Asian Tourism
Growth and Change

Edited by Janet Cochrane

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ASIAN TOURISM: GROWTH AND CHANGE
ADVENTES IN TOURISM RESEARCH

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Preface

When I signed up to the British overseas volunteer agency VSO in 1979 as a young graduate I had only the sketchiest idea of Asian geography, and had to look Indonesia up on the map when they told me I was going there. I had asked not to be sent to a big city, so was surprised to land in the South Sulawesi city of Ujung Pandang (now Makasar), which even then had a population of half a million people. But my two years there were a marvellous introduction to the complexity, challenges and charm of life in Asia, and set my professional and personal life off on a course from which it has never really departed.

I joined Leeds Metropolitan University in 2004, and their support allowed me to promote Asia-related activities within the university and further afield. The idea of a European conference on tourism in Asia generated considerable interest from academics and policymakers internationally, and it was obvious early on that this was going to be an important event. Most study of Asian tourism is carried out (understandably) within Asia, but the conference — held at Leeds Met in June 2006 — was an opportunity to share ideas and research findings outside the region. It was decided at an early stage that the conference would be as much concerned with policy and market aspects of tourism as with its ethnographic and sociological aspects so that the main driver behind the sector (i.e. its potential for making money) could be explored in addition to its effects.

This volume is one of the outcomes of that conference, and consists of chapters based on papers presented there and of additional research by contributors whose work gives a more rounded focus to the whole. The collection brings together the thoughts and findings of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners from across Asia, Europe, Australia and North America, reflecting the global interest in changes in industry and society in Asia. Inevitably, there is far more to say about the subject than could be presented in a single volume, but it nevertheless fills a gap in knowledge about the processes of tourism within the continent and, it is hoped, will contribute to increased understanding of the subject. More important, the increasing ease of travel and communication means that none of us can remain oblivious to events in this huge and varied continent; understanding brings demystification, and with it, the confidence to engage.

Thanks are principally due to all the contributors, who diligently produced their chapters and patiently answered my queries. The conference in June 2006 was conceived jointly between the University of Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan University and London Metropolitan University, and I would like to thank Mike Parnwell, Terry King and Mike Hitchcock for their support in bringing together a diverse range of speakers, and the British Academy for its financial support. Colleagues at Leeds Met were universally appreciative of the opportunities offered by the conference and by the book, and support from across the university allowed both to take form. In particular, the excellent teamwork of David Dewhurst, Olwen Poulter and Jane Davies was critical to the success of the conference.
I would especially like to thank Robin Chapman and Robert Cochrane Hart for their encouragement and forbearance during my long hours of toil over the manuscript. Finally — and most importantly — the strongest acknowledgement is due to the very many people in Indonesia and other parts of Asia who have shared their hospitality, their enjoyment of life, and their depth and breadth of culture with me.

Janet Cochrane
Chapter 1

Introduction

Janet Cochrane

In the decade to 2007, the geography of tourism flows underwent dramatic change. International tourism movements increased by over 40 per cent from 598.6 million in 1997 to 842 million in 2006, with the most dynamic growth in Asia and the Pacific. The region overtook the Americas to become the second-most visited part of the world (after Europe) in 2002, and individual Asian countries climbed up the rankings of the most popular destinations (UNWTO, 2005, 2006, 2007). Globally, however, there is still a presumption that ‘tourists’ are Westerners, whereas the major markets in most Asian countries by now are other Asians. In a typical example, Koreans displaced Americans in 2006 as the largest group visiting the Philippines, and six out of the country’s top ten source markets are Asian (NSCB, 2007). Amidst the plethora of books published on tourism, few recognise this reality as Winter (2007) also points out, the literature is still dominated by analyses by Western commentators of Western markets. This volume seeks to redress the balance by examining the current processes of tourism in Asia.

Two-thirds of the chapters in this book were initially presented as papers at the conference ‘Tourism in Asia’ held at Leeds Metropolitan University in June 2006, while the remaining third were contributed by authors whose research covers significant topics which ‘filled in the gaps’. Fourteen of the chapters are written or co-authored by Asian researchers. The great majority of the others are by people who either currently reside in Asia or have spent long periods there. These are people who have lived in remote Asian islands and learned obscure dialects, watched gamblers as they queue to take their place at the gaming tables, listened to hill-top villagers who hope to benefit from tourism, overcome business challenges to introduce innovative new products, lectured in Asian universities, negotiated with governments to introduce laws and policies which spread the benefits of tourism, and created plans to take Asian tourism forward towards the opportunities of the new millennium. All the authors have tried to understand the changes taking place in Asian tourism, the influences that shape those changes, and the impacts that result from them.
What insights into Asian tourism, then, are provided by this body of expertise? Geographically, the studies range from Sri Lanka in southern Asia to Japan in the north-east; from landlocked, mountainous Bhutan and Mongolia to the archipelagos of Indonesia and the Philippines; from the tiny, nascent destination of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the vast source market of China. The locus of one investigation is even the United Kingdom, although the subject matter — the temporary diaspora of Chinese international students — is firmly Asian. In subject terms the chapters are equally diverse: there are close-up studies of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on households and communities in Cambodia and India, discussions of intraregional policy actions, and investigations into how destinations respond to new markets.

This book sets out to illustrate the diversity of manifestations of tourism in Asia, the motivation and preferences of Asian tourists, and the complexity of the processes that shape the industry, its dichotomies and challenges. The chapters are presented in three sections: the political uses of tourism and the resulting policy aspects; market responses to new opportunities; and the impacts of tourism on particular destinations or segments of the industry and their adaptation to change. A common foundation is fashioned by the force that underpins most of the world’s economic activity: the power of the market.

In the free market — on which the prevailing global system of capitalism is based — the interplay between supply and demand should provide social and economic benefits while ensuring the prudent management of environmental resources through availability or scarcity. Unfortunately this scenario ignores the ambitious and expansionist tendencies of human nature, which emphasise individual gain over the collective good. Despite the collectivist nature of Asian society, demonstrated in tourism through an evident enjoyment in the ‘collective gaze’ rather than the more individualistic gaze of European tourists, weak governance in many Asian countries means that poorer communities often experience disproportionately the negative effects of tourism. Unable to be tourists themselves, they may not benefit from it economically and may suffer social disruption and environmental deterioration as a result of it. This is partly because of the unregulated struggle for profit and competition, which is experienced by the tourism industry on several levels: tour operators compete with each other for market share, hotels and resorts compete with one another within destinations, and countries jostle to differentiate themselves from others with similar products.

A competitive environment is generally good for consumers and for entrepreneurs, of course: a great array of niche products will develop in response to demand, such as with the variety of medical and wellness holidays offered across Asia (described by Laing and Weiler), the development of casino-hotels along the Sino-Vietnamese border to cater to Chinese gamblers (Yuk Wah), the growth of accommodation, tour, and transport services around religious sites in India (Shinde), and the exploitation of the ‘pop-culture’ niche (explored by Ng). But the interplay of market forces means that, left to their own devices, the most profitable enterprises will predominate regardless of any negative social and environmental consequences. This situation is most clearly demonstrated by the peculiarly Asian issues of ‘zero-fee’ or ‘zero-dollar’ tours (discussed by Ravinder, Arlt, and Fallon), a common problem across the continent as unscrupulous travel agents seize on unsophisticated new markets; ‘copycatting’ by operators who lack the imagination to develop new products but compete by trimming the margins on existing ones; and by the demand-led
growth of low-cost air carriers, whose environmental impacts in the longer term are set to outweigh the short-term benefits (as outlined by Cambridge and Whitelegg).

The inequalities created by unfettered market forces can reach extremes in certain circumstances: conscientious tour operators protest that their ability to make a fuller contribution to social and environmental welfare is hampered when their products are undercut by less principled operators, and the genuine participation (in the sense of having a decision-making role) of weaker elements in society is difficult to achieve. All over Asia, from the banks of the Kinabatangan river in Sabah to beach resorts in Koh Samui, people whose culture and environment are the focus of tourism find themselves marginalised by the industry. As soon as tourism shows promise, outsiders rush in to purchase land and build hotels. With few resources of expertise and capital, peasant or fishing communities can rarely gain substantial benefit from tourism under a *laissez-faire* system of development; some form of regulation or intervention is essential.

The key agents of intervention are the government, NGOs, and aid agencies. The government’s principal role is to create the enabling environment for tourism to grow and for the benefits to be fairly spread through increasing employment and economic linkages; in other words to harness market forces and drive them in the direction of social equity. Frequently, this does not happen with much success, either because of bureaucratic inertia or incompetence (especially at provincial level) or because private interests prevail over the public good. The current vogue is for collaboration between private and public sectors and between countries, such as with the sectoral collaborative actions described by Ravinder and the geographical ones described by Wall.

NGOs are active throughout Asia in supplementing government efforts to improve tourism’s benefits: amongst other actions, they train guides and tour operators, campaign in support of local communities threatened by large-scale developments, and try to bridge the divide between tourism and biodiversity conservation by sponsoring master-plans and collaborative management initiatives in protected areas. International aid agencies generally work at a more macro level, guiding policy and law formulation. The Netherlands development agency SNV has been particularly active in poverty alleviation through tourism in Asia, from advising on the management and promotion of new products in Lao PDR, to capacity-building along trekking trails in Nepal and the introduction of articles designed to facilitate pro-poor tourism into Vietnam’s 2006 Law on Tourism.

Meanwhile, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been instrumental in creating the legislative and physical infrastructure for tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), as described by Sofield. This is typical of a state-sponsored discourse which sees tourism as part of its modernisation agenda, using it to develop the infrastructure and diversify from an economy based on primary agricultural products to service industries. The effectiveness of this involvement for poorer communities is questioned by Travers, who also points out the contradiction between the mass movements which will be facilitated by the GMS infrastructure creation and the smaller scale, community-based approach advocated under another ADB-sponsored programme, the adoption by the Laotian government of ecotourism as a central focus of its national strategy. Many ecotourism projects in Asia are donor-assisted, community-based enterprises which are based more on idealism than pragmatism, their development running in parallel to larger scale, conventional
forms. There is increasing awareness now amongst donor agencies that such ventures are only likely to succeed if underpinned by a strong market awareness.

While intervention and regulation are essential to support and manage tourism, attempts to over-direct or limit the market by regulating physical access by consumers, such as with the manipulation of visa regulations in Vietnam (Suntikul, Butler, and Airey) or the strict control over the dimensions of supply and the channels of distribution imposed by the Bhutanese government (Ritchie), have tended to creak or break apart under the pressure of demand. Even in Bhutan, long considered a success story because of its apparent success in maximising the benefits of tourism while minimising its negative effects, there are moves to relax entry controls in order to allow a more professional and market-orientated approach to service delivery.

A further need for government intervention is because of the environmental consequences of unregulated market forces, which commodify nature and other key elements of tourism: as they are not assigned a value, they fall outside any calculation of the true cost of goods. Thus, tourism companies treat environmental resources as ‘free’ to ensure profitability, and they become subject to the ‘tragedy of the commons’ scenario, whereby common resources are over-exploited. Since the consequences of this are now well understood, why have so few measures been taken by the tourism industry to address the environmental costs of tourism? The major issue is the lack of assigned responsibility for the resources consumed. The tourism industry is aware of its responsibilities but chooses to let host governments impose a regulatory structure: it does so because competitive practices militate against responsible practices, which can only be effective if all companies in a given geographical area or product field are obliged to behave in the same way.

The negative impacts and externalities provoked by the overwhelming strength of market forces are exacerbated in countries where countervailing forces to individual or governmental excesses are underdeveloped, and where regulations are widely flouted. Many Asian governments are still trying to establish themselves as democracies or are shrugging off the ideological constraints of communism and command economies, while others are subject to the legacy of powerful social and cultural hierarchies; in some countries both circumstances apply. The still-extant pyramidal or monolithic power structures stifle dissent, making it difficult for the communities who bear the brunt of tourism’s negative impacts to protest, such as with the representation for tourism purposes of bowdlerised versions of Tibetan and other ‘minority’ Chinese cultures, as discussed in the chapters by Murakami, Bovair, and Feighery.

In the last decade several countries have shaken off their government’s stranglehold over the media and embraced the revolution in communications technology to delight in freedom of speech and the sharing of knowledge. However, entrenched systems of patronage have not been easily overturned, and in the conflict between private interest and the public good the former often seems to win. Practices which would be deemed corrupt in the West, from the small-scale re-routing of national park entry fees into the pockets of poorly paid staff, to the major diversion of levies intended for tourism development into private enterprises directed by government ministers or their cronies, are still common in Asia. The dividing line between corruption and taking rational measures to support one’s friends and family is not clear-cut, and is accepted as a fact of life by many; but the over-enthusiastic use of power and status for personal gain undermines social justice and wise use of environmental resources.
On the other hand, there are pockets of philanthropy and enlightened leadership which are leading to social change and illustrate the significance of human agency in creating different outcomes from otherwise similar situations. While in recent years the Philippines has struggled to distance itself from the cronyism and kleptocratic practices which stymied development under the Marcos regime, the chapter by Gray describes how power-relations can be used in a positive way when a strong leader wields influence for the benefit of society and the environment. Philanthropic actions, too, are emerging as a key driver in spreading the benefits of tourism more widely. Examples include the health, education, and reforestation programmes funded through tourism by enterprises such as the Kaliandra Foundation and the Nihiwatu Lodge in Indonesia; the efforts by the Singapore-based hotel company Banyan Tree Holdings to engage their customers in environmental regeneration; and — most striking of all — the generosity shown by the international community after the Asian tsunami, manifested in the huge amounts of cash donations and in volunteer work by individual visitors to help rebuild shattered lives. Given that other natural disasters (for instance the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, which killed over 70,000 people and rendered thousands more homeless) generated far lower levels of media interest and funds, it seems inescapable that the tsunami-affected countries fared so well because so many people in source markets felt a strong emotional link to familiar holiday destinations.

The impact of the tsunami on tourism and the role of government in revitalising the industry is discussed by Cochrane (for Sri Lanka) and by Reddy (for the Andaman and Nicobar Islands). The high levels of donations were an indication of the cross-cultural understanding generated by international tourism, a theme also explored by Hamzah in the context of Japanese school students visiting Malaysia to participate in local lives under the homestay programme, and by Rong Huang, who found that Chinese students in the UK were keen to act as ambassadors for their country as well as to understand the British better.

Several of the chapters in this volume support the concept of tourism as a rite or passage or as a contribution to social capital: by their vacation decisions, people identify with a particular group within their own society or define themselves as part of a global community. Another side of this is that while abroad, people may indulge in behaviour which would be unacceptable at home; one of the attractions of travel is that it is easier to remove oneself from social constraints in the areas of liminality which occur when people travel across cultures and geographies. Porananond and Robinson show that Thai and foreign participants alike enjoy a relaxation of social constraint during the ludic activities of the Songkran Festival in Chiang Mai, while Feng Yi Huang confirms that a motivation for both international and Asian backpacker travel is the temporary freedom from normal social ties. This includes perhaps the opportunity to explore close interpersonal relations: as White shows in her study of sex-workers at Kovalam Beach, India, some people travel to find love in one form or another. As with the issue of corruption, the dividing line between ‘romance’ and ‘exploitation’ is not clear-cut, and is subject to gendered and culturally informed interpretation.

While tourism undoubtedly engenders social dislocation, partly by providers changing their lifestyles or migrating in response to market opportunities, tourism is rarely the sole agent of change. Brickell explores the changes to intra-household relations caused by the income-generating opportunities of tourism taken up by women in Cambodia, and points out that this is part of a general diversification of rural livelihood strategies. Feighery
shows how the Chinese government is reorganising the living space of the World Heritage Site of Xi’an in its efforts to grapple simultaneously with the challenges of safeguarding cultural resources, managing growth, and meeting the needs of local residents for contemporary living. Xi’an and other ‘lived in’ World Heritage Sites, such as Luang Prabang in Lao PDR, can be carefully preserved architecturally (as reported by Travers), but maintaining the living culture is a far more difficult task: in Luang Prabang, local people are responding to the dollars wielded by foreign purchasers to move out of the Heritage Site, with its planning restrictions, to newer properties in the outskirts of the town, with the Site itself increasingly the haunt of foreign residents, most of whom can be classified as long-stay tourists.

The influence of long-stay foreigners in Asian countries — many of whom started out as tourists, even if they are no longer considered as such — is an area, which again, is under-researched. Policies designed to encourage long-term stays by foreigners (and their foreign exchange), such as the ‘Malaysia My Second Home’ programme, spring from the familiarity of Asian countries as tourism destinations. Furthermore, the thousands of Europeans, other Westerners, and migrant Asians who have fallen in love with particular countries, often marrying locally and settling down to run businesses, is an important factor in injecting capital into poor areas, raising standards, and helping to bridge the cultural divide between hosts and guests. As markets shift, this can make a significant contribution to the societal learning needed to ensure that strangers feel welcome — although it can also be a channel for the expatriation of tourism revenues and the alienation of resources from local hands. Whatever the drawbacks, learning the cross-cultural ‘language’ of expectations is also essential for success in handling new markets: as Hitchcock and Putra show, the Balinese are finding the cultural characteristics of their ‘new’ Asian visitors challenging to accommodate.

In principle, the needs of domestic tourists should be easier for destinations to understand, but there is sometimes as deep a gulf in perception and expectation between the host communities of more marginal destinations and their compatriots from urban metropolises as there is between the foreign tourists and local communities. Here, again, the public sector and NGOs have an important role to play, in this case by acting as intermediaries through extension work, capacity building, or regulation.

While places such as Xi’an and Luang Prabang are clearly outstanding, more modest locations are also experiencing reinterpretation for tourism, as with the older buildings of the major Indonesian city of Surabaya, where Indrianto shows how academics concerned about the demolition of the built colonial heritage stimulated the creation of walking trail packages. Similarly, government bodies and private entrepreneurs are working in partnership to promote festivals and events all over Asia to generate tourism income. Some are newly invented, such as the almost continuous festivals described by Gray in Palawan, while others are based around traditional events. Examples are the Braj pilgrimage in India, which has been commercialised into a modernised and motorised version of an ancient walking pilgrimage (discussed by Shinde), and the Songkran Festival, which is again based on an ancient religious ritual but has been reinvented for a multinational audience (Porananond and Robinson). The popularity of the Songkran in fact goes back to the 1920s, when rail links were created between the north and south of
Thailand; the modern-day pattern of tourism here — with its benefits and challenges — thus has roots in the early twentieth century, as with tourism in so many parts of Asia. This is also demonstrated by DeWald in his investigation into tourism in Vietnam during the colonial period.

In both these examples, domestic tourism (not just by resident Europeans, but by wealthy local people) was an important stimulus to destination and industry growth — even though in the case of Vietnam it was largely ignored by the colonial government. Given that so much of the tourism infrastructure across Asia now relies on domestic visitors, it is surprising that so little research attention has yet been paid to the sector. In this volume, several authors contrast the differing motivations and behaviour of international and domestic tourists: Thompson and Matheson for spectators at a Mongolian sporting event, Cheung in the context of nature-based tourism in Hong Kong, and Arlt for domestic and outbound Chinese tourism. Viewing an attraction through a particular cultural lens refracts perceptions in different directions; in preferring heavily managed ‘authenticity’ over educational messages at attractions abroad, Chinese tourists may experience disappointment or unwittingly upset their hosts. In Asian tourists’ preferences, it is clear that certain activities are experiencing strong growth. There is curiosity about neighbouring countries, a desire to enjoy the company of friends and family in the fresh air away from polluted urban environments, and interests in souvenir-shopping, in visiting important sites for pop-culture as well as more traditional cultural and religious sites, in attending sporting events and festivals, and — amongst Chinese markets in particular — in gambling.

As Asian tourism expands and more people become visitors as well as the focus of visitation, it is certain that the supply of tourism products will continue to diversify. In view of the industry’s contribution to revenues and employment, governments will collaborate further across frontiers and sectoral boundaries to create the spaces for tourism, and partnerships of public, private, and non-governmental associations will create the institutional and promotional infrastructure to channel tourists to their destinations.

Through their research, the authors in this book indicate the truly globalised nature of tourism, as individuals explore their own and other countries in search of new experiences and self-fulfilment. The consequences of the rapid growth of the Chinese economy already draw considerable attention, and it is time that this awareness spread to the other vibrant societies of Asia: with 60 per cent of the world’s population, what happens in Asia matters enormously in global terms. The case studies and processes discussed show how deeply tourism has become embedded in social, cultural, political, and economic systems across the region, and how developments here are not necessarily replicating the well-researched paradigms of Western tourism. Perhaps more than any other industry because of its high visibility, tourism has the scope to bring great benefits in terms of cultural understanding and socio-economic benefits — but only if societal partners are aware of their roles and their potential impacts. It is hoped that the insights provided by this collection will foster greater understanding of these roles and impacts, and help to create the conditions needed for tourism to continue to consolidate as one of Asia’s foremost industries.
References


PART 1

THE POLITICS AND POLICIES OF ASIAN TOURISM

Mike Parnwell

Introduction

Tourism is often referred to as an “industry,” suggesting a degree of commonality or similarity in the products and services it purveys, and a sense of grouping in the companies engaged in this form of commercial enterprise. If we reflect on the huge range of activities that get wrapped together under the banner heading of “tourism” (e.g., travel, leisure, recreation, holidaymaking, business trips, conferences, pilgrimage, school trips, expeditions), the great variety of forms such activities take, and the diverse “industrial infrastructure” that delivers, facilitates, and accommodates them, it is a mind-boggling task simply to corral this all together into an apparently discrete economic sector and social process. Pity, then, the poor planner and policymaker, from local minnow to global mammoth, who is charged somehow with regulating the tourism industry in such a way as to capitalize on this Juggernaut’s development potential while containing its destructive power.

This section presents a variety of perspectives on tourism in Asia where national and supranational institutions are seeking to steer developments in appropriate directions. Ravinder, Wall, Sofield, and Reddy adopt a regional viewpoint to explore the challenges and achievements of bilateral and multilateral collaboration in tourism promotion, while Cambridge and Whitelegg take the specific and region-wide case of aviation to assess in microcosm the tensions between phenomenal tourism sector growth and growing environmental concern. Murakami, Suntikul et al., Cochrane, and Travers analyze governmental responses to the opportunities and challenges that tourism provides, not least for relative newcomers on the tourism stage, or where crises have mapped out recent developments.

The conventional view has always been that national governments exert sufficient influence on the pattern and process of economic development to warrant particular and singular attention being given to policy making and implementation in any analysis of tourism development. This is the rationale for functionally separating these nine chapters from the sections on marketing and industry perspectives, notwithstanding their obvious interconnection. But both tourism and the world in which it occurs have changed considerably in recent years, and so it begs the question as to whether state actors in Asia are still (if they
ever were) influential in encouraging, steering, and controlling tourism development? Globalization and the growing permeability and inconsequence of national boundaries either threatens to undermine state sovereignty and the influence of state institutions or engenders a siege mentality that threatens to leave states standing by as the development bandwagon rolls past. The neoliberal hollowing out of the state by the market similarly reduces regulatory capacity by strapping government actors into the back seat of the tourism roller coaster. A whole host of non-state actors has also emerged to challenge the paramountcy, authority, and sometimes even the legitimacy of national governments as the custodians of development, including national and international civil society, supranational agencies, a rampant business sector, transnational business associations, and even (embryonically) discerning tourist consumers. Governments are increasingly left to wobble along a regulatory tightrope, simultaneously anxious to woo, and scared not to shoo, the golden goose of tourism development while confronting environmental and social externalities and seeking to steer growth in locally appropriate directions.

A rapidly changing tourism sector, where Asian source markets have shifted dramatically from the West to the East, and from international to domestic, and where the tourism product has become fantastically diversified, requires nimble fingers to steer and direct. Gazelles, not hippopotami. But Cochrane’s chapter on Sri Lanka, Murakami’s on Tibet, Travers’ on Laos, and Suntikul et al.’s on Vietnam all, in different ways, convey a sense of the state as behemoth. The Sri Lankan tourism sector had been underperforming for decades, even before and irrespective of political instability and natural disaster, with the fragmentation of public institutional responsibility, competing political agendas, limited state resources and resourcefulness, and a planning mindset trapped in a dated model of beach-centered tourism identified as principally to blame. The Chinese government’s superimposition of a nationalist and propagandist policy agenda on the promotion and expansion of tourism in an “opened Tibet” has underpinned the state manipulation of Tibetan tradition and ethnicity that raises serious questions about the role of tourism as a liberating and developmental force. Similarly, the Vietnamese and Lao states, while anxious to enjoy the riches that tourism potentially bestows, present a host of policy, logistical, resourcing, and infrastructural encumbrances that are far from conducive to the growth, distribution, and sustainability of tourism. Where state institutions act as a barrier to, rather than a springboard for, tourism development, it is left to other actors to plug the gaps. Business entrepreneurs at various levels have shown themselves to be much more responsive to, and even manipulative of, changing market conditions. Non-governmental organizations position themselves as the “nagging conscience” of both government and industry actors. Transnational bodies seek to establish the parameters within which all other sets of stakeholders — governments included — should operate. While all groups of actors agree that a buoyant tourism industry is the most desirable outcome, each has its own priority agenda and modus operandi.

Competition defines tourism in Asia. To the competing agendas suggested above must be added not only the sometimes extreme competition that occurs between countries and destinations because of the importance of tourism to national development, but also the broad similarity of resources that they are seeking to sell on the international market. Unless niche markets can be found, competitive advantage generally accrues to the early rather than the late arriver, the large-scale more than the petty enterprise, the hubs more
than the spokes, and the secure more than the unstable. And yet in this highly competitive environment, cooperation and collaboration have recently emerged as important strategies for tourism development. Ravinder identifies regionalization as the driving force behind moves to engender regional partnerships in tourism promotion and facilitation, using PATA, APEC, ASEAN, and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) as primary examples. Sofield also looks in depth at the GMS tourism development strategy, while Wall looks for similar synergies in the Brunei–Indonesia–Malaysia–Philippines growth area. The rationale is that the collective gains and efficiencies to be derived from pulling together are far more beneficial than a competitive and atomistic pulling apart. It is also a strategy that allows latercomers, such as transitional economies still searching for a post Cold War peace dividend, to gain from the experience, resources, and institutional networks of more established tourism destinations and institutions. By adopting an implausibly altruistic “prosper [as opposed to beggar] thy neighbour” approach (which is Thailand’s stated policy toward its Mekong subregion allies), all parties potentially benefit from the promotion of multi-destination vacations and the pursuit of various synergies and scale economies.

Multilateral bodies have positioned themselves as the champions of regional cooperation, with the Asian Development Bank playing a leading role as the financier of several large-scale infrastructural projects seen as the key to tourism and other forms of economic growth and integration. They are helping to promote the harmonization of regulations, standards, and procedures, while simultaneously hoping to immunize against the contagion of various tourism “diseases” (environmental degradation, elite capture, inequality, harmony, social and cultural degeneration, etc.). Gaps in human resources, technical and professional competence, institutional and physical infrastructure, entrepreneurship, and both promotion and marketing are being plugged by multilateral agencies. And despite the inevitable persistence of nationalist politics, the safeguarding of national interests, skepticism about cooperative sincerity, and the natural tendency toward protectionism, the authors suggest that these supranational initiatives have, by and large, been surprisingly effective. Supranational bodies such as the ADB, UNWTO, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, and to a much lesser extent non-interventionist associations like ASEAN and APEC, appear able to wield sufficient moral authority, political leverage, and financial clout to be able to influence and convince national governments, business interests, and civil society groups to work together toward a common development agenda, adopting such models as comanagement and public–private partnerships.

Three decades ago the secretary-general of Thailand’s national planning board (the NESDB), Phisit Pakkasem, claimed that “we no longer talk in terms of urban planning, only urban management.” The same might be said of tourism. In spite of the commendable progress that has been made in the last decade or so in placing sustainability and distributional issues further up the policy-making agenda, one is nonetheless left with the sense that the tourism industry is too diverse and disobedient a donkey to be driven, and perhaps even directed. But it can at least be cajoled and nagged. And a host of national and supranational stakeholders are getting much better at nagging and cajoling. Better this than walking behind with a shovel and bucket.
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Chapter 2

Cross-National Tourism Collaboration in Asia

Ravi Ravinder

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) is arguably the leading tourism association operating in the Asia-Pacific region. It is a multi-sectoral association of members from private, government and non-governmental organisations that are partially or wholly involved in tourism. It is therefore in a unique position to be able to advocate and facilitate cooperation and collaboration across all tourism sectors, in a number of countries, and across a wide range of issues. This chapter draws on its involvement and explores examples of regional cooperation and/or cross-national collaborative agreements within the tourism sector and their progress in the Asian region.

Background to PATA

From its headquarters in Bangkok, PATA’s mission ‘as a not-for-profit trade association ... is to enhance the growth, value and quality of Pacific Asia travel and tourism for the benefit of its membership’ (PATA Southern California Chapter, 2006). To achieve these objectives it has held annual conferences, annual trade fairs and several issue-specific conferences. It publishes annual forecasts of tourism arrivals, weekly/fortnightly bulletins distributed by email and a regular (monthly) bulletin entitled Issues and Trends. It also publishes one-off reports on issues of interest. Its membership comprises organisations broadly covering the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) area, which includes countries from the Eastern Pacific. As a trade association, it works for, and reflects, the tourism industry in the region.

Cross-national collaboration in the region is an issue that PATA actively fosters across the entire APEC region; across the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) region; and across more specific areas such as the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), the Pearl River Delta covering Southern China, Macau and Hong Kong and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region. This chapter will cover the first
three groupings only. The APEC, ASEAN and GMS groupings are interesting because the GMS sit within ASEAN (mostly), which in turn sits within APEC (with some exceptions). The list of the member countries of each of these groupings is given in Table 2.1. This chapter therefore:

• undertakes a review of recent academic papers to identify a framework for analysing such collaborative linkages,
• describes the three cross-national alliances in terms of their composition and priorities and • reviews the progress to date of the particular alliances mentioned, using frameworks that have been derived from academic writing.

To achieve these objectives, a review of PATA’s Issues and Trends constituted the starting point. This review has been supplemented by further investigation of the resources within PATA’s Strategic Intelligence Centre, PATA Conference proceedings, and other sources that cover such collaborative networks.

PATA’s Issues and Trends bulletins cover a variety of topics, including cross-national collaboration. They also cover (in no particular order) recovery from crises, emerging markets, e-tourism, environment and sustainability, business tourism and other miscellaneous topics.

Table 2.1: Membership of various regional groupings of nations.

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Discussions in these bulletins also touch on the potential for regional collaboration to deal with the respective issues.

Not all the analyses in *Issues and Trends* have been generated from within PATA resources. In many cases, they have, with good reason, resorted to reporting on reports and conferences hosted by other organizations and associations, e.g. the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), several UN agencies including United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the Asia-Pacific Tourism Association and even analyses from private research specialists such as Price Waterhouse Coopers or Deloitte.

**Academic Writings on Cross-National Collaboration**

One of the first academic books dealing with tourism collaboration in Asia was by C Michael Hall (1994). Subsequently, Hall and Page (2000) identified several regional partnerships in Asia — viz. in the Mekong Region and in the SAARC countries. They also highlighted the fact that the role of tourism was often discussed within broader contexts at various ASEAN political forums. They discussed SAARC in some depth, but they do point to the dominant position occupied by India (within SAARC) and Thailand (within the Mekong Region), both in terms of tourism flows as well as in terms of economic and industrial development. They warned of the potential of these countries to wield the heavy stick, possibly inadvertently, within these partnerships.

This issue comes to the fore when there are very weak partners within the relationship. Croes (2006) points out that a small economy’s overall ‘economic weakness and marginality’ (p. 454) derives from its small (domestic) market size, small labour force and restricted capital. Using Caribbean tourism as an example, he points out that when all three of these factors exist, they can be overcome if open tourism development is pursued as a critical component of the economy, which may then be thrown open to foreign involvement. Such tourism development could stimulate other related or non-tourism-related economic activity and entrepreneurship, and he cites several studies showing a strong positive correlation between tourism growth and economic growth in an economy.

Croes (2006) also points out that homogeneity of tourism product offerings could be a problem for small competing destinations. He therefore argues for product differentiation to avoid such economies competing with each other. As well, their lack of scale economies could be overcome by a regionalised approach to build capacity and resources. Such measures would particularly help nascent or small-scale entrepreneurialism in small economies. At the micro-level, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) tend to be disadvantaged by the trend towards open markets, owing to their lack of scale economies in both supply and demand (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, & Wanhill, 2005). Some cross-national alliances are, however, cognisant of this and opt to support them either by subsidising SME activities and/or by encouraging them to build collaborative networks of substitutable or complementary SMEs to derive scale economies in their marketing or operational aspects.
There are some contradictory policy positions though. Cooper et al. (2005) highlighted the opposing forces operating in cross-national economic environments. On the one hand, General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) principles advocate open markets with appropriate safeguards against anti-competitive and/or collusive behaviour. Concurrently, on the other hand, there are also cross-national trading blocs being formed, comprising some GATS signatory countries deliberately opting to sign separate bilateral or multilateral agreements with other countries (Cooper et al., 2005); such blocs appear to be at odds with the principles of GATS. The agreements include (explicitly or implicitly) collaborative linkages in tourism. In a few cases, these linkages go beyond the particular country networks established through these agreements, while there are also cases where two countries within a multinational trading bloc seek a separate tourism alliance.

Much of Cooper et al.’s (2005) discussion is demand (or market)-focused. On the other hand, Croes (2006) tends to focus on micro-level issues — i.e. the disadvantages faced by individual firms, particularly if they are SMEs. The scope for collaboration, however, goes beyond marketing and the disadvantages of small size; it exists across any or all of the three major areas of business focus — labour, capital and markets (and marketing). Fyall and Garrod (2005) recognize this and point out the advantages of an ‘interorganisational collaborative domain ... linked to a particular [author’s italics] shared problem’ (p. 52), which they posit is critical to the success of marketing strategies. The ‘shared problem’, in this case, is tourism development and marketing. The collaborative mode they advocate is based on relational exchange theory which, by its very nature, relies on mutual trust and commitment of the network partners for effectiveness.

They go on to list six ‘drivers of collaborative effectiveness’ (Fyall & Garrod, 2005, p. 65). These are:

1. recognition of the interdependency of firms within the particular (tourism) domain;
2. recognition of the individual and mutual benefits to be derived from collaboration;
3. perception that decisions will be implemented;
4. that collaborating partners should include all key stakeholder groups (the authors warn that managing the power relationships between these groups is a critical activity);
5. that a convener should take the lead in initiating and facilitating this collaboration and
6. formulation of a vision of tourism development, and agreement on goals and objectives to fulfil this vision.

They discuss airline alliances and hotel consortia, but not other types of collaborative networks between firms across the different sectors of the tourism industry, nor those encompassing multiple destinations. Nevertheless, it appears to be a sound basis for evaluating any type of alliance or network. Tourism industrial activity covers multiple complementary and substitutable products (and suppliers), and this very complementarity and substitutability can cover multiple (often contiguous) destinations. Such destinations may be large or small, or at various stages of tourism development, but could still derive benefits from mutual or multilateral and multinational collaboration. This paper uses Fyall and Garrod’s framework to evaluate the effectiveness of four such alliances and in the process also tests the utility and comprehensiveness of the framework.

Individual examples of such collaboration will now be described and discussed.
The APEC Tourism Charter

In 2000, tourism ministers of the APEC caucus adopted the ‘Seoul Declaration on an APEC Tourism Charter’ that put forward a vision of tourism in the new millennium and offered a direction for its development. The Charter established four key policy goals (PATA, 2000) which are:

1. **Remove impediments to tourism business and investment.** These include improving labour mobility, providing training opportunities, clearing the way for increased trade in services and liberalizing cross-border tourism investment and operations.

2. **Increase mobility of visitors and demand for tourism goods and services in the APEC region.** This goal aims to facilitate seamless travel, developing e-commerce and intra-regional marketing and cooperation.

3. **Sustainably manage tourism outcomes and impacts.** It recognises specifically the need to educate SMEs in the region, the presence of indigenous communities and to address the ‘implications of gender’.

4. **Enhance recognition and understanding of tourism as a vehicle for economic and social development.** To this end, they advocated harmonisation of tourism statistics and data collection methodologies, and exchanging information and broadening their knowledge base of tourism.

That year, the first ever Tourism Ministerial Meeting of APEC recognised the value of tourism in economic and social terms; they also highlighted the extent of intra-APEC travel.

‘Tourism within the APEC region accounts for one-quarter of world international visitor arrivals and more than one-third of global international visitor expenditure. Of greater significance is that more than three-quarters of international visitor arrivals in the APEC region are generated by APEC economies, i.e. it is intra-regional.’

APEC (2006)

To this end, it set up a Tourism Working Group (TWG) comprising public and private organisations, which in turn set out to create individual (by country) and collective action plans to report back at annual meetings of the Group. They also set agreed-upon timelines for delivery as 2005, 2010 and 2015. As of 2006, the TWG has delivered a review of public and private partnerships for tourism development, a paper on best practices of e-commerce applications for SMEs, and Stage 2 of a tourism impediments study. It was also in the process of concluding a report on tourism skills and standards (including possible accreditation schemes) and another on sustainable tourism best practice in the region, and it was commencing work on a study of best practice of safety and security, as well as furthering the tourism impediments study (APEC TWG, 2006).

If one compares these outcomes with Fyall and Garrod’s (2005) framework, it is apparent that all the drivers are in place. The Charter and the desired outcomes listed above point to the recognition of interdependency and mutual benefit (the first two drivers). The terms of reference and the implementation plan, as reflected by the organisational structure
underpinning the APEC TWG, points to meeting the last three drivers. As well, decisions seem to be taken and implemented (the third driver), even if the progress might appear slow, but given the large and diverse membership of APEC (see Table 2.1), this may be understandable. The TWG has to date held 26 meetings since 1991 and has convened three APEC Tourism Forums (APEC TWG, 2006). The outcomes of the meeting in May 2006 (shown on their website) also demonstrate more such actions undertaken and completed.

Interestingly, the TWG’s last meeting called for a review of the Seoul charter itself. One could well presume that this is the result of a greater increased knowledge of tourism and its impacts — itself one of the sub-objectives of the Seoul charter.

The ASEAN Tourism Ministers Conference

ASEAN as a forum had its beginnings in 1967 primarily to preserve the political stability of the five founding members (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore). But, as their individual economies started to develop economic momentum and inbound tourism flows grew rapidly, the forum opted to focus some attention on tourism. They set up a Sub-Committee on Tourism (SCOT). Their first initiative was to promote the region as ‘the world’s only 6-in-1 Tropical Paradise’ during ‘Visit ASEAN Year’ in 1992. At that stage, their efforts were confined to marketing and promotion only (Timothy, 2000).

Since then, it appears that the individual countries have been pursuing their own tourism development promotion and development strategies, often competing with each other in Western source markets (as well as Australia and New Zealand). However by 1997, with members then being labelled the ‘Tiger economies’, it became apparent that intra-regional travel was a significant market opportunity, not just for leisure travel but also for trade, commerce and social links (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003a). The 1997 Meeting of Ministers advocated the freeing up of impediments to travel within a region, and to promote the ASEAN region as a single destination. It also mooted the idea of cooperation in human resource development, developing sustainable tourism and encouraging more investment in tourism to bring it up to world class.

The Asian financial crisis in 1997 brought home the high incidence of intra-regional travel as visitation numbers plunged. This was about the time that the relatively poorer countries of Vietnam, Lao PDR and Cambodia joined ASEAN. As the original members’ economies recovered, and the new members embarked on a less centralised and politicised economic trajectory, tourism flows started rising again. In 2003, after the first Bali bombings, the ASEAN Summit pondered the question of whether such incidents might lead to a long-term shift in inbound tourism away from Western source markets (including Australia and New Zealand) to more intra-regional travel (PATA, 2003). This reinforced the need for progress on removing impediments to travel within the region. Concurrently, ASEAN as a whole was hoping to set up a free-trade zone, and certainly to bringing down more trade barriers, thereby stimulating more business travel. The Tourism Plan of Action therefore neatly fitted into the larger political and economic political imperatives of ASEAN as a whole.
At the ASEAN Summit at Phnom Penh in 2002, the Heads of Governments themselves, rather than their Tourism Ministers, signed an agreement to improve intra-regional travel (including making the region visa-free by 2005), increasing regional awareness, collaborative marketing, human resource development and industry education about the problem of so-called ‘zero-cost tours’ (i.e. when tourists purchase a holiday at a low up-front cost, only to find that a series of hidden extras awaits them on arrival) (PATA, 2003; ASEAN Secretariat, 2003b).

If the issues tackled are examined, it can be seen that at the ASEAN level, the emphasis seems to be somewhat more on operational issues when compared to the APEC Tourism Charter. However, what the ASEAN Tourism Agreement in 2002 achieved was to obtain a commitment by the ASEAN leaders to change policy. For example, to facilitate travel within and into the region, they committed their governments to exempting visas for all ASEAN nationals, ‘harmonising’ visa issuance to international travellers, phasing out levies and taxes for travel to ASEAN countries, and easing the process of issuing travel documents and ‘progressively reducing all travel barriers’. ASEAN has also gone a long way towards an ‘Open Sky’ aviation policy among its members. Air freight movements have already been fully liberalized. For passenger movements within ASEAN, the CMLV multilateral agreement (covering Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR and Vietnam) is virtually a full open-skies aviation regime between these countries. It aims to kick-start aviation links and tourism flows in a region that has thus far been hampered by poor point-to-point aviation services (Forsyth, King, & Rodolfo, 2006).

These strategies fall directly within the area of government responsibility; therefore the significance of such commitments being signed off by Heads of Governments lies in the commitment and high-level backing shown to these goals. They also indicate that Fyall and Garrod’s third and sixth drivers are in place here. The problem appears to be the lack of stakeholder involvement (driver 4) and the lack of a single convenor (driver 5). It has to be questioned how effective the ASEAN Secretariat is in pushing through a purely tourism agenda, when ASEAN Summits would be covering a multitude of other issues. The ASEAN Tourism Agreement does recognise the views of all stakeholders, and that tourism industry stakeholders would be the key implementer of the broader goals of a single tourism market such as the European Union; for example, the agreement states it aims to ‘encourage ... cruising and travel by ferries ... and cooperation and commercial arrangements among ASEAN airlines’.

The preamble to the ASEAN Tourism Agreement addresses the first two drivers of the framework. To quote one of the clauses therein:

“Emphasising the need to strengthen, deepen and broaden cooperation in tourism among ASEAN Member States and among their private sectors in the light of the complementary nature of their tourism attractions.”

ASEAN Secretariat (2003b)

The collaboration at the ASEAN level is therefore high-powered, but perhaps lacking in outcomes at the industry level. For example, the author is not aware of any significant progress towards cooperation and commercial agreements between airlines in the region. But if it delivers on the policy settings and legislation, as outlined, this in itself will constitute a solid foundation to greater collaboration and cooperation in the area,
especially given the diversity of political systems and levels of economic and tourism development that prevail among ASEAN members.

The Greater Mekong Subregion

The GMS comprises Myanmar, Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam. In addition, the Yunnan province of the People’s Republic of China is a constituent region. Organisations such as UNESCAP and multilateral financial institutions recognised that these countries needed special assistance to ‘repair’ and kick-start their development after (with the exception of Thailand) they effectively ‘lost’ most of the second half of the twentieth century through war, genocide and radical but misdirected government policy.

The Mekong River, which has its source in Tibet, flows through the mountainous Yunnan province. As it flows towards the South China Sea it then weaves through Lao PDR, Thailand and Cambodia, often providing the border between these countries, until it flows into the sea through the Mekong Delta in Cambodia and Vietnam. Along the way, it is a key trade lifeline and a major agricultural resource. At the same time, in centuries past, the river has allowed Buddhism and a common artistic and cultural heritage to grow, particularly in the lower lying nations. The resulting abundance of heritage sites, many of them unique, is one of the reasons tourism was selected as one of the key elements of the GMS economic cooperation program (the other being energy) (Brooker Group, 2002). Being relatively low-impact and labour-intensive, tourism was also seen as a way to alleviate the grinding poverty facing many of the region’s people (Dain Simpson and Associates, 1996). With funding from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the countries set about developing a 10-year strategic framework for tourism, commencing 2006 (ADB, 2006). It focuses on seven areas of cooperation, which are:

1. **Marketing** the subregion as a single destination, offering cross-border ‘nature, culture and adventure’ opportunities, and building capacity and partnerships to effectively promote this subregion.
2. Building up the **Human Resource** capacity and skills in middle management, hospitality and academia within the region.
3. **Cultural and Social Impact Management** covering heritage and natural area management and preservation, improving interpretation at sites, and steps to eliminate social ills like child exploitation and prostitution, and drug use.
4. Encouraging **pro-poor tourism** by enabling local communities to derive direct and second-order economic benefits from tourism, and ensuring that pro-poor tourism is enshrined in governments’ tourism policies.
5. **Encouraging private industry and public–private partnerships**, especially at the SME level, and encouraging local industry to apply sustainable tourism principles in their activities.
6. **Improving movement of people** by increasing the number and efficiency of checkpoints, instituting a single GMSR visa, and improving transportation links.
7. **Strengthening tourism infrastructure**, e.g. access roads, information centres and mechanisms for natural area and heritage preservation.
These sets of strategies are costed at US$440 million over the period, of which 85 per cent (US$373 million) will be spent on tourism-related infrastructure at ’13 spatial projects that deal with ... priority tourism zones and 16 thematic projects dealing with specific GMS-wide interventions’ (ADB, 2006, p. 6). The funding is slated to come from the respective governments, the private sector, development agencies and loans.

The management and marketing of the region rests with the Mekong Tourism Coordination Office (MTCO), but Figure 2.1 illustrates the extent of consultation and participation in the process up and down the political and economic hierarchies of all the countries.

By 2001, the TWG of the GMS had been in consultation for over a decade and an annual Mekong Tourism Forum had been held for 5 years. PATA sees the efforts (including its own contribution) in this regional grouping as being a success — both in terms of visitor arrivals (12 per cent growth in 2000), and also as a model for cross-national collaboration (PATA, 2001). In 2004, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Cambodia were still recording annual increase in arrivals of between 10 and 50 per cent (PATA, 2005a; 2005b).

The threat of a dominant partner in this network (in this case, Thailand) has not eventuated. As part of its ‘Prosper Thy Neighbour’ policy, the Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports funds part of the office costs of the Agency for Coordinating Mekong Activities, and actively promotes the region and its attractions through its own websites and tourist offices overseas.

Does the functioning of the GMS entity conflict with the broader regional collaborations (e.g. ASEAN)? It would appear not. At the very outset it was determined that the GMS workings would not be as highly structured as at the ASEAN or APEC levels, neither is there any move towards creating a separate trade bloc. It was to be seen simply as a vehicle for regional collaboration. Such collaboration need not involve all the GMS countries, either, if aspects were considered not relevant to particular countries.

The workings of the GMS programme constitute an exemplary model of international collaboration, shared vision and cooperation. This chapter primarily examines only the tourism aspects of the broader economic cooperation programme, but it can be seen from the list of stakeholders, objectives and strategy that all parties have a solid platform on which to build mutually beneficial tourism development. The Structure for Tourism Coordination (as shown in Figure 2.1) not only formalises the relationships between the various stakeholders, but also acknowledges the presence of and the participatory mechanisms for all stakeholders, be they governments, industry or NGOs and developmental agencies.

**Discussion**

If one regards these three alliances as being localized versions of the broader APEC tourism strategy, the question to be asked is whether their efforts are necessary, complementary and/or potentially conflicting. One thing is clear — it is that the economic imperative is driving the workings of the TWGs. It is not simply the direct economic benefits that accrue from tourism flows, but there is a clear recognition at all three levels that these benefits can contribute to economic development of the weakest sections of the individual
ADB = Asian Development Bank; ESCAP = Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; GMS = Greater Mekong Sub-region; NTO = national tourism organization; MTCO = Mekong Tourism Coordination Office; NTWG = national tourism working group; PATA = Pacific Asia Travel Association; PCU = Project Coordination Unit; PIU = Project Implementation Unit; PRC = People’s Republic of China; SNV = Netherlands Development Organization; TAT = Tourism Authority of Thailand; TMPB = tourism marketing and promotion board; UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; WTO = World Tourism Organization.

Figure 2.1: The structure of subregional tourism coordination in the GMS.

countries through the activity stream labelled ‘pro-poor tourism’. Political differences in other areas are not considered in the alliances’ striving for tourism benefits. This is a very beneficial outcome, and it is probably also the result of non-governmental driving forces behind the alliances, particularly organisations such as PATA, the World Bank and key NGOs and environmental groups.

Not all partners in the GMS are members of ASEAN or APEC. Myanmar is not a member of APEC, but is a member of ASEAN and the GMS. Practical concerns also override political boundaries, as evidenced by the inclusion of China’s Yunnan province only as a member of the GMS. Hence visa exemptions for GMS nationals for travel within that region will not apply to Yunnan nationals. Yet Yunnan has to be a key partner in any development along the Mekong River, as its development and its use of the Mekong waters significantly influence the economy downstream. Hence membership (the collaborative domain) seems to be determined by Fyall and Garrod’s ‘particular shared problem’ — that of tourism development.

The workings of the APEC TWG appear not to have yielded substantial results. This is to be expected as it comprises countries that are geographically distant (e.g. Papua New Guinea and Peru) and economically diverse (the USA and Japan on the one hand and Vietnam on the other) in both size and economic base. It is also easy to spot the obvious differences in political and social perspectives and economic imperatives. Nevertheless, the fact that APEC sees fit to give attention to tourism issues (when the region is also facing issues such as poverty alleviation, security concerns, energy shortages, environmental concerns and economic growth) is to be applauded. If there is a weakness, it would be in the lack of strength of the third and fifth of Fyall and Garrod’s (2005) drivers. There is a system of individual and collective action plans to be drawn up and implemented, but action and decisions are slow to come to fruition.

It would appear that the weakest of the three collaborative networks and outputs is the ASEAN tourism strategy. The problem may well lie in the restriction of the membership base to governments only (the lack of the fourth driver), or it may be that there are two groups of economies here — the more developed ones (Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Thailand and, to a lesser extent, Indonesia and the Philippines) and the emerging economies (Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Myanmar). The former group also has a well-developed tourism plant and infrastructure, while the latter are seeking assistance in investment, expertise and environmental management. To ASEAN’s credit, however, there is top-level commitment to tourism development and intra-ASEAN collaboration, mercifully doing away with ill-conceived flag-waving promotions such as the ‘the world’s only 6-in-1 Tropical Paradise’ campaign of 1992. Instead, the aim appears to be to facilitate collaboration and to pass legislation and institute policy to strengthen and encourage intra-ASEAN travel.

As indicated earlier, the GMS collaborative network appears to be the most detailed and all-encompassing. Not only does it cover a wide range of issues, it also comes with the promise of funding from the ADB and other sources to build infrastructure and capacity — both physical and human. It can also logically be seen as a single destination, at least for tourists from outside the GMSR. There is logic in having as the core of a holiday experience the Buddhist cultures and heritage that have grown up on the banks of the Mekong, as well as the natural attributes of this region. (Airport infrastructure, however, precludes
the landing of long-haul wide-bodied jets at airports other than Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City.) This alliance appears to possess all the drivers of the Fyall and Garrod (2005) framework.

**Conclusion**

Regional collaboration among governments in Asia seems to be proceeding apace, with one grouping already delivering strong positive outcomes. It also appears that the Fyall and Garrod (2005) framework is a useful set of criteria to evaluate outcomes of alliances. While the framework was initially developed and used for specific industry sectors, this chapter indicates that further refinement is needed when one considers cross-national alliances that also operate on a multilateral basis. At this level, there are governments collaborating with each other, as well as specific industry sectors, not to mention individual firms. Then there are the tourism-specific stakeholders like PATA and other industry associations, and non-tourism-specific stakeholders such as NGOs and funding institutions whose input and support is essential to policy development and implementation. The key appears to be the mechanism wherein this diverse group of organisations is free to contribute and participate in decision-making for tourism development. Fyall and Garrod’s (2005) fourth driver does recognise such non-industry stakeholders and the need for them to be explicitly brought into the collaborative process. But in the context of cross-national collaboration, an effective collaborative mechanism needs to be an essential component of this particular driver of effectiveness.

**References**


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Chapter 3

The Asian Regional Market: Flows and Collaboration

Geoff Wall

Introduction

This chapter has a number of purposes. The initial task is to set the scene, although it is acknowledged that most tourism specialists and many readers of this book may be familiar with most of the points that are made and the data on which they are based. It will be pointed out that globally, international tourism has grown significantly, and that Asia has been an increasingly important recipient of and contributor to this growth. Secondly, it will be suggested that growth in tourism in Asia has been fuelled substantially by increases in regional tourism, i.e., that a growing proportion of Asian tourism has resulted from people originating within the region visiting other countries within the region, as well from increases in domestic tourism. Thirdly, it will be argued that growth rates have been uneven temporally and spatially, partially as a consequence of the extreme events that have impacted tourism in the region. Fourthly, it will be posited that economic and tourism development in most countries in the region exhibit strong core–periphery relationships associated with marked regional imbalances in virtually all aspects of development. If these imbalances are to be redressed, then ways must be found to facilitate development in peripheral areas and tourism may have a role to play in this. Finally, and in somewhat greater detail, the possibility of collaboration among peripheral areas will be assessed and illustrated.

These points can be restated into two linked topics: the nature of tourism flows and ways in which these flows might be manipulated in the interests of development in peripheral areas. These two themes constitute the subjects of this chapter.
Tourism Flows

The purpose of the first part of this contribution is to draw attention to the growing importance of tourism in Asia to global tourism patterns and to argue that much of this growth is due to the expansion of regional demand and supply. Demand and supply are closely interrelated and one cannot exist for long in the absence of the other. The first part of the chapter will emphasize effective demand as revealed through consumption (i.e., the number of tourists) and will draw heavily on UNWTO international tourism statistics, mostly as reported in WTO (2004), while the interpretations are those of the author. Little will be said about supply. However, it should be understood that supply of supporting infrastructure, such as accommodation, has increased in line with demand and in some cases in advance of it. Indeed, it is not difficult to find places in Asia with low occupancy rates where supply exceeds demand.

Globally, the number of international tourist arrivals has evolved from a mere 25 million in 1950 to an estimated 763 million in 2004 and 842 million in 2006, corresponding to an average annual growth rate of 6.5 percent and constituting one of the most remarkable economic and social phenomena of the past century. During the period between 1950 and 2005, tourism development was particularly strong in Asia and the Pacific (13 percent on average a year) at double the global average. This is shown graphically in Figure 3.1.

Put another way, while the number of world international tourist arrivals increased from 544.9 million in 1995 to 690.0 million in 2003, equivalent statistics for Asia and the Pacific were 57.7 million and 119.3 million. As a result, the market share of Asia and the Pacific increased from 15.6 percent to 17.3 percent. When measured in international tourism receipts, performance is also impressive, exhibiting the second highest value in the world (US$810) after the Americas (US$1985) in 2003. Thus tourism in Asia has grown both in absolute and relative terms.

![International Tourist Arrivals, 1950-2005*](image)

Figure 3.1: International tourist arrivals, 1950–2005.

In line with the substantial growth in tourism, the number of visitors to Asia and the Pacific has increased from all the UNWTO regions. However, the growth of intra-regional tourism in Asia and the Pacific is most impressive. In 1990, 43.3 million tourists from Asia and the Pacific visited other countries within the region. In 2002 it was 102.4 million, although it declined somewhat in 2003 to 93.7 million, largely because of the effects of SARS. Nevertheless, the intra-regional market continued to increase from 75.1 percent in 1990 to 76.7 percent in 1995 to 78.6 percent in 2003. Thus, in absolute numbers of visitors, the regional market is by far the dominant source of visitors and it is also the one that has grown most rapidly.

Statistics on domestic tourism are notoriously difficult to collect but domestic tourists usually far exceed the number of international visitors (by between four and ten times depending on location). It is also likely that these have also been growing in importance, further emphasizing the importance of Asian tourists in Asia.

**Spatial and Temporal Unevenness**

Of course, these aggregated statistics mask considerable temporal and spatial variations. This is clearly illustrated in the WTO summary (2004) “Asia and the Pacific Tourism Market Trends” report which is paraphrased here. Although the region outperformed world growth substantially in 2001 and 2002, in 2003 it was the worst performing of all regions, ending the year down by 9 percent. This major reversal was largely due to SARS, compounded by Avian flu and by the general impacts of the Iraq War and the sluggish world economy. However, the impact of SARS was uneven, and the South Asian subregion, e.g., had a very good year, showing an overall increase of 9 percent.

Not surprisingly, different areas and countries fared quite differently. For example, between 2002 and 2003, while South Asia’s tourists increased by 24.7 percent, South-East Asia’s declined by 8.8 percent. At the national level for the same time period, the Philippines and Singapore declined by 27.4 and 22 percent respectively, whereas India increased by 21.7 percent and Malaysia by 8.7 percent.

It is less easy to find data to examine within-country differences. However, there are marked regional imbalances in levels of development and tourism in many Asian countries. For example, in Indonesia, approximately one quarter of commercial accommodation and one-half of tourist arrivals are to be found in Jakarta and Bali combined (Statistics Indonesia, 2007). Capital cities often dominate tourism, for the transportation systems focus upon them; they are places with much cultural capital, and their residents constitute an important source of demand. In many countries, it is not possible for an international visitor to fly to a peripheral location without first going through a big city, usually the capital city. Thus, the peripheral locations, which need the economic injections that tourism could bring and which often have interesting landscapes and cultures, often struggle to get visitors to move beyond the capital. Furthermore, the peripheral areas are generally poorly linked with each other. For example, until the advent of low-cost air-carriers, a journey by plane from North Sulawesi to the southern Philippines involved a journey via Jakarta and Manila at great expense in both time and money, although the straight-line distance between them is small. Thus, they fail in many cases to attract the tourism business that they desire.
So far, it has been argued that tourism in Asia has generally expanded at impressive rates with the result that its global significance has increased. This increase has been supported especially by expansion of the regional market. Nevertheless, perhaps inevitably, growth has been uneven and there are many peripheral areas that, for a variety of reasons, have yet to benefit greatly from tourism even though their tourism resources may be impressive. It is to these peripheral areas that we now turn, although it will first be necessary to make some points of a conceptual nature to guide the discussion.

Tourism in Peripheral Areas

Given the information and perspectives presented above, it is pertinent to explore ways in which peripheral locations, which are often disadvantaged in many ways, can be enabled to benefit more substantially from tourism. Initially, the topic will be addressed conceptually and then a South-East Asian example will be examined.

Core–Periphery Relationships

When viewed from a national perspective, core areas are often (but not necessarily) centrally located. They are usually centers of power and authority and, as such, they usually encompass the capital city (although some countries have relocated their capitals in recent years) and are the most developed parts of the nation economically. In contrast, peripheral areas lie at a distance from the cores, are less accessible, usually exhibit lower levels of economic development, and are the recipients of decisions made in the core.

While most easily understood at the national level, core–periphery relationships exist at a variety of scales, both supranational and subnational. Thus, there may be regional cores and peripheries that encompass more than one country, as well as provincial cores and peripheries in smaller, subnational areas.

Peripheral areas, by definition, are commonly found at the margins of their regions, e.g., again at the national level, near the borders of their countries. Frequently, these borders separate adjacent peripheral areas that are under the jurisdiction of different cores.

The discussion of border tourism has become a growth area in recent years and the reader can refer to the book by Timothy (2001) for an articulate discussion of the topic and to the special issue of “Tourism Geographies” edited by Ioannides (2006) for a variety of case studies. At this point, it is useful to distinguish between “borders” and “borderlands.” Borders are essentially vertical planes that separate the jurisdictions of different parties. In contrast, borderlands have width and are areas. Borders can be both barriers and attractions, reflecting the characteristics of the border itself as well as the attributes of the borderlands on either side. Some borders are permeable and permit the passage of people and goods whereas others are absorbing borders or barriers that restrict movement. Obviously, the former permit the movement of tourists while the latter prevent this. However, the volume of tourism depends on a multiplicity of other factors, including population sizes and characteristics, the distribution of attractions, and the availability of crossing points.
People often have mixed attitudes to crossing borders, particularly national ones. A border crossing provides tangible evidence that they have reached somewhere new and different and perhaps affords access to opportunities to do different things, including purchasing duty-free goods or other products at advantageous prices. At the same time borders may be crossed with anxiety as official documents may be requested, one might be questioned and even searched, and one enters a less familiar jurisdiction. Furthermore, all of these things may change with time as the ease or difficulty of crossing borders is altered and the attributes of the borderlands are modified.

House (1980) developed a borderlands model that has been refined by Richard (1991) and applied in a tourism context. It is based on power relationships, which often have a spatial component, and reflect the multiplicity of links that can exist within and between borderlands and among a variety of cores and peripheries at different scales. The model can be used to analyze the decisions ("transactions" in the terminology of the model) that are made by decision makers in different jurisdictions, although it will not be applied rigorously in this analysis.

The Role of Tourism in Cores and Adjacent Peripheries

It was pointed out above that, for a variety of reasons, core areas often attract a large share of tourism while peripheral areas, with the exception of a small number of particularly attractive locations, serve only a small proportion of the tourism market. Peripheries are not only competing with the cores for customers but they also are often seen as competing with each other. However, it may be that adjacent peripheries may have more in common with each other than with their respective cores. Furthermore, depending on the specific circumstances (such as border type, resource availability, and market characteristics), they may not always be competitors; their offerings may be complementary and their mutual interests may be best served through collaboration. Thus, the growing literature on partnerships (Selin & Beason, 1991; Selin & Chavez, 1995) is also relevant if adjacent areas are to collaborate in their mutual interest.

Practical Example: BIMP-EAGA

BIMP-EAGA is an acronym for the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (Yusof, Mulia, & Hussin, 1999) (Figure 3.2), which was launched in 1994. The area under consideration comprises the peripheral areas of three countries plus a fourth country (Brunei), and covers parts of a number of tropical islands and archipelagos. The area has considerable biological and cultural diversity and, although generally poor, has some economic variations (e.g., Brunei having the highest standard of living, and incomes in the Malaysian periphery being generally higher than in Indonesia or the Philippines). The borders between these countries are complex and they traverse both land and sea. Historically, the sea has united as well as divided the surrounding land areas, often being easier to traverse than the land.
“Growth areas” are often also called “growth triangles,” “growth quadrangles,” “subregional cooperation areas,” etc. and have been developed elsewhere in Asia, e.g., in the Singapore-Johor (Malaysia) and Riau (Indonesia) area (Timothy, 2000) and along the Mekong (discussed by Sofield in the next chapter). They are typically established with the following motivations:

1. to exploit economic complementarities in neighboring countries (or parts of countries in the case of BIMP-EAGA) by combining factors of production across borders so as to reduce costs of production and/or increase efficiency (e.g., through the realization of economies of scale);
2. to exploit opportunities to develop and manage shared resources or address common problems; and
3. to exploit opportunities to promote the area as a whole, either by attracting various forms of inward investment or through joint export/trade promotion.

Unfortunately, BIMP-EAGA has been less successful than its advocates had hoped. Critics have suggested that this is because the area under consideration is too large and there has been a lack of focus on specific economic sectors with high potential. Furthermore,
emphasis has been placed too heavily on the private sector, which cannot operate successfully in the absence of adequate public support; in fact government agencies and the private sector have blamed each other for the lack of success (Borneo Post, 2007). Lastly, perhaps, the initiative suffered from bad timing, given the large number of political upheavals in the region.

However, in 2001 a decision was made, with the support of the Asian Development Bank, to try to reinvigorate BIMP-EAGA by attempting to focus initiatives, both spatially and sectorally, more than previously. Accordingly the spatial focus was narrowed somewhat and a decision was made to concentrate upon agriculture and related activities, and tourism. Secondly, proposed initiatives were to be more closely linked to specific interventions in supporting sectors (particularly trade and investment, and infrastructure). Thirdly, efforts were to be concentrated on the development and marketing of multi-destination products in which a critical mass of resources and comparative advantages could be created. Fourthly, it was expected that measurable results would be achieved in the short term, for quick results would be required to restore support for the overall BIMP-EAGA program.

The overarching goals for any strategy thus were to create tangible economic benefits; and to stimulate renewed enthusiasm for BIMP-EAGA.

Project Responsibilities

In the context of the above considerations and with the support of the respective countries, the Asian Development Bank funded a project to create a development strategy for BIMP-EAGA. The contract was awarded to an American consulting firm that hired four international consultants — including the author — to undertake the task. The author’s particular responsibilities were to make recommendations for international collaboration in tourism. The overall assignment lasted several months but the core set of activities involved approximately 3 weeks in the field in meetings with officials, visiting sites, collecting documents and data, and brainstorming with the other team members.

Underlying Considerations

The situation had changed markedly since an earlier BIMP-EAGA mid-term report had been completed in 1996. This can be illustrated for international tourism by the case of Indonesia. In 1984, Indonesia received 700,910 international visitors. The number grew steadily, reaching 1,067,347 in 1987, 2,177,566 in 1990, and 4,006,312 in 1994, rising to a peak of 5,185,243 in 1997. However, in 1997 there were problems with haze from forest fires, currency and economic crises, and demonstrations against the country’s long-standing president, Suharto, began. Suharto resigned in May 1998 and political uncertainty followed for several years. In 2000, a bomb blast at the Jakarta Stock Exchange claimed 15 lives, and disturbances in the Sumatran province of Aceh led to full-scale military operations in 2001. The World Trade Centre was attacked in New York
on September 11, 2001, and the first Bali terrorist bombing occurred in October 2002. In 2003, SARS occurred, the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta was bombed in October, and the Aceh peace deal collapsed. Not surprisingly, visitation fluctuated markedly and at substantially lower levels than in the mid-1990s. Such extreme events (which have continued with the tsunami in 2004, the earthquake and tsunami in Java in 2006, outbreaks of Avian flu, a ferry disaster, and plane crashes in 2007, forest fires and, as this contribution is being finalized, extensive flooding in Jakarta) have created a climate of uncertainty in the region.

Accordingly, careful thought had to be given in the charting of strategic directions for BIMP-EAGA, for there were underlying assumptions concerning the desirability of international collaboration in the context of lack of stability in the region. There were four key assumptions. In the first place, it was acknowledged that domestic tourism would be important to the BIMP-EAGA tourism destinations, but a collaborative tourism strategy of the type considered here would inevitably focus on flows of visitors (and possibly investments) between the constituent national subcomponents of the region and the attraction of visitors (and investments) from outside of the region. Secondly, it was felt that there was a need to enhance the number and quality of products, especially multi-destination products. Thirdly, it was believed that collaboration in product development and marketing could increase the visibility of destinations, making destination regions more attractive because of enhanced product strength and diversity, and by creating marketing efficiencies; and finally, efficient and competitively priced transportation would be fundamental to the enhancement of tourism performance.

Recognizing these assumptions, six strategic directions were identified. The first was an emphasis on risk reduction, which could be achieved by focussing on the near extra-regional market, e.g., China, for such markets were likely to be more stable than longer-haul markets with less regional familiarity and more intervening opportunities. Next, there was an emphasis on subregional cooperation (i.e., parts of countries to parts of countries) more than partnerships between all member countries. This was considered to be more practical than initiatives involving all four countries although it was recognized that there would need to be opportunities for all participants if the strategy was to be accepted. Following on from the above, while acknowledging the existence of opportunities in other locations and some initiatives that pertain to the whole region, two areas were emphasized: the West Borneo corridor from West Kalimantan through Sarawak, Brunei, and Sabah, with possible future extension to Mindanao; and the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea Triangle between North Sulawesi, Mindanao, and Sabah. Fourth, emphasis was also placed on the creation of opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Many tourism businesses are SMEs, so tourism might lend itself well to this approach. The fifth point was that balance between public and private sector initiatives would be required, for the private sector could not be expected to fund the substantial improvements in public infrastructure that would be required to underpin tourism development. Finally, as a key aspect of the above, it was recognized that enhancement of transportation systems would be critical and would require considerable public commitments.
A Tourism Strategy for BIMP-EAGA

Based upon the above considerations, the strategy that was proposed emphasized the development and marketing of new multi-destination products, the enhancement of transportation and communications, more explicit identification of investment opportunities, human resources development, and improved tourism planning.

Briefly, and in point form, the strategy had the following characteristics:

1. A subregional focus on parts of the BIMP-EAGA region where there were the greatest prospects for success.
2. Regional (the West Borneo corridor and the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea Triangle) and sectoral (tourism and agriculture) foci.
3. Compatibility with existing plans.
4. The forging of stronger private and public sector relationships.
5. Ecotourism, which is a growth market and for which the region was deemed to have some comparative advantages.
6. Marketing, with a near extra-regional focus on the one hand, and marketing of BIMP-EAGA subregions (such as Borneo) on the other, and NOT the marketing of BIMP-EAGA as a whole, for the name has little public recognition and is a large area that is not an obvious tourism unit and is difficult to develop into one.

Eleven items were identified as key components of the strategy. While these projects and products are listed separately here, they are in fact linked and overlap. They are as follows:

1. Ecotourism/adventure tourism.
2. World Heritage Sites (tours linking the World Heritage Sites in the region).
4. Dive packages.
5. Golf packages.
6. Cultural tourism packages (celebrating the cultural diversity of the region).
7. A marketing plan for BIMP-EAGA (based on the West Borneo corridor and the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea Triangle rather than BIMP-EAGA as a whole).
8. Transportation enhancements.
9. Investment opportunity identification (based on a resource inventory).
10. Human resources development, principally tourism and hospitality training and guide training.
11. A tourism master plan for BIMP-EAGA, which was to specify tourism goals, objectives, strategies, and targets; provide a comprehensive identification of the tourism potential in BIMP-EAGA; draw up policies concerning transportation, accommodation development, human resources development, and priority projects; prescribe development standards and guidelines, such as ecotourism standards and guidelines; incorporate a marketing plan and associated funding mechanisms; and be compatible with environmental conservation initiatives, for natural attributes constitute an important part of the tourism resources of the region.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Project / Product Name</th>
<th>Ecotourism / Adventure Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Summary description</td>
<td>The project promotes the development of multi-destination ecotourism / adventure tourism packages particularly in the West Borneo corridor and also in the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rationale for inclusion / explicit link to tourism strategy</td>
<td>The BIMP-EAGA region contains many excellent attractions and tourism operations but they tend to be isolated and poorly linked to other complementary attractions. International tourists will wish to visit multiple sites within a single destination and multiple destinations within a single trip. Thus packages should be developed involving multiple facilities and destinations. This will increase length of stay and the likelihood or repeat visitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Specific activities to be included in project scope</td>
<td>Multi-destination packages should be prepared from combinations of existing tourism opportunities and costs of provision ascertained. Such packages should include attractions, transportation, accommodation, food and beverage and, ideally, interpretation. Some packages could be varied in content (landscape, wildlife, dives) but some ecotourism devotees are highly specialized (in birds, butterflies, primates, plants etc.) and specialized products can be developed for niche markets. In some cases the contents of the packages may be very similar but with a different experience at the attraction (park or reserve) delivered through skilled interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Required interventions In supporting sectors (trade and investment, infrastructure)</td>
<td>Efficient transportation is essential for successful tourism development. Therefore, enhancement of transportation and communication links is vital if product development initiatives are to succeed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Costs and financing implications</td>
<td>Initially, emphasis is placed on increasing occupancy rates and the viability of current operations. Thus, increased capital investments in tourism plant are not a vital element of this project. Costs will be incurred in identifying possibilities for collaboration and in facilitating meetings between interested operators (possibly including site visits) to promote collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Responsibility for implementation</td>
<td>Product ‘clubs’ should be developed for each initiative comprised of interested operators stimulated by a facilitator working in collaboration with existing tourism organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Expected impacts / benefits (short-term, medium-term)</td>
<td>Benefits include increased demand and occupancy rates, leading to increased public support and revenues for parks and protected areas, and better returns on capital investment for entrepreneurs. For BIMP-EAGA, benefits should come in increased employment as well as enhanced support for conservation to protect the fragile environments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 8 | Indicators of measurable Impact | 1. Increased number of multi-destination products available  
2. Increased number of visitors  
3. Increased lengths of stay in the region  
4. Enhanced occupancy rates in accommodation facilities |

Figure 3.3: Information collected for Project/Product No. 1 (ecotourism).
Space does not permit explication of the rationale for inclusion of each of the eleven items. However, for each proposal, the information illustrated in Figure 3.3 for the example of ecotourism was developed and incorporated in the report.

Conclusions

This paper has made some introductory comments concerning the growing magnitude and significance of Asian tourism. It has emphasized the importance of the regional market in the recent growth of tourism. While Asian tourism can celebrate many recent successes, the region is still home to many poor people and there are peripheral areas with great tourism potential that have yet to benefit greatly from tourism. A multinational project has been examined that is designed to facilitate cooperation between peripheral areas of the region to promote tourism in their mutual interests.

Acknowledgments

Part of this work was undertaken for BearingPoint under contract to the Asian Development Bank. However, the ideas presented are not necessarily endorsed by these organizations.

References

The Borneo Post. (2007). Palm oil to be anchor industry in BIMP-EAGA (30 May).
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Introduction

In broaching the role of tourism in the transition economies of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) there are varied texts and subtexts which could be the focus of an analysis. Development theory would be the most obvious, but I wish to bypass many of these texts to cover two main areas, the politics of governance and government associated with regional cooperation, and the characteristics of economies in transition. It is argued that by isolating these two themes from the many that contribute to the complexity of the Great Mekong Subregion they will prove significant vehicles for reaching an understanding of key processes in the implementation of major tourism development initiatives in the GMS countries.

First, however, there is a relatively short, descriptive outline of the strategy and programmes agreed by the six countries of GMS to strengthen regional cooperation. This flows into a brief examination of several key concepts and theoretical constructs concerning the nature of regional cooperation in general and its application through the Mekong Tourism Development Project (MTDP) and the GMS Tourism Strategy. Of necessity, this examination considers the politics of bilateral and multilateral relations, the exercise of sovereignty, and the nature of border maintenance in the region. I then turn to dissonance in the application of these development programmes in transition economies since they display a range of characteristics that create a less than stable environment, and I draw mainly on examples from Cambodia and Vietnam.

GMS Strategy to Strengthen Regional Cooperation

On 29 November 2001, Ministers of the six countries bordering the Mekong River — Cambodia, People’s Republic of China (represented by Yunnan Province and Guangxi
Province), Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam — adopted a new strategy for the next 10 years to strengthen regional cooperation as the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). Under ‘the GMS Strategy’, the six countries agreed to cooperate to realize the potential of the Subregion through an enabling policy environment and effective infrastructure linkages that would facilitate cross-border trade, investment, tourism, and other forms of economic cooperation and would develop human resources and skills competencies (Maekawa, 2001). The overall goal was identified as ‘to work towards the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of achieving substantial poverty reduction and the sustainable development of biodiversity and other natural resources’ (Maekawa, 2001, p. 1). The overall strategy is to enhance connectivity, increase competitiveness, and generate a greater sense of community among the GMS countries. As part of this programme, four of the GMS countries — Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam — signed a landmark cross-border agreement in 2001 to facilitate the flow of people and goods by simplifying and harmonizing legislation, regulations, and procedures. Negotiations are ongoing over abolishing individual national visas in favour of a single visa for the Mekong region.

At Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in November 2002, the leaders of the six Mekong countries agreed to implement the GMS Strategy through eleven flagship programmes. They endorsed the GMS medium-term cooperation framework in which the tourism sector was recognized as a major growth engine for socio-economic development and poverty alleviation, as a promoter of the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and as a harbinger of peace in the subregion (ADB, 2006). Tourism was therefore designated as one of the flagship programmes.

Arising from these regional agreements, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) emerged as the leading agency in providing funds for cooperation in developing the tourism industries of the Mekong countries. It has funded MTDP to the tune of approximately US$36 million for Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam, with these three countries providing an additional $8 million in counterpart funds. China, Thailand, and Myanmar self-finance their participation in joint projects involving them. The MTDP is an ambitious three-year plan (2005–2007) to facilitate regional tourism, with four project components in each country covering tourism-related infrastructure improvements; pro-poor, community-based tourism developments; subregional cooperation for sustainable tourism; and implementation assistance, human resource development (HRD), and institutional strengthening.

Tourism infrastructure projects include regional airport upgrading, road access improvement, and a sewage system for Siem Reap (site of Angkor Wat), in Cambodia; the provision of Mekong River piers/passenger facilities and solid waste treatment plants in two of Vietnam’s impoverished southern provinces (An Giang and Tien Giang); and road construction to open up new tourist sites in Lao PDR. Community-based tourism and poverty alleviation subprojects cover two provinces in Cambodia, two in Vietnam, and four in Lao PDR, which are budgeted at almost $3 million. Subregional Mekong cooperation includes seven subprojects: harmonization of tourism statistics; facilitating cross-border tourism flows and improving border checkpoint facilities; developing national tourism marketing and promotion boards through public sector/private sector partnerships; establishing a single regional hotel classification system; undertaking regional tourism planning; establishing a regional tourism marketing office based in Bangkok; and cooperating in joint tourism ventures.
MTDP was followed by the Greater Mekong Tourism Strategy that in 2005 identified 90 individual projects grouped into seven themes for the six countries with total funding estimated at more than US$75 million (ADB, 2006). The seven themes encompass product development and marketing; tourism-related infrastructure development; human resource development; natural-cultural-social impact management of tourism; pro-poor and equitable distribution of benefits derived from tourism; private sector participation in the tourism sector; and facilitating the movement of tourists to and within the subregion. Given that historically the adjoining states have experienced border conflict with occasional incidents still occurring today, it is of interest to note the key role of tourism in promoting transnationalism in the Mekong. East–west and north–south corridors that will benefit from new transport infrastructure (roads, bridges, river piers, railways, and provincial airports) are designed to facilitate tourist flows throughout the Mekong and add substance to GMS efforts to be one destination consolidating a diverse range of experiences and attractions.

In addition, each GMS country may have its own priorities for further cross-border tourism developments and these need to be integrated. Thus, under the GMS ten regional and subregional tourism zones have been designated. Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Thailand have identified the Emerald Triangle Tourism Zone that groups seven provinces in the tri-border area of those three countries for subregional tourism. Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam have identified the Green Triangle Tourism Zone that groups another seven provinces in their tri-border areas. The Golden Quadrangle Tourism Zone has been identified for the same purpose by the four countries which share this area — Thailand, Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Yunnan Province, China. Cross-border facilities are required for further development in all such areas as tourism within the GMS continues to expand.

Along with these spatial zones, several major thematic tourist circuits have been suggested for major product development that also requires linking in to cross-border facilities. These include for example the Heritage Necklace Circuit which would link the World Heritage Sites of Siem Reap (Cambodia), Hue (Vietnam), Luang Prabang (Lao PDR), Bagan (Myanmar), Sukhothai (Thailand), and Lijiang (Yunnan, China). There is also the concept plan for a tourist circuit called 'Following in the Footsteps of Shiva and Lord Buddha', which would link all the major ancient monuments and many new sites with religious heritage architecture in the GMS countries. Thus it is important to recognize that for tourism growth and increased cross-border tourist flows, the orientation of future transport policy objectives should be towards joint (i.e. neighbouring country) spatial and regional policies and GMS strategies, going beyond current volumes of traffic and tourist flows. The GMS Tourism Strategy forecasts a massive increase in road travel in the next decade and several border checkpoints will therefore become major gateways even if today there are very small traffic flows.

These integrated developments towards greater regional cooperation may be interpreted as evidence of transnationalism and movement towards a borderless region. Given the recent history of disputed borders within the GMS, a strong — even strident — defence of national sovereignty and national interests, distinct national identities, very different levels of national economic development, and tourism industries which range from mature in the case of Thailand and China to embryonic in the case of Myanmar, this level of cooperation is as surprising as it is welcomed. It is the role of the GMS Tourism Strategy and the MTDP to move this regional tourism agenda forward and the future role of borders as open and permeable is fundamental to making progress.
The Political Nature of Regional Cooperation

In examining the GMS’s cooperative efforts in tourism it is necessary to examine the term ‘regional cooperation’. At least three pre-conditions must be met for such cooperation to exist. First, there must be a sentiment that a particular group of countries constitute a region. Second, the political will to work together must be present. And third, there must be sufficient resources devoted to implementation of regional objectives if the states are to operate at a regional level (Sofield, 1990). These are of course interrelated: the sense of belonging to a single region generates a willingness to tackle some issues collectively, which in turn leads to the necessary resources being available for joint activities. In the GMS, regional inter-governmental cooperation has focussed on limited, functional programmes in clear recognition of political, economic, and geographical constraints which would make the lofty ideal of economic integration pursued by other International Governmental Regional Organizations — IGROs — (e.g. the European Union) an impractical goal.

The many manifestations of regional cooperation in the GMS include a diversity of both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Insofar as governments are concerned it may be argued that regional cooperation will be initiated, developed, and continued for as long as that cooperation serves, preserves, and/or extends national interests. This illustrates very clearly one of the maxims of regional cooperation — it most commonly takes place in the GMS at what I have termed ‘the l.c.d.’ — the lowest common denominator. When there is consensus on perception of commonality of interest or if a national interest coincides with a regional act, national concerns are most likely to be put to one side and regional cooperation permitted (Sofield, 1990). Where regional cooperation exists it does so because it enables individual governments to pursue national policies and objectives more effectively. The spirit of regional cooperation for regional cooperation’s sake exists more in rhetoric than in reality. As Crocombe stated: ‘Regional cooperation is not a virtue in itself. It is justified only to the extent that it is the best option’ (1982, p. 212).

In the GMS the emphasis of and leadership for regional cooperation has been at the governmental level and the major organizations are all inter-governmental in nature. Economic rationale underpins GMS cooperation since most of the inter-governmental regional organizations were established to achieve developmental (largely economic) goals, and the GMS is founded on the recognition that regional cooperation offers benefits through tackling common economic problems together. The emphasis accorded by states in pursuit of regional technical cooperation in the GMS is very much a functionalist, state-centric view, in contrast to the approaches adopted by the ‘populist-based idealist’ and the ‘economic reductionist’ (Herr, 1980). As Herr has noted the former tends to see regionalism as a mechanism to reduce the divisiveness inherent in much nationalism and therefore to promote interaction by NGOs because they are ‘putatively closer to the people’ (1985). The economic reductionist disregards to a large degree the morality of government, emphasizes the fundamental importance of economic issues and interprets both domestic and international politics in strictly economic contexts.

Nye (1968) developed a typology for classifying regionalism into five stages, based on the intensity of relationships, interactions, and commitments among the actors. At the lower end of the spectrum, ‘token integration’ typifies the first stage: relationships are not
intense and involve little more than a rhetorical attachment to the idea of a supranational community; no restructuring of national interests occurs. The second stage evidences a strengthening of relationships where a common view of security interests leads to a community ‘sense of illegitimacy’: violent conflict among those on the ‘inside’ is regarded as unacceptable. As with the first stage, this stage involves little direct financial or material cost and provides ample scope for nations to manoeuvre in pursuit of individual political and economic goals which stop short of armed conflict with other community members. The third stage sees limited functional cooperation designed to provide common services, such as a regional airline or a regional development bank. This involves a greater degree of interaction but falls considerably short of stage four, complete economic integration. Stage five, the apex of Nye’s ordinal scale, sees ‘direct political unification’. Using this typology, I suggest that GMS regionalism lies somewhere in the middle to upper end of Nye’s stage three, that is there is a fairly effective degree of limited functional cooperation.

However, in some of the subprojects of the MTDP, nationalist concerns may override functional cooperation. A case in point is an attempt, now spread over a number of years, to develop a hotel classification (star rating) scheme that would be applied across the GMS so that visitors would have a single standard when seeking accommodation. The ADB has provided funds for such a standard system, and Vietnam has taken the lead to formulate it. On the other hand, China already has a very well established system controlled centrally by the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) and every hotel in China must have its accreditation awarded and/or renewed annually as part of its licence to operate. Thailand has also had its own system for a number of years although it is not applied rigorously under a central licensing agency. Cambodia in 2005 enacted legislation for its own star rating system and in 2006 established a Hotel Classification Unit within its Ministry of Tourism to assess accommodation plant nationally. Although there are common elements, all three differ in significant aspects. In these circumstances, while Vietnam has produced a possible model for standardized hotel classification, its application across the region is unlikely.

Sovereignty and Borders

The issues of border control and the regulation of movements across borders also demonstrate that the GMS has a long road ahead before it achieves the ideal of visa free, open-border facilitation of tourist flows, although Cambodia and Thailand in particular have made progress, and Vietnam and Cambodia in February 2007 also reached agreement on several border checkpoints being able to issue visas on arrival.

Traditionally, borders have been considered as demarcations of ‘us’ and ‘them’, of delineating difference, of civilized from barbarian, of one field of endeavour (e.g. the arts) from another (the art of war), as either ‘open’ or ‘closed’, and of dividing friend from foe. Spatially they have enclosed nations, governments, ethnicities, and cultures, and defined centres and peripheries, with seats of power, authority, and governing elites in the nucleus and marginalized communities at the edge. The term ‘border’ includes both the legal demarcation between states, and a signifier of differentiation or frontier where cultures and politics meet, often in contestation, in a dynamic relationship. Thus borders have been
construed as ‘institutions that serve to mark the functioning barrier between states, to impose control over the flows of people and regulation of cross-border trade, or to indicate the evolving gateway to facilitating contact and interchange’ (Hageman, Berger, Gemie, & Williams, 2004, p. 2).

A geo-political boundary may be material when marked by a natural feature such as a river or a mountain range, or conceptual when drawn on a map as a geometric line with coordinates of degree of latitude or longitude. The latter may be translated into the physical by a human-made barrier such as the Great Wall of China, or the Berlin Wall, or the sorts of barriers common at many cross-border checkpoints. The material border will define the legal jurisdiction of a government within territorial limits and that will take us into the conceptual realms of sovereignty and international recognition, public law and order, definitions of citizenship and nationality, a state’s right to utilize resources within its boundaries and to control movement across its borders. At the same time it will conjure up mental images of that country, those people within that bounded space, and stereotypes of ethnic, cultural, and religious characteristics (all features, incidentally, which the marketers of the tourism experience also draw upon in the promotion of destinations). The border will thus combine both the material and the conceptual/mental, and tourism is interrelated intimately to both elements (Sofield, 2006).

Geo-political boundaries have rarely been static and history is thus central in reaching an understanding of ‘the mutual processes of construction and reconstruction of borders and identities. ...Both (borders and identities) must be legitimated historically in order to meet with broad acceptance’ (Hageman et al., 2004, p. 3). The discourse of histories deploys ‘evidence’ about common origins and culture in order to argue that a particular border and the identities it encompasses — of a nation, a state, a people, a religion, a culture — are legitimate, and the exercise of sovereignty within that territorially bounded space is one of de jure governance. ‘In this way, the past as an invention of tradition is invoked on behalf of present and future interests’ (Hageman et al., 2004, p. 3).

By their very nature, borders are political and tourism can be enmeshed in highly sensitive politics that will constrain openness and impede tourism flows. Alternatively, where governments embrace cooperation along their borders, tourism flows can be facilitated (Sofield, 2006). However, the dark cloud of international terrorism has heightened tensions between the global tourism industry which argues for increased deregulation, on the one hand, and governments exercising their sovereign rights and responsibility to protect their citizens within their jurisdiction, on the other. Global health crises such as SARS and the threat of Avian ‘flu have resulted in borders assuming their traditional role as barriers, imposing stricter not lesser controls over tourist entry, and thereby impeding trans-national moves to greater openness.

For the GMS, one of the major issues confounding greater cooperation is that borders remain disputed in a number of areas. Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam, China, and Thailand for example have highly sensitive political concerns and the demarcation of some parts of their borders has not yet been resolved. Cambodia has reached agreement with Vietnam and Thailand that there shall be a 200 m wide strip of ‘No-Man’s Land’ along their common borders and that their border posts will be separated by this strip in order to lessen capacity for friction and hostilities. The bilateral agreement specifies that neither side may construct any edifice of any kind in the strip, and at several border crossings, including for
example the Mekong River crossing at Vinh Xuong between Cambodia and Vietnam, a paved road between the two border posts has still to be constructed. Tourists, traders, and border residents must negotiate this no man’s land to move between the countries. From time to time border posts may be closed without any advance notice by either side based on perceptions of national risk or protection of national interests.

In May 2005 a dispute between Thailand and Cambodia over the presence of a number of itinerant Cambodian stallholders in the no man’s land area at the approaches to a famous Buddhist temple inside Cambodia resulted in six Cambodian casualties as the Thai border authorities unilaterally removed the stalls. The temple is indisputably in Cambodian territory but because it is located on the edge of a cliff, it can only be approached from Thailand. However, since it is a Cambodian temple, the Cambodians considered that they had the right to establish the stalls outside its entrance even if they were in no man’s land. The border crossing was closed as both sides rushed army reinforcements into the area, dug trenches, and pointed their artillery at each other— not exactly in accordance with the spirit of free-flow provisions for tourist and pilgrimage access to the site. The dispute has since been resolved and visitation by early 2007 had recovered to previous levels.

The study of borders and boundaries has experienced significant change during the past fifteen years, reflecting the fluidity we now experience in global politics, global trade, global communications, and global mobilities. They are no longer the exclusive domain of political scientists, strategic studies and diplomacy. This globalized world has altered the functional role of international boundaries. The combined effects of the exponential growth in international trade, the enormous flows of capital, the interconnectivity of markets, of financial institutions, of stock exchanges and global corporatism, the rise of international tourism that is beginning to approach a billion annual arrivals, and the advent of cyberspace which promotes unimpeded global communications, have led some observers to predict the end of the nation-state and the rise of a borderless world (Hageman et al., 2004). When increased mobilities, of which tourism is but one aspect (Hall, 2005), are added to the mix, it is possible to state that many borders today are perhaps boundaries of inclusion as much as they are boundaries of exclusion, and this is the ideal that some of the GMS countries are pursuing (vide the 2001 Agreement between Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Lao PDR for visa free entry). However, while one will find many publications and substantial research covering the geo-political factors of a reconfigured world map caused by the preceding decades of decolonization, the territorial changes exerted by the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Empire, and moves towards greater regional integration as evidenced by the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), there are very few that specifically examine the role of borders in tourism. Work by Timothy (1999, 2001, 2005) on this topic is a notable exception which indicates that the more traditional role of boundaries as barriers has been breached in both the material and conceptual/mental sense and that tourism studies are moving to join other disciplines in reassessing the role(s) of borders in our new globalized world.

Timothy (1999) building on a model for cross-border partnerships by Martinez (1994) proposed a five-part typology of levels of such partnerships. This typology extended across a spectrum of nil interaction at one extreme to comprehensive integration at the other, in order to capture the differences in human movement between adjacent countries. His first
construct is of alienated borderlands; no partnerships exist between contiguous nations because: ‘Political relations are so strained or cultural differences so vast that networking is not feasible or possible’. Timothy’s second type is that of coexistence, which is characterized by ‘minimal levels of partnership’ where ‘neighbours do not actively work together to solve common problems’. His third is for cooperative partnerships that involve ‘initial efforts between adjacent jurisdictions to solve common problems’. Collaboration, his fourth kind of partnership, is found in regions where ‘bi-national relations are stable and joint efforts are well established. Partners actively seek to work together on development issues and agree to some degree of equity in their relationship’. Finally, integrated partnerships ‘are those that exist without boundary-related hindrances ... regions are functionally merged (and) each entity willingly waives a degree of its sovereignty in the name of mutual progress’ (all quotes from Timothy 1999, p. 184).

When Timothy’s typology is applied to measure progress towards trans-national tourism in the Mekong Region, a mix of his third and fourth types of cross-border partnerships — cooperation and collaboration — is the most apt. The Mekong still has a long way to go however before it begins to approach the extent of tourism partnerships in the member countries of the European Union. Significant political and economic barriers remain, and the unrestricted flow of goods and people is some distance in the future. The MTDP, which has the improvement of border posts and facilities for cross-border tourism as one of its seven regional cooperation projects, confronts the opportunities and tensions of this phenomenon continuously.

Tourism and Transition Economies

The OECD definition of a transition economy is of a country in the process of change from a centrally planned economy towards a market economy, a process that involves enormous changes at every level of society, but it may also distinguish any economy that attempts to replace bureaucratic mechanisms with greater reliance on markets (OECD, 2003). Such countries include those of the former Soviet Union and eastern and central European members of the communist bloc, as well as more recently countries in Asia and Africa undergoing market transformations of various degrees, including Cambodia and Vietnam.

Cambodia for example in the last thirty years as a transition economy has moved from war to peace, then to single-party authoritarianism, and is now grappling with multi-party democracy and the emergence of a market economy that is still not complete (Hughes, 2003). While it has a thriving private sector, the peaks of the economy are controlled by the governing élite, the largest private national companies are owned by those with power, and conflicts of interest which would preclude many ministers and military commanders as individual owners in Western capitalist democracies is a concept that has yet to be established in Cambodia (Hughes, 2003). This creates dissonance and tension when issues of corruption arise since a very different value system, based on a centuries-old tradition of rule by an autocratic monarchy, meant that by definition what was in the interests of the king was automatically deemed to be in the interests of the nation. What Western democracies might describe as nepotism was accepted as a
profound responsibility to ensure that family members were the first beneficiaries of another’s position and power. When allegations of corruption are raised, or inequitable distribution of national wealth is exposed, or issues of gender inequity, or utilization of a position of power for personal gain occurs, in many ways the current ruling élite is simply applying practices condoned over centuries by its previous rulers, and some societal values are so deeply entrenched that there is often passive acceptance that ‘this is the way it is’.

Vietnam as an orthodox communist state officially refers to ‘the business sector’ rather than ‘the private sector’, a euphemism for the fact that all major business and investment ventures have state agencies as either sole owner or as a major partner. While it has a highly active informal sector of private sector small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the formal private sector is still embryonic. Communist doctrine still sets the parameters or boundaries of what can be done because it determines the political system and therefore what is acceptable or unacceptable in many situations.

While the transition countries in the various regions of the world differ from one another in many respects, including culture, economic structure, and extent of the informal sector and pre-transition starting points, they nonetheless are affected by transition in much the same way (World Bank, 2001). The transition process has brought with it significant well-documented short-run costs to the economies. The dismantling of state-owned enterprise systems has resulted in increases in poverty as wages drop in the face of disruptions in trade and financial links, unemployment increases in some cases as newly private firms struggle to become competitive, and vulnerable groups generally are not able to rely on heavily state-subsidized support services. In many cases, poverty and increasing urbanization have further stressed and weakened family and community-based coping mechanisms, particularly in Asia.

Modernization is integral to transition and is often also disruptive. ‘Modernization’ is not to be equated with ‘Westernization’ and in implementing projects it is necessary to understand the two are not synonymous. In Vietnam modernization, at a swift pace with annual growth rates of more than 8 per cent, invariably translates into constructing something: if a project does not result in a lot of building it is not seen as achieving much. The prevailing system of advancement and promotion within the bureaucratic system rewards cadres for the amount of investment they are able to attract, so sustainability is often not part of the equation. ‘Ecotourism Vietnamese style’ for example is more about investment-driven supply side construction than environmental conservation, and so hotels, golf courses, and karaoke bars set in a national park qualify in their marketing and promotion as ecotourism. Tam Dao, a former French hill station, is a classic example of this: 53 hotels, karaoke bars and nightclubs are set 10 km inside the boundaries of the Tam Dao National Park but there is not one activity related to the natural surroundings other than a single path to a waterfall, the stream of which has become the main effluent channel for the hotels. There is a massive oversupply of rooms and most hotels close for six to eight months of the year. Given the obvious operational failure economically of Tam Dao, the response from the Government is ‘interesting’: Tam Dao is a success because 53 investments have been made, attributed to the beauty of the natural surroundings; so the National Parks authority has already embarked on the construction of Tam Dao 2 with the construction of a road to a valley another 12 km inside the park to repeat the investment success — and it has plans for Tam Dao 3.
In examining the role of tourism in transition economies, the first point is that tourism is a commodity and every country has something to offer. Even those countries that are among the poorest or struggling with the transition to a modern free-market economy may be able to find ways to attract a range of market segments through their cultural and natural heritage. International tourism thus offers the potential to contribute to a nation’s export strategies and we would agree with ITC (2005) that sustainable tourism development ‘should be a key element of the national export strategy of the majority of developing and transition economies’.

Second, entrepreneurship is central to the functioning of market economies, and faces several obstacles in transition economies: access to credit, opaque tax systems, heavy administrative burdens, and often areas of corruption (World Bank, 2001). Tourism development requires an environment favourable to entrepreneurship, particularly for SMEs, given the fact that in most countries with mature tourism industries the majority of operators (up to 80 per cent) are SMEs. The building blocks of a successful tourism strategy include integrating the private sector and fostering collaboration among SMEs. In transition economies however there are a number of weaknesses that tend to inhibit these factors from progressing smoothly (Sofield and Metaggart, 2005):

(i) privatization is not always easy or effective;
(ii) key opportunities may be seized by the governing élite and free market entry severely curtailed (in developed ‘Western’ economies such action would often be deplored as a conflict of interest);
(iii) tolerance of entrepreneurship by those outside the governing élite may be lacking initially, other than at the level of SMEs;
(iv) the viability of some SMEs will be doubtful because of weak business acumen and poor market access;
(v) standards of SMEs can vary considerably, often because of the substandard construction of facilities; and
(vi) there is a lack of appropriate HRD inputs, poor training facilities, no national qualifications standards, and sometimes resistance or apathy by SMEs to training and capacity building.

The third point is that in approaching the issues of a move to a market economy and entrepreneurship, it is important to pursue a steady, staged strategy that avoids jumping from one extreme to the other. It needs to be understood that competition is not about the law of the jungle and that some regulatory mechanisms are necessary. Lack of effective legislation to control predatory behaviour — or lack of enforcement of the provisions of such legislation when it is in place — can be a major source of tension. As Denman (2005) stated, it is vital to create favourable conditions for doing business, in order to encourage both local enterprise formulation and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). There is a requirement to encourage promotion of standards (quality and sustainability) and of certification processes. Intermediary bodies, such as professional associations, can help coordination. Public–private partnerships are needed (Denman, 2005). At present in several GMS countries the potential of success by a smaller investor is likely to result in a takeover where a bigger venture simply pushes the first investor aside or swallows it up. A community about...
to embark on an ecotourism venture may find that its traditional lands have been registered by a big business interest and village households are not only rendered ventureless but also landless.

Fourth, there is an interesting paradox in transition economies with reference to environmental resources. Sometimes, because of the relative state of undevelopment, their natural heritage may be comparatively pristine and thus constitute an important unexploited tourism potential. However, there may also be a lack of effective regulatory frameworks for conservation and protection. There may also be a legacy of local environmental pollution and poor waste management such that uncontrolled development may put natural heritage resources at risk. In a number of transition economies we have also witnessed a decline in public sector funding for conservation and a lack of commitment to finding the resources necessary for measuring environmental impacts. This situation may be exacerbated by a degree of immaturity of the private sector combined with an unwillingness to adopt voluntary measures and self-regulation to protect the environment. In terms of the MTDP, the ADB has insisted on a condition of loan disbursement that for any construction an Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) followed by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) must be undertaken and, if necessary, designs must be modified to meet the standards of the environmental assessment before construction can commence. This compulsory condition, in which the IEEs and IEAs are made publicly available through the ADB website, is a very useful mechanism for ensuring that the projects of the MTDP are environmentally sustainable.

Fifth, resettlement may be required in order to proceed with a development (e.g. the My Tho landfill site in Vietnam, the Siem Reap sewerage system, the Ratanakiri Airport extension in Cambodia). Since aid agencies are concerned with alleviating poverty and certainly not with creating new poverty, adequate compensation becomes a key issue. But in many transition economies the rights of ‘Affected Persons’ (APs) are often ignored or inadequately managed. This is a constant issue in many countries with the potential to bring the implementing agency into direct conflict with the government of a transition economy. In Vietnam for example the My Tho landfill site requires 11 pineapple farmers in Tan Lap Commune to relinquish their land, but Vietnamese legislation only covers the loss of the immediate crops (at less than market prices) and does not cover the need to find replacement land, the need to provide income subsidies for the two years it takes new pineapple crops to bear fruit, nor the need to provide replacement houses if the new land is too far from the existing settlement. However, under the MTDP, a condition of the loan agreement for funds disbursement requires that ADB provisions for resettlement and compensation take precedence over any existing local legislation where that legislation provides lesser benefits than ADB regulations. But while there is an agreement signed at Head of Government level which has juridical weight, if there is no enabling legislation to support the over-riding of national law then understandably the local bureaucracy may be reluctant to accept the authority of the agreement. In support of this, the ADB may insert a covenant in its loan agreement which will give it the right to withhold funds until it is satisfied that its minimum requirements have been met; but such a measure needs to be applied diplomatically rather than dogmatically.
Sixth, in many transition economies infrastructure may not be fully developed and if the tourism potential of a destination in a transition economy is to be fully realized then substantial investment in capital works will be required. This is recognized by the MTDP and the GMS Tourism Strategy, so both contain major provision for tourism infrastructure development — in the case of the MTDP this component absorbs about 70 per cent of the funds. Maintenance of existing infrastructure is also compromised by lack of funding in many such economies. It may also be necessary to convert large state-owned public tourism structures into manageable private tourism resorts and hotels.

Seventh, marketing of new tourism product, destinations, and attractions is often poorly undertaken in transition economies. They must compete with well-established traditional destinations and there is often a high cost of image creation and promotion that such economies baulk at. They may also suffer from a distorted perception of safety and health risks by their potential market. However, new destinations may be price-competitive with traditional markets, and they will often have a novelty (‘exotic’) factor that can be exploited. MTDP contributes to confronting these issues through its role in building a public sector/private sector partnership through the establishment of Tourism Marketing and Promotion Boards (TMPBs) to be led by the private sector. Remedial action should address poor infrastructure, low levels of FDI flowing into tourism, and lack of resources for marketing, as these frequently act as a brake on tourism development. However, because of the lack of a mature private sector and the dominant power position of the governments it has proved difficult to meet the condition of the ADB loan agreement in both Cambodia and Vietnam that a private sector led national TMPB for each country would be established within 18 months of the signing of the Loan Agreement. Alternative models led by Government which involve some private sector interests have been developed instead.

Eighth, government structures may be poorly developed, and Ministries of Tourism (MoTs) and/or National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) are likely to be severely under-resourced with weak HRD capacities coupled with inexperience. Decades of large-scale donor-driven assistance have seen many transition countries acquire significant support for operational expenses, capital costs and human resource development of the institutions required for health, education, agriculture, and rural development but rarely for tourism development. In Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam, the ministries are housed in relatively modest accommodation, and require more experience to deal effectively with major donor bureaucracies. MTDP recognizes this, and seeks to stimulate MoT/NTO development both through the in-country assistance programmes, and through regular meetings of the GMS Tourism Working Group where individual countries are supported by their peers.

Finally (ninth), one of the strengths of a transition economy is that, despite the limitations outlined above, there is often a political willingness to prioritize tourism in the national development agenda. This is particularly the case with Cambodia, which with its recent accession to the World Trade Organization faces the imminent dismantling of preferential access for its garment industry products, the mainstay of its export earnings over the past decade. It has limited natural resources and has recognized that tourism is perhaps the only sector that can make a similar contribution to its national economy if developed sustainably. Its active involvement in the MTDP is a manifestation of a high level
of political support. Vietnam, Lao PDR, Thailand, and China all recognize tourism as a key sector for development.

**Exogenous Forces of Globalization**

These endogenous factors of economies in transition, already vigorous, already creating tension and dissonance because of internal inconsistencies and contradictions, must contend with the exogenous forces of globalization that impinge upon the countries of the Mekong Subregion. Part of the globalization process is the acceptance at a certain level of Western paradigms of development, but often it is an imperfect adoption and/or adaptation that produces a significant ‘implementation gap’ (Dunsire, 1978) between policy and praxis. The implementation gap may be *inevitable* because of the lack of resources to commit to the introduction of a policy. For example with the MTDP it is necessary for the recipient government to match loan funds with matching funds; but those funds are not always extant. There may not be the technical expertise available locally; or outdated or inappropriate equipment or no equipment, without which some aspect of a project cannot move forward. Second, the implementation gap may be *inadvertent* because of inexperience and lack of understanding of how to introduce measures that are outside ‘normal’ practice. Third, implementation may not be possible because of *inconsistency* or a clash with other policies which demand a higher priority for government action. Fourth, it may be *deliberate*, either because the policy was in fact only introduced to satisfy demands from an agency or pressure group and designed to pay lip service to those demands in the hope of removing the pressure; or because there is a hidden agenda with other priorities. And fifth, on occasions over time the issue may be *overlooked*, inaction happening because a policy or need for decision simply gets pushed to the back of the queue by more urgent demands even if once it had a higher priority. The politics of non-implementation are a constant and key factor in development intervention and constitute one of the most time-consuming components of project management.

All of these factors, both endogenous and exogenous, combine to produce an even more dynamic mix of forces that contribute to the current directions of tourism development and the forms that they take. A conclusion to be drawn from the experience of implementing a major tourism development project in transition economies such as Cambodia and Vietnam, in a region that retains a significant degree of volatility such as the GMS, is that technical competency in tourism development often takes a subordinate role to the need for political analysis and diplomacy. Attempts to impose purely technical solutions or to adopt an approach based on an inflexible application of Western standards which are of course underpinned by Western values, with a concomitant failure to understand and work within the prevailing political system, is in many cases a recipe for making little or no progress. This is not advocating the abandonment of basic principles: there are some which are universal in terms of justice, human rights, gender and ethnic equity, legality, and fairness; but it is a recognition of the contestability of values: who determines the moral superiority of one value over another?

At a practical level it is an acceptance of the merits of ‘incrementalism’ (Lindblom, 1979) in bureaucratic decision-making, where step-by-step or ‘little’ decisions that are
acceptable in themselves accumulate over time and result in the achievement of objectives, as distinct from confrontation or ‘revolution’ where big decisions are attempted and in many cases are ineffective. It is a validation of ‘satisficing’ brought about by ‘bounded rationality’ (Simon, 1976). Simon noted that there are always insufficient resources to apply to resolution of an issue and no one person possesses complete knowledge, and is thus restricted by ‘bounded rationality’. The outcome is decision-making that is sufficient to satisfy (hence satisficing) basic requirements, an acknowledgement that the ideal is often not practicable, and so one seeks the best possible outcome that meets at least some of the objectives while minimizing or restricting adverse consequences.

**Conclusions**

Regionalism will only be accepted and executed where the three conditions outlined at the beginning of this paper are present (agreement that certain countries constitute a region; that they have the political will to act together; and that they have the resources to pursue regional objectives). There must be a convergence of national interests with regional objectives for implementation of a regional project. Governments are highly pragmatic: their responsibility is to protect and promote their own national interests in the exercise of sovereignty, and regionalism for its own sake is not a virtue in itself. It is justified only to the extent that it is the best option. The manager of a regional project must therefore seek to identify commonalities across as broad a framework as possible that will appeal to and be accepted by participating governments. Regional cooperation is politically charged and technical expertise with technical solutions will often take a back seat to the dynamics of both national and regional politics.

In the Mekong Region, with the exception of Thailand, the five other GMS member countries are economies in transition. They are at various stages along the road to a free-market economy and each country must be analysed and understood individually in terms of where it is located along that spectrum from a centrally controlled command economy to one where the private sector predominates. Inevitably there will be occasions where there is an ‘implementation gap’ that will impede ‘progress’ (as defined by a particular project’s terms of reference). Part of the process of transition is modernization (not to be confused with Westernization), and integral to understanding the transition economy is a need to understand prevailing values that underpin the political and economic systems and to try to work within them if objectives of a regional project are to be achieved. This is not to abandon fundamental principles but to be aware of the need to pursue change incrementally in a ‘satisficing’ mode rather than attempting to push the speed of change at a rate which cannot be accommodated. In such situations the change agent must accept that technical expertise will often take a back seat to the need for political acumen and diplomacy.

The current multilateral initiatives to harness tourism for economic development and poverty alleviation such as the MTDP and the GMS Tourism Strategy are ambitious exercises in regional cooperation involving countries which lack a long history of such cooperation. That they are succeeding to a significant degree is evidence that despite the inevitable dissonance that is characteristic of economies in transition, sufficient common imperatives exist to achieve useful and sustainable tourism outcomes.
References


Chapter 5

Tourism Development and Propaganda in Contemporary Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China

Daisuke Murakami

Introduction

Nearly a half century has passed since Tibet was systematically integrated into China. During this time, it has experienced a significant degree of social and cultural transformation under the leadership of the central government in Beijing. At the initial stage of Chinese governance, particularly during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, socialist ideology was introduced into many aspects of Tibetan lives. As widely acknowledged, Tibetan Buddhism has been the prime target during this forcible introduction. Many monasteries and temples were looted or destroyed, the Buddhist clergy were deprived of their ordinations, and all forms of religious activities were banned in line with Maoist reform and revolution.

It was in the late 1970s that this socio-political upheaval came to an end. To stabilise the situation, the central government announced various levels of economic and social relief programmes throughout China and Tibet. One important scheme was the ‘Open Door’ (Kaifang) policy, which aimed to encourage human and economic interactions with the outside world. As far as Tibet’s tourist industry was concerned, the policy was a determinative incentive for its development, and over the last ten or fifteen years, particularly since the late 1990s, tourism has developed very rapidly to become Tibet’s pillar industry. The local media repetitively reports the ‘miraculous success’ of tourism and its benefits for the restoration and revitalisation of Tibetan ethnic culture. The ‘dark’, ‘feudalistic’ and ‘backward’ nature of Tibetan tradition, and other such socialist rhetoric introduced during the Maoist era, have metamorphosed into valuable capital as ‘exotic’ and ‘fascinating’, and as such cultivated in the interests of the tourist industry.
The red banner exclaiming, ‘Opened Tibet Welcomes You!’ (Figure 5.1) was displayed in front of the Potala Palace, the Dalai Lama’s former residence, just before the national ceremony of the ‘Fiftieth Anniversary of Peaceful Liberation of Tibet’ in the summer of 2001. On the surface, the slogan appears to be a mundane tourist greeting. However, the implicit message is that it is thanks to Chinese leadership and support that Tibet was liberated, opened, and is now enjoying the fruits of a booming tourist economy. The content of the slogan is monologic, a kind of oblique expression of Chinese paternalism towards its ethnic minorities; indeed, it is the naturalisation of its governance that the Chinese state wants to reinforce through its direct intervention in tourist development.

For the sake of clarity, the topic will be treated schematically by dividing this chapter into three sections. First, a general perspective on the development of tourism in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) will be given. The preferences and motivations of the increasing number of tourists, particularly Han Chinese, will then be described and examined. Lastly, some political aspects of the development of tourism will be pointed out through looking at the representation of Tibetan culture found in the media and various types of propaganda displayed on the streets. The information in this chapter is based on a two-year stay in Lhasa, from 2000 to 2002, and on subsequent return visits and close monitoring of events in the country.

A General Perspective on the Development of Tourism in Lhasa

At the beginning of the 1980s, Lhasa (literally ‘place of gods’) began to revive its former position not only as a major pilgrimage site for Tibetan Buddhists, but also as an alluring
tourist destination for both domestic and international tourists. During the early stages of this development, some local tourist agencies and hotels were founded to accommodate the growing number of tourists. Infrastructure conducive to accessing Lhasa was also established, for example the international flight from Kathmandu to Lhasa, which most Western tourists use, was introduced in 1987. Some of the main temples and monasteries, which had been damaged or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, were partly restored using central government subsidies. As a consequence, the number of international tourists, which was less than two thousand per annum until 1984, reached more than forty thousand by 1987. This growth was expected to continue, but was suddenly terminated due to the numerous political demonstrations for ‘Tibet Independence’ which took place in Lhasa towards the end of the 1980s. Accordingly, martial law was declared, and foreign tourists and journalists alike were expelled.

However, after martial law was lifted, recovery came swiftly. In 1992, the number of tourists exceeded past records. In the five-year plan initiated in 1991 large projects were designed to develop some tourist facilities and services: Lhasa Gonggar Airport was hugely expanded in 1993 and the restoration of the Potala Palace was completed in 1994. Subsequently, the Potala was included on the UNESCO World Heritage List and, accordingly, during the 1990s, the number of foreign visitors increased dramatically (see Figure 5.2), together with an even greater increase in the number of domestic tourists. According to an official document Tibet Academy of Social Science (TASS, 2002, p. 205), the average growth rate in foreign arrivals from 1995 to 2000 was 11.7 per cent, while domestic arrivals increased by 22.4 per cent, and tourism income grew at an average of 29.6 per cent. During the 1990s, income from tourism in TAR more than doubled from the first to the second five-year period. ‘Tibet Tour’ (Xizang lüyou) has become a pillar industry in acquiring foreign exchange, despite international pressure on China over its handling of human rights issues in Tibet. At the administrative level, however, the tourism industry continued to prioritise political stability (wending), hoping to prevent the re-emergence of political demonstrations, whose contact between Tibetans and international tourists was considered to ignite. Towards the end of the 1990s, therefore, new regulations governing people involved in the tourism industry and the management of foreign visitors were passed and proclaimed (Hu & Chen, 2001, pp. 50–52).

If the increase in international tourists could be described as dramatic, that of domestic tourists (i.e. Han Chinese) is extraordinarily so, both in its speed and number. As Figure 5.3 shows, the number of Chinese tourists has increased particularly since 2000, according to

![Figure 5.2: International tourists entering TAR.](image-url)
the China Statistical Bureau between 2000 and 2005 the average rate of increase of Chinese tourists was nearly 30 per cent every year. In contrast to international tourists, domestic tourists were hardly affected by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) turmoil in and around China in 2003. In 2005, there were around 1.7 million Chinese visitors to Tibet, more than a dozen times greater than international tourists. In 2006, due to the opening of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway connecting Tibet with China Proper (Neidi), it is believed that the number of domestic tourists would approach, or even equal, that of the whole population of Tibet (2.6 million). The number of the tourists present at any one time is not officially announced. However, in the summer of 2006 their presence was significantly overwhelming in Lhasa’s cityscape. These Chinese tourists are from the recently emerging affluent middle class, mainly from coastal metropolises such as Beijing and Shanghai, or adjacent provinces such as Sichuan.

It is notable that even during a period of considerable political instability in Lhasa, the authorities seem to have been very successful in establishing Tibet’s tourism brand (lüyou pinpai) within and outside China during the late 1990s, which contributed to the significant progress of domestic tourism in subsequent years.

During the research period in Lhasa between 2000 and 2002, the government’s efforts to celebrate and stabilise the development of tourism were evident, as indicated by a number of symbolic events. In December 2000, Lhasa’s main temple, the Jokhang, was successfully recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as an extension of the earlier inscription of the Potala. Only two weeks later, Lhasa was awarded the title of ‘Top Tourist City of China’ (zhongguo youxiu lüyou chengshi, which literally means ‘China’s excellent tourist city’) by the National Tourism Administration (NTA), an official body of the central government. This was in approval of the ongoing activities of the Tibet Tourism Bureau (TTB) which aimed to ‘create excellence’ (chuang you) in presenting Lhasa as a tourist city. In February 2001, four main tourist spots in Lhasa (the Potala, the Jokhang, the Norbulinka and the Tibet Museum) were given a title of ‘4A’, again by the NTA, which signified state recognition of their superior value as tourist sites. In June of the same year, just before the high tourist season, the local government declared the second Saturday of June as ‘Tibet Tourism Day’ (Xizang lüyou ri). To celebrate this new creation, some five thousand Tibetan youths were called to gather in the Potala Square for a ceremony. Some
were then sent to various tourist spots to clean them up, while others remained to serve as volunteer guides for tourists. The theme of ‘Tibet Tourism Day’ that year was ‘Tourism and Youth’, and was explicitly intended to make the people — particularly the educated youth — more aware of the significance of tourism for the development of Tibet. Local newspaper articles give a strong sense of how confident the authorities felt in the development of tourism. During the tourist season, the ‘miraculous success’ of the industry was repeatedly reported with hyperbolic expressions such as ‘Extraordinarily Explosive’; ‘TAR’s tourism has entered its ‘Golden Age’; ‘Let Tourism be a Dragon’s Head for the TAR’s Development’. In 2000, 162 travel agencies and 84 hotels were operating in the TAR to accommodate the increasing number of tourists, over four thousand local people (of whom an alleged 60 per cent were Tibetan) were employed in the tourist industry, and the number of employees in related industries was estimated to be nearly thirty thousand (TASS, 2002, pp. 205–206).

While tourism has certainly contributed to Lhasa’s recent economic boom, it is often pointed out (cf. Lafitte, 2003; Fischer, 2005) that only the urban, educated Tibetans have enjoyed its fruit. Indeed, it seems highly unlikely that the growth in urban wealth will ‘trickle down’ to rural areas, because the linkage between them is rather tenuous. However, the local media has continued propagating the myth that the tourism industry will be economically beneficial to the population in rural areas (85 per cent of TAR’s whole population), although the government is apparently not implementing any effective policies to ensure this.

The rapid growth of the industry has also highlighted the inadequacy of tourism services. One of the most urgent and significant problems which TTB identifies is the growing number of ‘unqualified’ tour guides’ — both Chinese and Tibetans. According to official understanding often expressed in local newspapers, not only tour guides, but also many other local employees working in the tourist industry, were considered as relatively poorly educated and, therefore, generally lacking in the ‘aptitude’ (suzhi) necessary to provide satisfactory tourist services. This situation is part of a general problem concerning Lhasa’s (and TAR’s) economic development, since high investment in infrastructure and facilities has not been matched by the investment in education which would provide the number of skilled local workers necessary for further development to take place (Fischer, 2005).

The Motivation of Tourists Visiting Tibet

Despite the palpable inadequacies of services, an increasing number of tourists visit Tibet, as we have seen, particularly during the summer months when the climate is relatively benign. In the case of Chinese tourists, two-week long National Holidays in May and October — respectively Labour Day and National Founding Day — are also popular periods. In this section, the motivations of Western, Japanese and Han Chinese tourists in travelling to Tibet will be discussed.

The largest numbers of overseas tourists are Westerners, mainly from America. There are plenty of studies concerning Western fantasies and imaginations about Tibet, investigated by scholars of Tibetology and cultural studies (e.g. Bishop, 1989; Lopez, 1998). Just to recap, the mystic and exotic image of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism has long been reproduced and circulated in media and academic discourse. The remote and holy image,
the spiritual construction of Shangri-la, has gained currency as a general image of Tibet and Tibetan people. Many exiled Tibetan lamas, most prominently the Dalai Lama, travel around Western countries propagating the spiritual value of the Tibetan religion as well as its predicament in its homeland. Therefore, a prime motivation for many Westerners visiting Tibet appears to be their desire to see and experience a peaceful, primordial and somewhat ‘otherworldly’ world, saturated by the sublime teaching of Tibetan Buddhism. Some also seem to be prompted to visit before the ongoing process of modernisation obliterates the religious purity they imagine exists there.

After the Americans, the second largest group of overseas tourists to Tibet is the Japanese. What motivates Japanese tourists to visit Tibet is both similar to and different from Western motivations. As in the West, a seductive, spiritual image of Tibet is disseminated by the media. Japan’s century-old study of Tibetology, as well as non-professional accounts on Tibet such as those of explorers (e.g. Kawaguchi, 1978), are instrumental in reinforcing this exotic, spiritual image of Tibet and Tibetan people. However, another factor attracting Japanese to Tibet appears to be their disenchantment with Buddhism in Japan. Japanese Buddhism is regarded as inauthentic, commercialised and even corrupt by some Japanese, and Japanese religions have certainly undergone secularisation and modernisation during the last one-and-half century. Therefore, Japanese people visiting Tibet may be powerfully inspired by the search for a ‘true’ and ‘living’ Buddhism; a kind of national quest for their lost, pre-modern origins. During work as a ‘Tibet Expert’ accompanying Japanese tourists in Lhasa during 2005 and 2006, I noticed that many of them were self-consciously Buddhist yet dissatisfied with the teachings and practices of Japanese Buddhism. They were searching for a true, uncontaminated, pure Buddhism whose traces they claimed they had found during their visit to Tibet.

Lastly, concerning the Han Chinese tourists’ motivations to visit Tibet, the dramatic increase in their number since 2000 seems somewhat surprising given the negative projections, such as ‘dirty’, ‘irrational’ and ‘barbaric’, observable within Chinese images of ethnic minorities. These derogatory images are not explicitly expressed in the media but often articulated in daily contexts where Chinese and ethnic minorities intensively interact person-to-person, for example, in schools, workplaces and many other public places. Exploring these issues is not the purpose of this essay, but these negative images can probably be seen as not unrelated to the traditional Han Chinese self-image as urban, cultured and civilised (cf. Gladney, 1999; Schein, 2000; Harrell, 1995). Within the general perception of the Han Chinese, Tibetans as ‘ethnic Others’ are exclusively attributed inferior characteristics and values which, in turn, operate to consolidate and validate Chinese orderliness and superiority. Due to both cultural remoteness and social proximity between the two nationalities, those ‘Othering’ practices are observable at both collective and individual levels.

As in the rest of the world, however, perceptions of the Other are not unitary or coherent. The images projected onto the Other tend to be multivalent, ambivalent and even conflicting, with features which can be characterised as simultaneously inferior and fascinating (cf. de Certeau, 1984; Fabian, 1983). Thus, together with the negative discourses above, terms such as ‘beautiful’, ‘enticing’, ‘pure’ and ‘sacred’, have been used to refer to Tibet in both commercial and government representations. Particularly from the 1990s
onwards — the period when China experienced unprecedented economic prosperity — China’s ethnic areas became popular tourist destinations and, concurrently, the exotic image of Tibet was gradually accepted as currency. The Chinese toponym for Tibet, *Xizang* (literally meaning ‘treasure house of the western region’) began to spread a seductive aura over urban Chinese in developed eastern coastal areas. In 1991 the TTB began publishing its tourist magazine, *Tibet Tour (Xizang lüyou)*, in which Tibetan culture and traditions were introduced through alluring photographs of Tibet’s natural landscapes, in a similar style to the Western magazine *National Geographic*.

Towards the end of the 1990s, some academic (or religious) literature on Tibet, which had previously stimulated Orientalist fascinations in the West, were translated into Chinese. The most popular of these was the global bestseller by Sogyal Rinpoche (a celebrated Tibetan lama in the West) entitled *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (1994), an adaptation of material discussed in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (trans. Evans-Wentz, 1974 [1927]). The latter publication was hugely influential in forming Western fascination with Tibetan Buddhism (e.g. Bishop, 1989; Lopez, 1998). Moreover, the successful inscription of the Potala as a World Heritage Site in 1994 resulted in the promotion of its national value for international and domestic audiences. The Potala Palace and Qomolangma (Mt. Everest) have now been sublimated into Tibet’s *ethnic icons*, functioning as metonyms signifying its people and land as peaceful, pure and holy. Inspired by the Western imaginative construction of Shangri-la, the romanticised, exotic image of Tibet has now become an important component of Han Chinese perception of Tibet. The tremendous increase of domestic tourists to Tibet since 2000 is partly confirmation of this. Notably, a county in Yunnan Province formerly called Zhongdian, whose name was changed to *Xiang-ge-li-la* (a Chinese phonetic representation of Shangri-la) in May 2002, now enjoys a huge income from tourism (*cf.* Kolas, 2004).

As hinted above, the boom in ‘Tibet Tour’ (*Xizang lüyou*) in China may also be understood as part of growing Chinese interest in their ethnic areas as tourist destinations. As many scholars report (e.g. Oakes, 1997, 1998; Schein, 2000; Kolas, 2004), ethnic tourism within Chinese national territory has been very popular since the 1990s, particularly in China’s southwest region, which is inhabited by distinctive and diverse ethnic peoples. Ethnic Tibetans form one of the minorities with whom Chinese in affluent coastal metropolises hardly come into contact, except through media coverage of their apparently exotic cultural lives.

**Tourism Propaganda and Tibetan Buddhism**

Despite Lhasa’s massive modernisation process, to which the tourism industry is central, Buddhism still dominates many aspects of life for local Tibetans. They make pilgrimage visits to the Potala, the Jokhang Temple and major monasteries in order to make offerings, say prayers, circumambulate and prostrate in front of Buddhist statues and other sacred objects. On auspicious dates of the Tibetan traditional calendar Lhasa attracts many Buddhists, not only from neighbouring counties, but also from Tibetan-speaking regions beyond the national boundary. Lhasa is still the main pilgrimage site for most Tibetan Buddhists, and Buddhist objects there have sacred, religious value for devotees in the
attainment of mundane advantage, the purification of spiritual defilements and the accumulation of merits for better reincarnation.

For ordinary Tibetans, the economic value of Buddhism, the idea introduced by tourism, is very new. Unlike in Southeast Asia or Nepal, tourism is a relatively new socio-economic phenomenon for Tibetans. Apart from within a certain section of Lhasa’s society (i.e. Tibetan elites, government officials and entrepreneurs), it is considered inappropriate to associate Tibetan Buddhism with mundane economic values and activities. In some contexts, it is even disrespectful and insulting for Tibetans to make such an association. However, it should be emphasised that economic practices and orientations relating to Buddhism did exist in premodern, traditional Tibet — and still do, for example in the form of economic activities related to pilgrimage. However, what is different from the previous era, what the development of tourism has brought, is the systematic introduction of economic value into the core of traditional Tibetan culture. The commodification of Tibetan religion is naturalised and authorised at the national level for the sake of social and economic progress. Tourism operates as a disseminating vehicle which encourages the Tibetans to re-examine their religious traditions; to consider them as commodifiable. Supporting this newly emerging economic movement is considered a Tibetan ethnic virtue, or even imperative, by the state. These ideas are repeatedly disseminated through a variety of state mechanisms: through local media, including newspapers and TV programmes; through government work units; through schools, universities and religious institutions; and through billboards and banners in the streets.

Between 2000 and 2002, when domestic tourists began their particularly rapid period of increase, the Lhasa townscape was excessively decorated with somewhat monotonously worded and styled tourism propaganda, exhibited alongside socialist slogans. The most ubiquitous slogan in the tourism discourse was ‘Develop Tourism, Prosper Economy’ (fazhan lüyou, fanrong jingji). The slogan was repetitively used in a variety of forms in busy public spaces, particularly during tourist seasons, and older Tibetans would joke that the widespread usage of the slogan was comparable to that of the many communist slogans during the Cultural Revolution.

One of the most eye-catching means of disseminating slogans was by the red banners displayed at the entrances of hotels and tourist spots. Just before the high tourist season, a list of tourism slogans was distributed by the TTB to hotels and travel agencies, which were encouraged to select and exhibit on red banners some of the slogans in order to demonstrate their conformity with (and support for) the government’s economic imperatives. Some Tibetans called these banners the ‘Chinese tarcho’, in a comparison with the five-coloured Tibetan tarcho — Tibetan prayer flags. Whereas Tibetan tarcho were hung in prayer, spreading Tibetan Buddhist teachings, the purpose of Chinese tarcho was, in their words, ‘to pray for money’. For many local people, these red banners appear to have become a familiar part of their townscape. Although the slogans were somewhat abstract and so perhaps not able to fully capture people’s attention, their overwhelming abundance was potentially effective in encouraging local people to appreciate the importance of tourism for Lhasa’s economy.

While slogans about the development of tourism were predominant in street propaganda, there were also other types of slogan, for example ‘Tibet — Paradise of All Dream Seekers’, and ‘Tibet — A Land that Entices People’. In these, there was no economic or
socialist terminology, and no exclamation marks were used. It is possible that these were targeting Chinese tourists in order to lend distinctive value to their journeys, but they also seemed to function simultaneously as a way of letting local Tibetans see their living space from a tourist perspective and taste. Through promoting Tibet as attractive and enticing, Lhasa Tibetans were encouraged to look at their homeland in a new way: Tibet as a hospitable place and its traditional culture as fascinating and exotic, which, as we can see, corresponds to a newly emerging Chinese fantasy about Tibet as ‘Shangri-la’.

Tourism as a virtuous enterprise was also a familiar slogan. At the beginning of the week-long ‘National Founding Day’ holiday in October, when many domestic tourists visit Lhasa, a white banner reading ‘Tourism: Instrument of peace and dialogue between different ethnic groups’ was displayed. As will be discussed below, the mutual fraternity between different ethnic groups is enshrined in Chinese nationalism and, clearly, the tourist industry is expected to contribute to this state imperative.

The slogan below (Figure 5.4), however, goes beyond the national context, and attempts to appeal to the global: ‘May Tourism Establish a Bridge with the World’. The image in the centre is the Potala Palace and the whole landscape of Lhasa City, seen from a distance. In the right corner is part of the Earth, and, in the left, a golden statue of deer and a dharma wheel — symbols of Buddhist teachings normally decorating the roofs of monasteries and temples. To propagate the virtue of tourism, this billboard appropriates the sacred aura of Tibetan Buddhism. The implied message seems to be about the universality of tourism, or even the sacredness of its economic mission.

To sum up tourism propaganda in Lhasa, three characteristics can be highlighted: first, the economic importance of tourism for Tibet; second, Tibet as an exotic tourist site and

Figure 5.4: ‘May Tourism Establish a Bridge with the World’.
third, tourism as ethnic virtue. Since tourism is a relatively new social and economic practice for Tibetans, these types of propaganda may be desirable and necessary in order to stabilise and stimulate the further development of the industry. Through the various state mechanisms such as education institutes and local media, including street banners, Tibetans were repetitively encouraged to pursue and maintain this emerging market. The crucial, underlying message of such propaganda is that Tibetan Buddhist values, Tibetan traditional culture and identity can be transformed into cultivatable economic capital. This view corresponds to an official socialist stance in which Tibetan religion should strictly serve the further modernisation of Tibet.

Another significant aspect of tourism propaganda worth mentioning is the state attempt to redefine Tibetan tradition and identity through what can be termed ‘ethnicisation’, reinforced within a tourism discourse. This ‘ethnicisation’ can be viewed as part of China’s ongoing strategy to maintain and strengthen the integration of ethnic minorities, which will be briefly explained below.

In the 1950s, when China was trying to stabilise national unity, the central government started to give ‘ethnic’ status to people whose history and culture are distinctive from the majority of Chinese. This process involved the creation and enforcement of a new identity for those people. Through categorising and listing them as ethnic minorities (shaoshu minzu), they were symbolically incorporated into the constitution of the Chinese Nation (Zhonghua minzu) in which the vast majority are Han Chinese. To date, 55 ethnic minorities have been officially acknowledged and, in theory, the ethnic identification process is not yet complete. Each ethnic minority is usually represented as a discrete entity with its own folkloristic customs, such as distinctive costume, dance, music, culinary practices and belief systems. Framed by these markers, each ethnic minority is treated as a delimited cultural bearer. Colourful and exotic images are flamboyantly proliferated and circulated in media and socialist discourse. Objectified ethnic symbols are reproduced and regulated according to a state standard, and the people labelled as ‘ethnic’ are encouraged (or sometimes forced) to become associated with these bounded traditional symbols. The endowment of ethnic status, in a sense, may be less motivated by egalitarian considerations than with confining the non-Han people within China’s national imaginings.

Tibetans are categorised as one of those ethnic minorities. They are encouraged to perceive and to represent themselves in the language of ethnicity. As is the case in many other parts of the world, it seems that tourism plays an instrumental role in reinforcing and consolidating ethnicisation in Tibet. In this political process within the tourism discourse, the Tibetan culture tends to be represented in such a way that its religious aspects are de-emphasised or relegated to a merely symbolic realm (as also discussed by Bovair in this book). While Tibetan Buddhist images and tropes proliferate in the townscape and local media, the traditional centrality of the Buddhist culture, in contrast, tends to be played down or overtly ignored in various tourism discourses. In the local media and most tourist documents in China, phrases such as Tibetan Buddhist culture or Tibetan religious tradition seem to be deliberately avoided. Instead, Tibetan ethnic culture is predominantly employed as the most common idiom, quite often together with some eulogising terms such as excellent (youxiu) or splendid (canlan), for example, ‘excellent Tibetan ethnic culture’. The secular aspects of Tibetan tradition such as artefacts, dance, food (e.g. butter tea and roasted barley) and courtesy (e.g. offering a white scarf to a guest or a respected
person) tend to be exclusively elaborated. Within the tourism discourse, Tibetan Buddhism has been, by and large, relegated simply to a flavour of ‘Tibet-ness’. In contrast, the aesthetic or folk aspects of Tibetan tradition have been highlighted, brought to the fore as representative of authentic Tibetan culture.

It may be true that one of the critical features of modernity is the way that culture, tradition and identity are organised within regimes of representation. Tourism may be a primary vehicle for this. The representative mode of Tibetan culture has increasingly been naturalised and taken as more real than the reality itself (cf. Eco, 1986) within the discursive discourse of cultural representation. Importantly, it seems that this economic process has been exploited by the state in order to manipulate and redefine Tibetan culture through employing specific national signs and markers in which the language of ethnicity (minzu) plays a significant role. The semiotic power of tourist representation has been harnessed in order to circulate, legitimate and naturalise this state label of minzu, and its superiority over religious elements. It can be argued, then, that Lhasa’s tourism discourse provides the national space wherein Tibetan culture has become ethnicised through its tourist representations, during which process those representations have become imbued with aesthetic character, being cleansed from ‘contamination’ by backward traditional elements considered to have originated from a Buddhist legacy.

**Conclusion**

The slogan ‘Opened Tibet Welcomes You!’ (Figure 5.1), as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, may be inherently monologic, and an oblique expression of Chinese paternalism towards the ethnic Tibetans. However, at the same time, this slogan can be interpreted as a typically socialist way of manifesting the validity of, and confidence in, recent econo-political reforms in which tourism is instrumental.

As often pointed out, the development of tourism inevitably involves state intervention (e.g. Richter, 1989; Wood, 1997; van den Berghe, 1995; Philip & Mercer, 1999). This may be particularly so in the case of ethnic tourism. Since the development of tourism may potentially stimulate nationalistic or separatist sentiments among the ethnic population, it is often observed that the state engages in systematic controls over its various marketing processes, particularly the ideological aspect of its development. In Lhasa what is repetitively propagated in the tourism discourse is twofold: the economic value of Tibetan traditional culture, and that culture as ethnic, rather than as religious or Buddhist. The semiotic logic of tourism seems to be harnessed to reinforce both the commodification and the ethnicisation of Tibetan culture. The state manipulation of Tibetan tradition (or ethnic signs), and the attempt to redefine (and even de-centre) substantial Buddhist components is observable behind the ostentatious celebration of ‘excellent ethnic culture’. The intended targets of this type of propaganda are not only Chinese and overseas tourists but also, more crucially, the Tibetan people themselves, whether they are involved in the tourism industry or not. Thus, it may be said that, at the ideological level, tourism in Tibet operates as a capitalist-driven socialist propaganda confining the Tibetan people within a marked tradition and identity as ethnic objects serving to constitute the Chinese Nation (Zhonghua minzu).
This chapter has touched on some political aspects of the development of tourism, while sketching general tourist motivations to visit Tibet. There are many other important issues to be explored, such as the influence of tourism on the preservation and restoration of Tibetan religious culture and its effect in widening economic disparity between Tibetans and Han Chinese, or between urban and rural Tibetans. Such types of research avenues are valuable ones to explore in the interests of both the local people and the policy-makers. For the facilitation of productive research, however, it may be indispensable that Tibet opens (kaifang) itself to the outside world in a more tangible manner.

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Chapter 6

Changing Accessibility to Vietnam: The Influence of a Government in Transition

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Introduction

Vietnam’s *doi moi* (‘renovation’) programme, which has been compared to Gorbachev’s contemporaneous *glasnost* campaign in the Soviet Union (Nguyen, 2004), was introduced in 1986. This economic ‘open door policy’ called for decentralisation of the planning system, a decrease in the number of government ministries and bureaucracies, reliance on the private sector as an engine of economic growth, and allowing state and privately-owned industries to trade directly with international markets. Incrementally, Vietnam established or re-established normal political relations with other countries at the regional and global scale, so that by 2007 it had diplomatic relations with 171 countries and territories, compared with only 23 non-communist states in 1989. This chapter aims to delineate the ways in which the factors determining Vietnam’s accessibility to international tourism have evolved alongside political, economic and social transition in Vietnam throughout the *doi moi* period. Visa policy, transportation access and tourism marketing are examined as three key determinants of accessibility.

As barriers to tourism (both those imposed by the Vietnamese government itself and those imposed by other nations upon Vietnam) have been lifted since *doi moi* began, Vietnam has attracted an increasing number of travellers: over 3.5 million international tourists arrived in Vietnam in 2006, a more than tenfold increase since 1990 (www.vietnamtourism.com). Increasingly, the Vietnamese government is eager to bring tourists to Vietnam, which implies at least three simultaneous spheres of operation. Firstly, the legal protocols and regulations surrounding travel and immigration, as exemplified by visa laws, constitute a filter through which the state can regulate the flow and type of tourists allowed into the country, and which can serve as an enticing or discouraging factor for tourists. Secondly, transportation networks and connectedness determine the accessibility of a destination,
regulate the potential volume of visitors and affect the relative attractiveness of different destinations within a country (or of countries within a region). Thirdly, the destination must capture the attention and win the interest of prospective tourists through marketing and promotion. In addition to determining the influx of tourists into the country, these three factors also control the movement of tourists, both international and domestic, within the country. To a large extent, they set the parameters for the country’s entire tourism industry in as much as they constitute ‘bottlenecks’ through which tourists must pass to access the destination.

The opening up of Vietnam to foreign tourists not only brings great potential for financial and political gain, but also evokes fears of potential competition, contamination and loss of control on the part of the government. Policy and practice in all three of the above areas — visa, transportation and marketing — have been used to pursue the various goals and address the various apprehensions implicit in the doi moi programme; and as with most sectors of Vietnamese government and society, these three aspects have been in a state of transition during at least the past decade. Whereas the central government used to have a near or total monopoly over all of these realms, provincial and district governments, private entrepreneurs and even foreign entities are becoming increasingly involved in various ways, as will be discussed in this chapter.

**Visa Regulation**

The growing demand for travel to Vietnam makes visas a highly saleable commodity in which the government effectively holds a monopoly. This factor has been used by the government over the last two decades both as a way of controlling tourists and of generating revenue: in 2001, for instance, the government collected over US$50 million in visa fees (Vietnam Investment Review, 2002). The control of visitor flows has been exercised through manipulation of visas in various ways: through policies on issuing and extending visas to enter and stay in the country and on exempting various nationalities, and through internal travel permits. Before 1986, most foreign tourists to Vietnam came from COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, i.e., Soviet bloc) countries (EIU, 1993), but with the introduction of doi moi, the government eased conditions for entry visas for tourists of all nationalities (Elliott, 1997, p. 228). As a result, arrivals from non-COMECON countries increased sharply, from 4581 in 1986 to 40,966 in 1989, quickly surpassing the number of tourists from COMECON countries (Theuns, 1997, pp. 306–307).

In addition to controlling access to the country with visas, the government used to restrict the movement of foreign tourists within Vietnam through a system of travel permits. Tourists were required to declare explicitly in their visa application where they would enter and leave the country, and had to register with the police within 48 hours of their arrival in Vietnam (Magnier, 1992; Casson, 1998). They also had to give a list of all the places they wished to visit in order to apply for a separate travel permit for each city (EIU, 1993). Tourists who violated the stipulations of their internal travel permit could be sent back to a major city or deported (Casson, 1998). The 1991 Tourism Development Master Plan recommended that tourist travel within Vietnam be completely liberalised, and in 1993 the government abandoned the policy of internal travel permits.
The government has used its policy on visas repeatedly as a tool to control the inflow of tourists, using its discretion to issue or deny visas and occasionally ceasing to issue visas or visa extensions without prior notice. In the mid-1990s, government fears of external influences on Vietnamese culture and society — disparaged under the collective rubric of ‘social evils’ — were used to justify a number of instances of sudden and strict repression of foreign influences. In 1996 the government abruptly stopped processing all visa applications except for some prearranged group tour visas, causing a decline in arrivals for the first time since 1986. The Institute for Tourism Research and Development continued to issue rosy figures, claiming an increase for 1997, but the Vietnamese National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) lobbied the government to stop this tourist-hostile practice and ease entry visa requirements, realising that it would never meet its target of 3.6 million tourists by 2000 if the policy continued (Biles, Lloyd, & Logan, 1999).

Another instance of this capricious form of visa regulation came in 1998. In mid-August, the 200th anniversary of the sanctuary of Notre Dame of La Vang was celebrated — an event of obvious appeal to many Catholic pilgrims and other tourists. However (although there was some confusion over the issue), the government refused to issue visas for individuals from August 10 to 25, citing financial problems and expected difficulties in organising and accommodating the mass of people expected to attend the celebration (Deutsche Press-Agentur, 1998). As late as September 2004, the government once again ceased to issue short-term visas due to security concerns during the Asia Europe Meeting in Hanoi in October 2004 (AFP, 2004).

The lack of a fixed policy on visa suspension seems to give the government free rein to use such restrictions on an ad hoc basis to control the flow of tourists into the country, for whatever reason. This reactive approach, coupled with the lack of reliable information on current visa policy, has had a detrimental effect on Vietnam’s attractiveness to certain groups of visitors, particularly independent tourists. The pattern of visa suspension seems to confirm the government’s general preference for group tours over individuals on the grounds that tour groups are typically composed of more affluent tourists, are easier to control and monitor and are less likely to deviate from planned routes or interact with the local population (Biles et al., 1999). Groups also make more efficient per capita use of guides and transportation.

In line with harmonisation procedures introduced under the 2002 ASEAN Tourism Agreement, it is currently possible for tourists to obtain a so-called ‘visa on arrival’ to Vietnam, although in fact they must apply for the visa before entering the country. Intending visitors need to send their passport details to a tour operator at least 2 working days before they arrive in Vietnam. The tour operator submits these to the Department of Immigration in Vietnam, which issues an approval letter which is then faxed by the tour operator to the clients. The same document is sent to Vietnam immigration checkpoints at international airports. The tourists then need to show their letter to immigration officials upon arrival. This process — although termed ‘visa on arrival’ — seems no more convenient than the traditional process of issuance at any Vietnamese embassy, and certainly compares unfavourably with the policy of neighbouring countries such as Thailand or even Lao PDR which have much simpler entry procedures. Thus, many people residing in the region, who may wish to make spontaneous plans for a short break, are much less likely to choose Vietnam.
Tour operators also arrange the complicated process of visa extensions. The process is rendered more challenging by the lack of rules or regulations on visa extension policy. In 1995, for example, during the ‘social evils’ campaign, the government suddenly ceased renewing visas for tourists already inside Vietnam with no announcement or explanation (AP, 1995). No announcement is generally made as to when moratoria on visa extensions are enacted and which countries’ nationals are affected. Sometimes the process of visa extension is easy and sometimes difficult, and each province within Vietnam seems to have its own ways of dealing with visa issues. According to travel industry representatives interviewed by the lead author, obtaining a visa extension depends greatly on luck and the whim of individual immigration officers.

Under the 2002 ASEAN Tourism Agreement, visitors from other ASEAN member countries do not need entry visas to visit Vietnam for up to 30 days. For many years, the government considered whether to offer visa exemption also to Japanese and French tourists, but concluded that there were insufficient tourists from those countries to justify this. There seems little inclination to use visa exemption as a means of encouraging growth in tourism; in fact in order to define alternative means of doing so, the government has instructed officials to research tourism development in countries able to lure large number of tourists without granting visa exemptions (Ngoc Son, 2001). Nevertheless, at the beginning of 2004 Vietnam began to grant visa exemption for Japanese tourists for stays of up to 15 days, and tourists from South Korea, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland also currently enjoy the same privilege. This initiative came about in part due to lobbying from VNAT and from foreign business organisations in Vietnam such as the European Chamber of Commerce and the American Chamber of Commerce. There has been pressure to allow visa exemption for other Europeans as well.

Transportation

The second determinant of accessibility to a country is transportation, especially policy towards the operation of airlines and railways.

After the influx of foreign airlines into Vietnam brought about by doi moi, the Vietnamese national carrier, Vietnam Airlines, has gradually tried to improve its fleet and rationalise its operations. During the 1990s it improved staff training and modernised its ticketing and reservation services (McKinnon, 1993), although in 2001 tourists were still complaining about the punctuality and dependability of domestic services; the carrier cancelled an average of 133 internal flights each month, while 460 others experienced significant delays (VNAT/UNDP/WTO, 2001). By 2003, Vietnam Airlines was servicing 15 domestic airports and flying to 25 major international cities, compared to 3 international destinations in 1989. Passenger numbers also increased greatly, at an annual average of 30 per cent from 1989 to 1997 (IATA, 1997); by 2007 the airline was carrying 6.8 million passengers (3.1 million on international flights and 3.7 million on domestic flights). In addition, the Vietnam-based carrier Pacific Airlines (privately owned but with government shareholders) began operations in 1992.

In keeping with its attempts to maximise revenues from tourism, the government has used a dual-pricing policy on airfares to generate revenues from tourists for much of the
period since the beginning of *doi moi*. In 1995, for instance, a Vietnamese passenger would pay US$60 for a one-way domestic flight from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City, while a foreigner would be charged US$170. In 2003 this dual price system still existed, although the cost differential had been substantially reduced, and in January 2004 the split fares were abolished (Lewis, 1995; CNN, 2003).

Vietnam’s railways are another essential part of its tourism infrastructure. It has 2600 km of railways linking over 260 stations, and provides the only vehicular access to some rural areas that are inaccessible by road (Theuns, 1997). However, most of the line is narrow gauge and single track, including the country’s main rail backbone from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City, along which the tourist-popular ‘Reunification Express’ runs. Up until *doi moi* and for a few years thereafter, the rail network was owned and run by the central government’s General Department of Railways; this became a state-owned enterprise in 1989 and was renamed Vietnam Railways. The management structure was reformed, the rolling stock renovated or replaced, and travel times reduced; for instance, the journey between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City formerly took 72 hours and now takes 32. The government owns the railway infrastructure and rents it to Vietnam Railways for a percentage of its operating revenues. The company established its own marketing department in 2001 and underwent another restructuring in 2003. A further development being planned is the construction of a high-speed rail link between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (BBC News, 2007).

As an indicator of the difficulty it has experienced in freeing itself from state control, Vietnam Railways used to implement a government-imposed dual pricing policy similar to that previously practised by Vietnam Airlines. Foreigners and overseas Vietnamese were charged a surcharge of 375 per cent and 480 per cent, respectively on the normal fare for domestic travellers (EIU, 1993). Vietnam Railways succeeded in convincing the government to abandon this practice in 2003. However, there remains a bewildering array of ticket prices based on class of travel, with as many as 13 different classes indicated for the line from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City alone. Since 2000, Vietnam Railways has rented compartments of the train from Hanoi to Lao Cai (on the Chinese border) to two independent companies, one Vietnamese and the other French, which include bookings in their travel packages.

The management of Vietnam Railways sees bus lines as their primary competitor. In particular, the ‘Open Tour’ service, by which tourists can travel between north and south on a comfortable coach and interrupt their journey for stopovers at tourist attractions, is in direct competition with tours on the Reunification Express — particularly as the coach costs only US$29, whereas the cheapest seat on the train is US$28, rising to US$60 for a seat in the most expensive, air-conditioned carriages.

**Marketing and Image**

The third key sphere of activity in which a government must engage to ensure the smooth functioning of its tourism industry is promotion and marketing.

VNAT is the government agency in charge of the management, regulation and marketing of tourism in Vietnam; it is not a ministry, but occupies an analogous level in the government
hierarchy directly under the Prime Minister. However, the central government has increas-
ingly devolved decision-making over local resources to the provinces, and tourism is no
exception, with a consequent shift in the tasks of VNAT. An example of the changing role
of VNAT is its apparent withdrawal from many facets of tourism regulation, such as the
issue of tourism transport operator licences, which is now the mandate of local agencies
of the Ministry of Transport (VNAT/UNDP/WTO, 2001). Generally, the trend towards
decentralisation discourages uniformity in tourism legislation and exacerbates the lack of
coordination at several levels: between central government agencies, between central
and provincial government departments and between government bodies and tourism
companies.

Vietnam has been a member of the UNWTO since 1981 and became a member of the
Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) in 1989, but the dissemination of tourism infor-
mation has been slow to gain professionalism. There seems to be general agreement within
the industry that the weak points in tourism marketing include a failure to devise clear
strategies and policies, inadequate transparency of VNAT and insufficient promotion.
These issues are mainly due to lack of expertise and financial resources, and the result is
ad hoc planning of promotional activities, with promotions carried out by individual tour
operators rather than as part of a concerted effort; a lack of coordination amongst stake-
holders; and the absence of a striking marketing campaign or brand image. These prob-
lems are compounded by the fact that Vietnam has 64 provinces, each of which has either
a Department of Tourism or a Department of Tourism and Trade.

Due to the sharp increase in the number of tourist arrivals in the early 1990s despite the
lack of any concerted marketing campaign, the government saw no need to allocate a
large budget to promoting the country (Biles et al., 1999). Only state enterprises with inter-
national licences were permitted to do overseas advertising and marketing, so that most
of the promotion of Vietnam as a tourism destination was done by foreign tour operators
(Cresswell & Maclaren, 2000) leading to conflicting and fragmentary tourism images for
the country. In the past, VNAT and Vietnam Airlines joined forces in promotional cam-
paigns to advertise Vietnam as a destination, but recently, Vietnam Airlines has decided to
carry out its own campaign and to focus more on its own products.

One barrier to success is that Vietnam’s annual tourism promotion budget is around
US$1 million, about a tenth the size of the budgets of Thailand or Singapore (Vietnam
Investment Review, 2004) and far short of the amount needed to mount a coordinated
and effective campaign. In late 2004, in recognition of the need for greater expertise, the
government approved a VNAT proposal asking for permission to employ foreign individ-
uals and organisations to promote Vietnam tourism internationally (Vietnamnews, 2004).
The fact that much of the tourism promotion is carried out by commercial operators to
make up for the poor performance of the administration means that each business will
first and foremost promote its own product, which does not result in effective promotion
of the country as a whole (Ngoc Tran, 2004) and in a multiplicity of advertising images
and slogans which do not necessarily reflect the government’s priorities. For instance,
VNAT and state-owned tour operators and hotels aim their promotion mostly at high-end
and business tourists, and in the 1990s chose an image of progress and modernisation,
presenting Vietnam as a unique and vibrant culture and a land of rich resources providing
ample opportunities for investment. Vietnam Airlines’ advertising at that time promoted
Vietnam as a ‘rising Tiger of Asia’ (Biles et al., 1999). By contrast, Australian tour companies operating at the same time categorised Vietnam as a ‘curiosity’ destination (EIU, 1993), whose attraction lay in the fact that it was relatively unknown. Generally, promotion carried out by overseas tour operators focuses largely on Vietnam’s cultural heritage, and tries to capitalise on the romantic allure of Vietnam’s feudal and colonial past.

It seems apparent that Vietnam is still working on identifying its core markets in tourism and in devising messages which appeal to these and present a clear image. In 1999, VNAT officially announced a campaign entitled ‘Vietnam: A Destination for the New Millennium’, which tried to project an image of Vietnam as a high-quality tourist destination (Vietnam Investment Review, 1999), and in 2004 changed its motto to ‘Welcome to Vietnam’. Foreign tour operators and hoteliers complained that this was ‘not strong enough’ (Vietnam Investment Review, 2004), and the current slogan — ‘Vietnam, the Hidden Charm’ — was the result of a 2005 contest attracting 1100 entries (Vietnamnews, 2005).

As mentioned above, during the early years of doi moi the government preferred organised groups of tourists to individual tourists and ignored the significance of backpackers in helping the industry develop. Reflecting its suspicion of foreign influences, in 1996 the government even broadcast a warning that some backpackers might be spies (Biles et al., 1999). In recent years, however, the government has realised that backpackers bring significant tourism income to certain destinations and has revised the policy of active discouragement of this market to welcome them to the country and capitalise on their patronage. State-owned tour operators have even established branches in the backpacker areas of destinations such as Ho Chi Minh City.

The deep-rooted problems inherent in Vietnam’s marketing strategy are in great measure the outcome of its transition from a planned, centralised economy to a market-based system. As part of the effort to address this, the 2006 Law on Tourism has gone a long way towards providing a coherent framework for a revised and revitalised strategy.

Conclusion

The attitude of the Vietnamese government towards access of foreigners to the country, and the corresponding visa regulations, continue to change as Vietnam’s political transition continues. The progressive liberalisation of visa policy is a signal of its increasing openness to other countries, playing both a symbolic and a functional role in this respect. Although the government still clings to some vestiges of red tape and complications that were intended as a means of protecting the political, economic and ideological integrity of the country, the state seems to recognise that such policies must be measured against the discouraging effect that they have on potential tourists and, by extension, the potential economic gain that is foregone for the sake of the perceived or actual security brought by these measures. The government is learning to revise its former hard-line stance on such issues and make compromises for the sake of furthering the doi moi process.

In becoming less restricting and fixed, however, visa regulations have also become less stable and predictable. Visa regulations are currently being used as a safety valve, which can become as restrictive or permissive as suits the government’s concerns. This ad hoc way of dealing with visa regulations certainly allows the government to react quickly to
need and changes in the fluctuating and volatile transition environment. However, besides the annoyance and inconvenience caused to individual tourists, this practice projects an image of indecisiveness and distrust on the part of the Vietnamese government that is perceived by foreign governments and individual travellers equally, apparently reconfirming the explicitly xenophobic message of the earlier ‘social evils’ campaign. Such a direct expression of isolationism can only serve to reconfirm the image of an old-school communist state that Vietnam is intently trying to shed. Other policies, as discussed earlier, seem to support the impression that the government is either reluctant to reduce the degree of control over the movement of tourists or lacks experience in effective implementation of policies intended to create a more open and accessible environment. Even the so-called ‘visa on arrival’ is purely nominal in nature.

Dual pricing policies, obviously aimed at maximising opportunities to increase the income from wealthy Western tourists, are only very recently being phased out, a likely indication that the short-sightedness of this ‘short-term-profit-oriented’ thinking was draining more from the overall revenues from tourism than it was taking in, not to mention the accumulation of negative feelings of tourists which can be expected to have a decisive effect on return visits and word-of-mouth recommendations. Regardless of reforms in pricing policy, some of the non-discretionary costs of coming to Vietnam, such as visas and airfares, are still high.

Unlike visa regulations, transport provision is not by nature the exclusive territory of the government, and doi moi has encouraged both tourist demand and market openness to attract an increasing number of foreign airlines to Vietnam. Vietnam Airlines’ purchasing of a fleet of Western-manufactured planes to replace its outdated Russian machines exemplifies how Western influences are stepping in to fill gaps in the Vietnamese market left by the withdrawal of entities from the failed Soviet bloc. The direct competition of foreign carriers has inspired Vietnam Airlines to rapidly improve and expand its fleet. However, the increase in the number and quality of aircraft seems to be outstripping developments in the airline’s human resources and organisational expertise, leading to many operational problems and cancelled and delayed flights, as mentioned above. This is an example of how, in a transition economy, improvements in some facets may overtake developments in others but, as long as these facets stand in a mutually dependent relationship to one another, progress will be hindered by this asymmetrical evolution. The same problems can also be observed in the limitations caused by insufficiencies in tourism infrastructure on the government’s ambitions to attract high-end tourists to the country.

Vietnam Railways is faced with problems similar to other state-owned enterprises that are no longer state-funded and must fend for themselves in the market. This can be seen, for instance, in the railway’s renting of carriages to private companies to ensure themselves a fixed income amid the many uncertainties in the market.

VNAT’s recent recognition of the need for publicity and its focus on promotion, especially to the international market, indicates a change of strategy. However, this re-appropriation of the responsibility for the tourism image of Vietnam from the hands of individual foreign tour operators into the hands of the Vietnamese government has occurred more or less in parallel to the decentralisation of tourism administration. Consequently, the still-ongoing fragmentary marketing of Vietnam tourism by foreign tour operators has been augmented by the fragmentary marketing of Vietnam tourism by provincial governments, without a
strong central image under which these different messages may be consolidated. The frequently changing and uninspiring series of slogans intended to serve as rallying points are evidence of this lack of a clear self-image for Vietnam tourism. Vietnam is assuming control of its own tourism image but has not yet shown that tourism is understood or orchestrated at a level mature enough to adeptly formulate an image worthy of all that the country has to offer as a destination, nor to communicate this image to the world. If Vietnam is to achieve its full potential as a destination, improvement in all three facets of tourism development affecting visitation — namely visa regulations, transportation and tourism marketing — must progress at a coordinated pace. If any one of the components lags in its development, it will handicap the other two and cause a bottleneck that will have a detrimental effect on Vietnam’s tourism industry as a whole.

References

Chapter 7

Responses to Continuing Crisis in Sri Lanka

Janet Cochrane

Introduction

Several countries in Asia have experienced a slump in international visitor arrivals for one reason or another over the last decade, but in most cases the causes of decline have been relatively short-lived; no other destination has been beset by such a range of long-lasting and serious crises as Sri Lanka. The recent history of tourism here illustrates a number of aspects of crisis management and several themes of government involvement in tourism, and demonstrates the importance of leadership, collaboration and transparency in public affairs.

This chapter will evaluate the recent history and current state of tourism in Sri Lanka. The industry flourished from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, when civil conflict prevented further growth. Revival after a peace agreement in 2002 was badly affected by the 2004 Asian tsunami, and since then renewed fighting in the north and east of the island and occasional terrorist attacks in the south have continued to depress visitor numbers. The industry’s decline has affected a wide cross-section of the population, especially because tourism’s linkages within a relatively diversified economy such as Sri Lanka’s are so pervasive.

Crisis management in the context of these events will be discussed, but existing models are not always applicable because they assume that crises are of short duration and that recovery efforts will be implemented by competent, accountable public authorities. In Sri Lanka, however, the civil war has lasted for many years, while the shock of the tsunami highlighted structural flaws such as weak institutional leadership, a poor enabling environment and fragmentation. More positively, private entrepreneurs — and more recently the public sector — have demonstrated a strong degree of reactivity in addressing their difficulties by developing new products and repositioning existing ones in response to market trends and new markets. Underlying discourses concern the importance of collective action and institutional learning and change that, if the conflict situation subsides, should stand the industry in good stead in the future.
Information for this chapter was collected during 2006 and 2007 through desk research and field trips to Sri Lanka. Interviews were carried out with a wide range of informants from the private, public, NGO and academic sectors, ranging from the Chairman of the Tourist Board and the President of the Tourist Hotels Association of Sri Lanka to restaurant owners and beach vendors.

Sri Lankan Tourism: From Success to Crisis

After modern mass tourism began to develop in the mid-1960s, Sri Lanka experienced a decade and a half of rapid growth, with arrivals increasing at an average annual rate of over 20 per cent and reaching 407,230 visitors in 1982 (Perera, n/d–c. 1997). The sector was predicted to make an increasing and significant contribution to foreign exchange earnings (De Bruin & Nithiyanandam, 2000). In 1983, however, tensions between the minority Tamil population and the majority Sinhalese broke out into communal violence, and civil conflict has continued with varying degrees of intensity since then. Given the sensitivity of international tourism to insecurity, the situation has had a profoundly negative effect on arrivals. Decline throughout the 1980s was followed by a partial recovery during the 1990s as confidence grew that the fighting was confined to the north and north-east of the island, and there was substantial investment in hotels and other facilities such as golf courses. By 2000 visitor numbers were approaching their pre-conflict level, with 394,000 arrivals; this was forecast almost to double by 2010 (WTO, 2000; SLTB, 2006).

In 2002 a peace agreement between the government and the separationist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), further stimulated optimism and investment and arrivals surged to 565,000 in 2004. The industry became the fourth largest source of foreign exchange, directly supporting around 50,000 jobs and 75,000 indirectly (USAID, 2004; World Bank, 2005). But prospects for a full recovery were dashed by the tsunami of December 2004, which killed an estimated 35,000 people (including 250 tourists) in Sri Lanka, making it the worst affected nation after Indonesia.

Perhaps surprisingly, recovery from this disaster in terms of tourism arrivals was fairly swift, with 549,000 visitors in 2005, only slightly less than in the previous year (SLTB, 2006). This was partly due to the proactive stance of the industry, with the ‘Bounce Back Sri Lanka’ promotional campaign (funded by USAID) emphasising that most of the tourism infrastructure remained unharmed or had been quickly reconstructed. The authorities had in effect put into practice well-established crisis management techniques for communication and ‘managing the message’ (as reviewed by Scott & Laws, 2006). The emotional appeal to the sympathies of source market (coupled undoubtedly with a degree of thanatouristic curiosity) were successful in helping recovery; generally, in fact, as McKercher and Pine (2006) point out, destinations recover quite swiftly from this kind of discrete, unpredictable event.

The overall number of arrivals masked unevenness, however. In Colombo and other administrative centres occupancy levels were high because of the influx of aid workers, while in coastal areas the infrastructure had been badly damaged and few tourists came there. Inland hotels, although undamaged, suffered consequential losses because part of their business depended on side-trips made by people staying principally at beach resorts (UNWTO, 2005).
Had the tsunami been the only disaster, the industry would certainly have continued to show strong growth, but in 2006 and 2007 the situation deteriorated again because of the breakdown of peace negotiations and renewed terrorism activity. While still mainly contained in the north and north-east, occasional bomb attacks in Colombo and in tourist-frequented areas such as the international airport and Galle, on the south coast, have given the conflict an island-wide spread. Tourists have not been directly targeted by the LTTE, but the continuing insecurity and high-profile military presence are deterrents to the less resilient market segments. In mid-2007 the airport was closed to night-flights for several weeks because separatists were said to be using passenger planes as cover for raids by small aircraft; this caused a further decline, since several routings used by tourists involved arrivals or departures during the night (Figure 7.1).

Even apart from these obvious causes of sector under-performance and before the tsunami, it was acknowledged that tourism to Sri Lanka was not fulfilling its potential in terms of its contribution to foreign exchange earnings, numbers of tourists and the diversity of market segments. Some of the reasons for this will be discussed below, after an overview of structural and market aspects is given.

**Structure of Sri Lankan Tourism and Principal Markets**

The principal government organisations concerned with tourism are the Ministry of Tourism and the Sri Lanka Tourist Board (SLTB), which is answerable to the Ministry. Other key institutions are the government-run Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management,
and private sector associations such as the Tourist Hotels Association of Sri Lanka (THASL), which works with the government on policy and with other trade sectors, and functions as a marketing organisation. There are numerous smaller groups, such as the Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation, which encourages diversification towards more ecotourism products and has a strong community focus. Several of the more important destinations also have their own associations, although these tend to be organised along rather narrow lines: for instance a stakeholder analysis at the west coast resort town of Hikkaduwa in 2007 found at least eight different sectoral associations, ranging from larger hotels to beach vendors.

The diversity of organisations was an indication of administrative and policy fragmentation, and it was admitted that there was a ‘blurring of focus’ (SLTB, 2007a, p. 2). There was awareness that coordination was necessary, but uncertainty over the best vehicles to take collaborative energies forward. In a strong market such fractures would be little noticed, but in the continuing crisis situation the impression was of an industry turning in on itself and lacking the strategic vision which would give a framework for progress. In early 2007, however, a welcome reversal took place with the appointment of an energetic new chairman of the Tourist Board. He quickly stimulated the production of new policy documents and undertook morale-boosting visits to centres of tourism around the country, meeting stakeholders and exhorting his audiences to put aside past problems and build linkages for the future.

As far as markets are concerned, the focus during the early years of tourism development (as in other Asian countries) was on Europe, then recognised as the most lucrative. Since the late 1980s, though, European arrivals to Asia generally have declined in proportion to intraregional arrivals because of the growing strength of Asian economies, and while figures for Sri Lanka are hard to interpret because of the particular circumstances, it is evident that arrivals from elsewhere in Asia are increasing in comparison to Europeans. In 1992 Asia provided 29 per cent of all visitors to Sri Lanka, declining to 23 per cent in 2000 but rising to 35 per cent in 2004 and 41 per cent in 2005 (SLTB, 2006). The principal regional market is India, which provides around half of all Asian visitors, and many developments (for instance the golf courses) are designed to attract this sector. While numerically the Indian market compensates for the loss of European arrivals, in revenue terms the change is less positive because their average daily spend is lower than for Europeans and because their visits are shorter, since for most Indians Sri Lanka represents a short-haul destination.

The length of stay of European tourists is declining, which may reflect a tendency to take several shorter holidays throughout the year, and fewer younger people are visiting, with an increase in older age groups (SLTB, 2006). The principal likely cause of these changes is that Sri Lanka’s position in the market for European tourism has fallen in comparison to other countries offering similar holidays (for example Thailand and Malaysia) because of weaknesses in the quality of service and product and a failure to capitalise on evolving market trends, including less interest in straightforward beach tourism. These aspects are illustrated by visitors’ average daily spend, which at US$72.60 in 2004 was lower than in other comparable destinations (SLTB, 2006) and indicate that Sri Lanka is operating at the lower end of the mass long-haul market. As well as attempts at product diversification in order to address this situation, efforts to move into new markets have started to show good results: arrivals from Russia and China increased.
significantly in 2006 compared to 2005, and early indications were that growth continued strongly in 2007 (Häußler, 2007; SLTB, 2007b).

Another increasingly significant sector is the domestic market, as the middle-class expands and people’s aspirations change. Leisure movements within the country help to bolster the tourism economy and redistribute wealth from urban to rural areas, and also represent a channel for foreign currency to be redistributed through tourism: remittances from Sri Lankans working abroad are the second largest source of foreign exchange, and many newly prosperous members of the middle-classes are former migrant workers who are now returning home to spend their savings. The industry has recognised the importance of this market during the current crisis and has a policy of cutting package prices to encourage them. Many hotels now rely on spending by the domestic market, with weddings (particularly during the ‘wedding season’ in May and June) forming an important niche sector (Figure 7.2).
Structural Weaknesses

Some of the reasons for the sluggish performance of tourism lie in the civil conflict and the tsunami, but these exogenous causes mask a deeper malaise within the industry which has its roots in economic policy stretching back several decades and continues through to poor governance in more recent times.

The post-colonial Sri Lanka government pursued an economic strategy of import substitution in an effort to foster domestic industrial production. By 1977 it was clear that this was not bringing about the desired improvements in the standard of living, and policy switched to an export-oriented growth strategy. Investment regulations were liberalised to encourage foreign investment, and substantial financial incentives offered to foreign investors in tourism (Silva, 2002) were taken advantage of quite substantially. Throughout these early stages, the government followed the classic model of a ‘beach resort with cultural overtones’ development, aiming to attract the European mass market of sun-seekers by relying on a scenic environment of palm-fringed beaches, its friendly, hospitable people and the attractive built heritage of temples and ancient towns.

It is now recognised that the economic benefits assumed during efforts to attract this high-volume market did not always materialise. Leakages from resort hotels are high, partly because of the poor availability and quality of local supplies and skills, which make it easier to source products from outside the country and result in high levels of imported goods, restrict opportunities for tourists to spend money locally and limit opportunities for local employment (Meyer, 2006; interview with Professor Lakshman Dissanayake, Dean of Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo, 2006).

A related problem — at first apparently paradoxical — is the low level of foreign investment in large hotels that has resulted from the uncertain civil situation, resulting in a shortage of good-quality provision in the high-volume sector. (Despite diversification, this is likely to remain the backbone of tourism for the foreseeable future.) The industry is dominated by locally owned conglomerates with interests in tourism in other countries and other business sectors (Carl Bro, 2007) and, as Sri Lankan tourism generates insufficient revenue to justify investment in renovation, the hotel stock has become run down, while there is poor awareness of rising standards in competing destinations and of changing market aspirations. One reason that investment by foreign hotel chains is welcomed is for the training opportunities this creates, along with the raising of standards and an increased profile for the country as a whole through the marketing power of international corporations (Meyer, 2006).

Another weakness is the shortfall in training provision, with limited places on courses at either vocational or managerial level. As a result, larger hotels find it difficult to recruit qualified or experienced staff, added to which many of the staff who do receive qualifications are enticed to work overseas (especially in Dubai and the Maldives) by higher wages. Furthermore, the road and rail infrastructure is inadequate to meet the demands of tourism (and other economic sectors) (ADB, 2005; World Bank, 2006), in that it is not only time-consuming for tourists to travel round the country, but hinders the transportation of goods between producer and consumer.

While some of these issues are exacerbated by the continuing conflict, others appear due to weak political backing for tourism and lack of accountability in implementing
measures to restructure the industry. A Tourism Act designed as a new industry framework and to facilitate policy and planning has been mired in negotiations since at least 2005, and funds raised by a levy on tourism businesses have not been disbursed in a transparent fashion. Compared to most of the rapidly developing Asian nations, attempts to rejuvenate the country’s old-fashioned and overburdened transportation network have been extremely slow. A modern expressway designed to link Colombo with the southern regions — which will cut travel time from the capital to the southern coastal resorts by at least half — will not be completed until at least 2010, with delays occasioned by disputes over land compensation and allegations of malpractice. Until the changes in public sector leadership in 2007, there was confusion over the extent of an official policy shift from ‘sun and sand’ products to a more diversified range, and tensions between the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourist Board were openly discussed (e.g. LankaNewspapers.com, 2005; Gunadass, 2006), with accusations of corruption and lack of professionalism.

The result of these issues is that foreign exchange earnings and tourism-related employment have not been optimised, while the local income-multiplier effect is restricted. Other weaknesses affect niche sectors that are set to become more significant as the industry diversifies. There are no national standards for the Ayurvedic/spa industry, resulting in variable quality, and no regulation of hazardous activities within adventure tourism, which could have fatal consequences. Tourism in national parks would normally play a significant role in ecotourism, but there is poor cooperation between the Department of Wildlife and Conservation, which administers the national parks, and the tourism sector, which means that provision of services and facilities are unlikely to meet the expectations of key markets.

The Tsunami and Tourism

It was into this already fragile sector that the tsunami crashed with such devastating force on 26 December 2004. Its effects on Sri Lankan tourism can be divided into direct and indirect impacts.

In addition to the huge death toll, the principal direct effect was that around a quarter of the coastal tourism infrastructure was badly damaged, including 58 out of 242 hotels, and 1200 rooms out of 4000 in smaller guest-houses (World Bank, 2005). Although demand for tourism had recovered by mid-2005, reconstruction and repair of the accommodation infrastructure has been slow, so that demand for the 2006–07 season was originally forecast to outstrip supply. This situation was relieved — unfortunately — by the breakdown of peace talks between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE in late 2006 and further bomb attacks, which again depressed arrivals.

Owners of hotels and other enterprises which were registered with the Tourist Board received compensation for the damage and were eligible for new loans, but unregistered SMEs received no help towards reconstruction, at least initially; in some areas there was greater flexibility in assessing needs and issuing the necessary documentation as time went on. But such schemes have not helped everyone. Some people had no security to guarantee a loan, while others had already stretched themselves financially to improve their properties after the 2002 peace agreement, and had been relying on rapid growth in 2004–05 to pay off their loans. The thousands of people involved in tourism peripherally
or informally lost their livelihoods because of the disaster and received no immediate help. Having said this, a programme of cash grants to affected households was quickly initiated by government agencies and NGOs, moving to ‘cash for work’ and then to more long-term reconstruction programmes. By November 2005, it was estimated that around three-quarters of people had regained their livelihoods (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2005) and there were large amounts of cash flowing into the affected zones that assisted the remainder.

The indirect effects of the tsunami on tourism were also substantial. The fall in revenue has had a knock-on effect throughout the economy through loss of the multiplier effect, and there was controversy over the application of a ‘100 metre’ rule (in some places extended to 200 m), whereby no construction was allowed within 100 m from the high-water mark (although hotels and other enterprises could rebuild on their original plot). This was intended to help prevent loss of life and property in the event of another tsunami, but there was criticism that the rule applied mainly to local inhabitants, while outside investors were permitted to build hotels and other tourism installations within the buffer zone (Fernando, 2005; Rice, 2005).

Some reconstruction plans have been controversial for this reason and because of a focus in some quarters on larger-scale developments in place of pre-existing small-scale ones. An example is at Arugam Bay, in the south-east, where a thriving tourism industry grew up around the surfing opportunities during the 1980s and 1990s. More upmarket tourists such as richer backpackers gradually arrived, attracted by an increasingly sophisticated infrastructure created largely by local (or at least locally based) investors. After the tsunami, there were government plans to redevelop the resort and take it upmarket by involving larger investors from Colombo and overseas. Local entrepreneurs, supported by NGOs, opposed this and succeeded in obtaining a retraction of these plans (Lancaster, 2005; MercyCorps, 2007).

More generally, the huge post-tsunami involvement by NGOs meant that people whose needs could be fairly easily supplied (for example fishermen) resumed their livelihoods quite quickly, while people with more complex needs — such as guesthouse owners — appeared to be ignored. Related problems were the poor coordination between relief agencies, resulting in duplication of projects and inefficiency, and the creation of a dependency culture because of the largesse with which cash was distributed in coastal zones. For instance the villagers of Peraliya, in Hikkaduwa District (near where around 1500 passengers were killed in a train overcome by the waves) believed that ‘the world’s worst train tragedy was a blessing in disguise, as at first they received vast amounts of relief. Now people who wish to continue their dependency loiter at the site begging from the local and foreign tourists who frequently visit this site’ (UoC, 2006, p. 8).¹

**Vulnerability and Reactivity**

Some groups were particularly vulnerable to the crisis: people who owned unregistered SMEs or who did not have a formal contract of employment were more seriously affected than owners of larger enterprises or contracted employees. Much peripheral work in

¹By mid-2007 the wrecked train carriages had been moved from the site.
tourism is, by its nature, unorganised and non-institutionalised. Beauticians, masseurs and handicraft manufacturers often sell their goods or services via informal channels, either directly to tourists or on a commission basis through shops or hotels. Many people will engage in a range of income-generating opportunities, either individually or as a household: a fisherman may use his boat to catch fish during one part of the season and offer tourist rides at another, while another member of the family may work as a chambermaid early in the day and in agriculture later on. This diversity is both a strength in that if one form of revenue dries up, the individual (or family unit) can profit from an alternative form, but also a weakness in that it makes it difficult to organise people along trade or company affiliations.

A useful study into post-tsunami recovery in Thailand (Calgaro, 2005) found that the chief factors leading to vulnerability to crises and slow recovery were exposure (relating mainly to physical factors), sensitivity (in terms of the social, economic and political strength of affected communities) and resilience (especially the strength of social networks and governance structures). Generally, social factors such as community cohesiveness and strong leadership allow people to take advantage of tourism opportunities and to resist marginalisation by non-locals, and evidence from Sri Lanka also suggests that when faced with externally generated crises, whether serious shocks such as the tsunami or the civil conflict, or less violent forms such as the attempt by outsiders to redevelop Arugam Bay, people are more capable of reactive action if they are part of strong socio-political networks or structures. At Arugam Bay, it was an alliance of NGOs and local entrepreneurs with good local leadership that forced the government to back down over the redevelopment plans. Recognising the strength of networks, the new administration of the Tourist Board is attempting to resolve the fragmentation of destination private sector associations by encouraging them to collaborate more closely.

There are many other examples of entrepreneurs taking action to address threats or weaknesses, backed up by greater awareness of increasing market heterogeneity. A particular focus has been on exploiting interest in wellness tourism by promoting Ayurvedic methods of healing; several successful spas have been established. Other enterprises have repositioned or refashioned themselves, such as the former three-star hotels ‘Fortress at Galle’ and ‘The Beach’ (at Negombo) which were rebuilt after the tsunami as luxury establishments, and the introduction of environmental management systems at the Aitken Spence hotel chain (Häusler, 2007). Other entrepreneurs are catering to the increased demand for tailor-made tours by providing a personalised service, including ecotourism and adventure experiences. Thanks partly to foreign investment, Sri Lanka has a good stock of boutique and atmospheric hotels and guest-houses that cater to the burgeoning market for more individual and high-quality holidays. Several of these small-scale operators have formed groupings in order to take advantage of Internet marketing opportunities through collective websites, for instance www.boutiquesrilanka.com and www.srilankainstyle.com.

Attempts are also being made by the public sector to address structural weaknesses and improve supply factors through a more professional and strategic approach. The rivalry and lack of cooperation between the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourist Board can only have been unhelpful in addressing the crisis situation, but the new chairman of the Tourist Board and Minister of Tourism are predicted to stabilise and recover the situation.
By mid-2007 the lines of responsibility had been clarified, a new policy document setting clear priorities and objectives had been produced, the development and marketing strategy was being revised and a programme was under way to improve beach and heritage sites and rehabilitate roads. Policy aims were settling more strongly around developing niche and special interest tourism such as ecotourism, health tourism and heritage tourism, with seven World Heritage Sites whose tourism potential is as yet underexploited. A further potential growth area is religious tourism: Sri Lanka has many important Buddhist sites and already experiences considerable pilgrimage tourism, and is involved in developing ‘Living Buddhism’ tour circuits and related products under a South Asia subregional economic cooperation programme. At the same time, the beach-resort market will remain important, and in any case many tourists do not fall neatly into one category during their holiday, often enjoying a relaxing beach break combined with more demanding or knowledge-based ‘soft’ adventure or cultural tours.

Discussion and Conclusions

The recent history of Sri Lankan tourism is populated by shortcomings in product offer, market access and physical and human resources. These factors pre-dated the 2004 tsunami and underlie the industry’s weak performance. Although pockets of far-sighted and responsive entrepreneurialism exist, the industry has largely failed to rejuvenate itself and maintain international competitiveness in product and service standards, and therefore to fulfil its economic potential. A particular area of concern after the tsunami was the SME sector, whose members were neither wealthy enough to have a diversified portfolio of entrepreneurial involvement nor poor enough to be involved in the ‘cash for work’ programmes. Even the more robust SMEs are disadvantaged by lack of access to the market and to policy-setting agendas, and without the synergies conferred by a strong institutional grouping have to rely on larger companies for distribution of their products. This is hardly an atypical situation, though, and it is unsurprising that the larger companies have looked after their own interests first, since “when the oxygen masks come down, you put your own on first before looking after your children” (interview with Hiran Cooray, President of THASL and Managing Director of Jetwing, 2007). The result is that price and product agendas — such as slashing costs to attract domestic tourists — have been largely set by the larger companies.

Analyses of successful crisis management assumes the competent public administration of resources, but the poor accountability of public bodies and lack of enabling environment in Sri Lanka has undermined efforts by NGOs and the private sector to re-establish the industry on a firm footing. Nevertheless, efforts to respond to the various disasters have not been completely fruitless, and two patterns of response have emerged. One has been the attempt to address the obvious crises of the civil conflict and the tsunami by communicating positive messages designed to reassure potential consumers about the geographically limited nature of the fighting and that Sri Lanka was still ‘open for business’ after the tsunami. The other has been a more fundamental review of the context of tourism, with an acceptance that the static performance of tourism has created the space for reconsidering the focus and direction of the industry. Overall, the industry has followed the classic
pattern identified by Fall and Massey (2006, p. 79) in their review of crisis management literature: “organisations are (1) restructuring messages, (2) refocusing their target markets, (3) readjusting communication channels for disseminating key messages and (4) revamping communication campaigns to include more public relations-oriented activities”.

On the other hand, because of the long duration of the civil conflict, some models of crisis and disaster management — especially Faulkner’s (2001) otherwise useful framework — are not directly applicable. Miller and Ritchie (2003) also reached this conclusion in their analysis of the UK’s 2001 outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (a highly contagious illness afflicting livestock), which almost eradicated rural tourism for several months. Faulkner’s distinction between ‘crisis’ and ‘disaster’ is, however, applicable: he defines a crisis as an event caused at least in part by managerial ineptitude, and a disaster as an unpredictable and catastrophic event. In Sri Lanka, then, the tsunami is a ‘disaster’, and as such excited a classic disaster management response based on communications, while the conflict is a ‘crisis’, whose long-lasting nature is due at least in part to the failure to implement agreed pacts and to progress peace negotiations, and to political uses of the conflict. In this situation, maintaining a vigorous tourism sector is obviously challenging.

It is apparent however that institutional and entrepreneurial change is occurring in Sri Lanka that, if pursued, should create the conditions for rapid recovery once the conflict is resolved, and the two crisis events have effectively formed the catalyst for this change. By 2007 factionalism in the public administration of tourism was being kept in check, with more credible and coordinated leadership. Partnerships between public and private sector and other civil society actors were being stimulated and stronger measures taken to develop niche sectors, lay the foundations for infrastructural improvements, encourage foreign investment and improve training.

The reflexivity demonstrated by individuals and organisations within the long-running crisis situation is admirable, and new policy objectives — if successfully implemented — should help to address quality and marketing issues, strengthen backward linkages along the supply chain and increase direct, indirect and part-time employment in tourism. Nevertheless, despite optimism and enthusiasm (bordering on desperation) among private entrepreneurs and the public sector, it seems unlikely that Sri Lanka’s tourism industry will make a full recovery until the security situation reaches a peaceful conclusion.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the Stockholm Environment Institute for funding the research on which this chapter mostly depends, to the University of Colombo, and to the Sri Lanka Tourist Board for facilitating the first visit to Sri Lanka.

References


Twinning Cities between the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Thailand: A Case Study of Controversy

Maharaj Vijay Reddy

Introduction

Besides causing enormous loss to the coastal communities and ecosystem of Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka, the 2004 Asian tsunami also devastated the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India (ANI), which are only about 80 miles from the epicentre of the tsunami off northern Sumatra. In the aftermath of the tsunami, the Andaman tourism industry and the lives of the tourism-dependent community reached what could, at best, be called a challenging ‘pause’ stage. As an effort to revitalise tourism, the Governors of the ANI and of Phuket Province in Thailand signed an agreement to twin the cities of Port Blair (the capital of the ANI) and Phuket, consenting to promote international understanding and strengthen their relationship through various forms of exchange between the two cities. Although this move was designed to stimulate tourism through a flow of expertise and tourists from the relatively mature destination of Phuket to the less developed ANI, the agreement was been seen as a threat to the ANI’s culture and moral values, and local NGOs began protesting as soon as it was conceptualised.

This chapter aims to discuss the development of tourism in the ANI, the impact of the 2004 tsunami and the possible negative impacts or benefits that the twinning cities agreement and other tourism developments may bring for tourism reconstruction in these remote islands. The chief discourse concerns the role of community consultation in winning acceptance for policies, which could be open to misinterpretation.
The Andaman and Nicobar Islands: History and Context

The Andaman and Nicobar archipelago of 572 islands (actually 306 islands and 266 rocks) (Figure 8.1) has attracted considerable attention in relation to its endemic flora and fauna and unique geographical features. The islands are included in the WWF list of the world’s highest priority ‘biodiversity hotspots’, and 87 per cent of the territory has some form of protected area status, with 96 wildlife sanctuaries, 9 national parks, 2 marine national parks and 2 biosphere reserves (DEF, 2003). Coral reefs surround every island and are estimated to cover around 11,939 sq. km; they are the largest reef formations of the Indian subcontinent and probably the second richest in the world (Andrews & Sankaran, 2002). Mangroves stretch along large parts of the coastlines and are among the most important in India. The fauna has Polynesian, Indo-Chinese, Indo-Malayan and Assam-Burmese affinities, and the geographic isolation of the archipelago has resulted in a high degree of
endemism among the terrestrial animals and birds, with 16 species of bird, which occur nowhere else in the world. The surrounding seas are equally rich in marine biodiversity. Because of the small area, remoteness and the high level of endemism, any loss of habitat could lead to species extinction and reduced genetic diversity among other species (ANET, 2002). Regrettably, even before the tsunami, tourism was already causing increased pressure on such aspects (Andrews & Sankaran, 2002).

The ANI have considerable historical significance, which has helped to attract tourists since Indian independence. Marco Polo (1292) and Nicolo Conti (1430) mentioned the islands as a ‘land of cannibals’, and later on they were still reputed to be peopled by a race of cannibals ‘indescribably hideous’, who attacked the crew of ships approaching their coasts (Choudhry & Roy, 2002, citing an undated 18th century document by R. F. Lewis). Choudhry and Roy (2002) also discuss the factors that prompted the colonial British Indian Government to open up the Andaman Islands in the 18th century. These include controlling sea traffic in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, building a harbour to repair ships, saving mariners from being killed by the indigenous tribes\(^1\) and establishing a penal settlement for Indian freedom fighters and criminals, since escape would be impossible from these remote islands. After careful surveys, the Indian (British) government established the penal settlement at Port Blair in 1858.

The ANI were occupied for a short period during World War II by the Japanese, and were included as Union Territory when India became independent in 1947. The population in 2002 was 356,152 (DS, 2002), and is comprised of settlers under government policies, families of former freedom fighters imprisoned here, fishermen from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, migrants from Indian mainland states, defence staff and the indigenous tribes. There are six of these: the Jarawa, Andamanese, Sentinelese, Onge, Nicobarese and Shompens, numbering 12,500 in total according to the 1991 census (DS, 2002). The government strictly forbids any encroachment into the tribal reserves and all indigenous groups except the Nicobarese are protected by specific tribal and forest regulations within prescribed forest boundaries. The Nicobarese, who live in the Nicobar Islands, have learnt the outside world’s lifestyles to an extent and constitute the majority of the indigenous population; the numbers of the other tribes are thought to be declining very rapidly.

The ANI is therefore a sensitive destination where unique natural resources, traditional cultures and external forces such as politics and the military are closely interlinked. The entire Nicobar group has been declared a tribal reserve, added to which there is sensitivity over the strategic location of Indian naval and air force bases, and because of these factors neither tourists nor researchers have ever been allowed into the area. This led to difficulties in reporting on the devastation caused by the tsunami and for international aid agencies such as Oxfam when engaging in disaster relief work (Reddy, 2003; 2005; Reddy, Shaw, & Williams, 2006). Help offered by foreign countries and international organisations such as the World Bank was politely refused by the Indian Government (Government of India, 2004; Zora & Woreck, 2005). Nevertheless, it has been possible to gain some idea of the devastation caused by the tsunami in the ANI and of efforts to reconstruct the all-important tourism industry.

\(^1\)This threat still exists: in 2006 two fishermen from the Indian mainland were killed by arrows fired by indigenous tribesmen (Foster, 2006).
Tourism in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Tourism in the ANI developed slowly following India’s independence but there was a notable increase in tourist from 1980 onwards, with 109,582 tourists in 2004 (Figure 8.2). For the reasons described above, tourists are allowed only in the Andaman Islands and not in most of the Nicobars (the exception being part of the main island, Great Nicobar). The ANI are considered to have vital resources and potential for tourism which perhaps no part of mainland India possesses because of their special geographical location, multilingual historical and cultural heritage, fairs and festivals (Rajavel, 1998). The marine national parks in Wandoor and Richie’s Archipelago have clear white beaches ranked among the best in the world by UNDP and WTO (1997), and Radhanagar beach, on Havelock Island, was rated as the best in Asia by *Time* Magazine in 2004. The 18th century buildings and monuments of the islands are foci for understanding the earlier Indian freedom struggle, and foreign architecture created under both British and Japanese rule particularly attracts tourists. A varied range of tourism activities developed, including beach holidays (generally in small hotels or guest-houses), water-sports and scuba diving, trekking, and a small but important niche market of bird-watching, with birders forming an enthusiastic market willing to travel far and spend substantial amounts of money to spot endemic species.

Thousands of local people are involved in tourism and it is the dominant economic activity in locations such as Wandoor Marine Park, the adjacent Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park, Havelock Island, Neil Island, Little Andaman Island, and in villages near towns such as Rangat, Mayabunder and Diglipur (Reddy, 2005). However, the tourism infrastructure and accommodation services remain poor when compared with Indian mainland destinations and other Indian Ocean islands such as the Maldives and Mauritius. Insights into tourism impacts have been provided through research conducted by UNDP and WTO (1997) and India’s National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (2000), which assessed carrying capacities and tourism impacts in various locations in the Andamans. A somewhat similar case is represented by the Lakshadweep Islands of India, which with their environmental and geographical limitations and distance from the

![Graph showing ANI Tourist Arrivals, 1980–2004.](source: DIPT, 2005)
mainland — generally purported to be disadvantages for development — have ideal set-
tings not only to follow a planned and controlled approach to tourism development but also
to introduce remedial measures to manage the impacts more effectively (Kokkranikal,
McLellan, & Baum, 2003). In the ANI, there was considerable discussion of the potential
for sustainable forms of ecotourism in the pre-tsunami period, with the aim of preserving
the habitat, biodiversity, socio-cultural values and customs of the indigenous tribes, but
despite the widespread policy discourse on ecotourism’s potential role, there have been
significant delays in both practice and implementation here.

Impact of the 2004 Tsunami

Geologically, the ANI are the emerged part of a mountain ridge that extends southward
from the Irrawaddy Delta and connects the Arakan Yoma mountain range in Myanmar to
northern Sumatra (Ravikumar & Bhatia, 1999). They lie on the contact zone of two tec-
tonic plates and as a result are prone to earthquakes; two of the islands (Barren and
Norcondum) are volcanic. The strongest recorded earthquake in the islands was in 1941,
measuring 8.1 on the Richter scale. It caused considerable damage, although the total pop-
ulation in the islands then was less than 50,000. There were also continuous tremors expe-
rienced for more than a month during April 1982 that caused extensive damage (A&N

Indira Point (Great Nicobar Island), the southernmost tip of the ANI (and of India), is
only about 80 nautical miles from the area off Aceh, in Sumatra, which was the epicentre
of the devastating 26th December 2004 earthquake. After the first shock of a magnitude of
9.0 on the Richter scale occurred at 6.30 a.m., a second earthquake measuring 7.1 occurred
at around 9 a.m. with its epicentre at Indira Point. Most of the ANI islands are tiny and
were extremely vulnerable to the earthquakes and the following continuous tsunamis.
Some of the original islands were permanently submerged, while elsewhere new islands
and beaches have formed. Most of the Nicobar Islands have shifted from their earlier geo-
graphical location and the archipelago as a whole has actually moved 1 m closer to the
Indian mainland, to the extent that there is now a need to re-draw maps of the area. Barren
Island volcano, which was fuming after the 26th December earthquake, erupted on 28 May
2005 for the first time in ten years.

The impacts in human terms were equally devastating. Information is lacking because
of the restriction on outsiders entering the area after the tsunami, but it is estimated that
around 8500 people lost their lives, while many more were affected. The sea encroached
on the coastal flatlands inhabited by the Nicobari tribes for thousands of years, destroying
much of this cultivable land and leaving little room for habitation. People were forced to
move their homes to higher ground. Figure 8.3 shows the devastation caused by the tsunami
at Indira Point, where Nicobar’s tallest lighthouse guides ships passing through the Straits
of Malacca.

Besides the most severe devastation in the Nicobar Islands, Little Andaman Island
was the most seriously damaged by the deadly waves, with little impact elsewhere in
the Andaman group. Most of the jetties and harbours were destroyed, the impact on
the rest of the tourism infrastructure was enormous, and will take several years to
rebuild. A study conducted by Reddy et al. (2006) to assess the impact of the tsunami
found that the local inhabitants were badly affected, although no tourists were killed, as tourists were not allowed to visit most of the Nicobar Islands at the time (they could visit Great Nicobar Island, but only a handful went there). Entrepreneurs who had taken out loans to develop their hotels and resorts found themselves unable to repay the loans or even the interest. The government had recognised this situation, and had offered relief money for each household in the ANI. Suppliers to the tourism industry, in particular souvenir-makers and vendors, were very much affected by the loss of business; the people involved in manufacturing these were from a poor economic background.

Figure 8.3: The Indira Point lighthouse and surrounding area before and after the tsunami. A: The lighthouse and associated staff quarters at Indira Point, Great Nicobar Island, before the Tsunami. B and C: Taken on 9th January 2005, these photos show the devastation that occurred to the area, with no sign of the staff quarters, and the lighthouse having tilted. The photos were collected by the author from various sources, including the Indian Navy.
Tourism revival was of major importance to the economy and local empowerment of the ANI, as other industries such as fishing, agriculture and timber extraction were unlikely to be a prosperous alternative for either skilled or unskilled dependents of the tourism industry; fishing is controlled by the ANI administration and there are restrictions on the extraction of timber, while the lowlands used for agriculture were inundated with seawater and will not allow cultivation for several more years.

The administration was felt by some informants to be acting slowly in promoting tourism to the ANI after the tsunami in comparison with other affected areas, but the administration did in fact move fairly swiftly to revive the industry, including an advertising campaign, reducing air-fares to the Andamans and Great Nicobar, encouraging domestic tourism from mainland India, allowing tourists to visit new locations that were not permissible before the tsunami, and implementing a strategy of twinning Port Blair with Phuket. The result was that although (not surprisingly) the tsunami had a substantial impact on tourist arrivals in 2005, by the end of the year numbers were almost back up to pre-tsunami levels, and by 2006 arrivals had recovered to the point that it was being described as ‘one of the best years ever in the history of the island’s tourism’ (Sekhsaria, 2006). However, the twinning strategy in particular proved extremely controversial in that it was seen as a threat to the cultural and moral values of the local communities and indigenous tribes.

Twinning Agreement between the ANI and Phuket Province

The twinning plan was in fact devised some months before the tsunami, with the primary objective of expanding the tourism industry by encouraging international tourists to visit ANI. The two places are only an hour’s flight apart, and it was expected that Port Blair could benefit from the experience of Phuket in developing tourism and from selling two-centre packages, which would encourage tourists to visit an area they might not previously have considered. An ‘Agreement of Friendship between the City of Port Blair and Phuket Province’ was signed on 29th June 2005 by the Lieutenant Governor of the ANI, Republic of India, and the Governor of Phuket Province, Kingdom of Thailand. The main components of the agreement (Article 2) are presented in Table 8.1.

The administration was at pains to point out that the agreement was only one part of their effort to revive the tourism industry, and that it had a robust mechanism in place for preventing any adverse impact on the environment and local society (Daily Telegrams, 2005). However, the move received strong criticism from the local communities. Even before it was fully conceptualised, local NGOs such as the Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology (SANE), the Andaman and Nicobar Environmental Team (ANET) and Kalpavriksh (KV) were against the plan because it was considered a serious threat to the socio-cultural and traditional values of the ANI community. There were claims that the Thai model of tourism would introduce sex tourism and prostitution to the ANI, with the resultant spread of contagious disease (e.g. HIV-AIDS) to the vulnerable and speedily declining indigenous tribal population (the Jarawas in particular). One of the NGOs even published a cartoon arguing that the spread of AIDS among the Jarawa tribes would lead the government to open up condom distribution
centres on the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR), which passes through the protected Jarawa Reserve in the Middle Andaman Islands (Figure 8.4).

The administrators of the islands dismissed the NGOs’ concerns, and the campaign also excited a reaction from Phuket. The Secretary of the Municipal Council of Port Blair said ‘it is not possible that if we [form links between] Port Blair and Phuket we will invite only single white males looking for sex. We have definite provisions in India to stop the sex trade coming to the Andamans ... If something [like that looks to be happening], then our country’s laws will take care of it well in advance’ (SANE, 2003).

In Thailand, the Chairman of the Phuket Chamber of Commerce, who has been at the forefront of talks to form trade links with the Andamans, reacted with shock and irritation to the NGOs’ allegations; ‘I am very surprised that they think Phuket sells sex tourism .... The last time that the President of the Port Blair Chamber of Commerce came to Phuket we discussed trade only, though he was very impressed with the level of development of Phuket and with its tourism industry .... Let’s not forget, that there are good and bad NGOs’ (SANE, 2003).

### Table 8.1: Port Blair-Phuket twinning cities agreement (principal components).

<table>
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<td>The parties shall undertake regular exchanges and interactions in the areas which include, inter alia.</td>
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**Tourism:** Exchange of tourist missions for fairs, expositions, tourist festivals, promotion of tourist destinations for each sister city and finally, promotion of international tourism between one another.

**Education and Culture:** Cultural exchanges — Phuket days in City of Port Blair and City of Port Blair days in Phuket Province. Cultural exchanges of students, artists and professionals.

**Urban Development:** Exchange of expertise in innovative water-harvesting techniques; upgrading of water treatment plants; study of old water supply network and rationalisation of water distribution network; de-silting/relining of old sewerage lines.

**Solid Waste Management:** Study of modern and sustainable methods of solid waste management particularly in the areas of cleaning of roads and public places, safe disposal through transportation, development of proper sanitary land-fill sites, segregation of bio-degradable and non-biodegradable solid wastes and recycling.

**Commerce:** Exchange of commerce missions and participation in expositions, fairs, business forums and other promotions with the increased flow of goods and services between the parties.

**Investments:** Exchange of business missions, information sharing of investment possibilities and business opportunities.

(Source: ANI Administration, 2005)
What the controversy revealed was the serious lack of consultation on tourism issues between the government authorities and the ANI communities, even before the tsunami. Perhaps as a result of this, members of the local tourism industry were critical of the government’s efforts, with comments such as:

*I don’t think the government is taking any steps to improve the tourism industry. As far I know the government has arranged no meetings. We can tell our problems, if it is arranged. Some TV people came for interview, after the tsunami. That’s all.* (A souvenir shop owner)

*When the Tourism Minister, Renuka Chowdhry, came we were invited for a meeting. No meeting after that at all to listen to our problems .... Now there is no office for the Andaman travel and tour operators Guild. Proper planning and local consultation in future tourism management is very much needed.* (The manager of a leading local travel and tour operating company)

In addition, NGOs and environmentalists claimed there was little consideration of sustainable management in the plans for tourism development, with commercial aspects emphasised over ecological and social ones. Public sector authorities stressed that the Government of India and the ANI administration were keen to revive tourism and that collaborative tourism planning measures would be implemented, but international NGOs also become involved and began to make critical comments: ‘the twinning agreement will have devastating effects on the Islands. While fostering tourism, stepping up trade and commerce, promoting education and culture seem reasonable for both countries, there are several long-term ecological, economic and cultural implications that need to be evaluated before embarking on such a project’ (Tourism Concern, 2006, p. 5).
Although the need for community consultation was highlighted by both the government and NGOs before the twinning agreement was signed, the consensus among NGOs is that insufficient steps were taken towards making it actually happen, meaning that fears of prostitution and child sex tourism — well-documented in other parts of South-East Asia (e.g. Ryan & Kinder, 1996; Oppermann, 1999) — have not gone away.

Conclusion

The strategies adopted by the administration to overcome the socio-economic impact of the tsunami, in particular the ‘twinning cities’ agreement with Phuket, are controversial as they seem from some angles to impinge on the traditional values of the local and indigenous communities. Tourism remains the main income generator in the post-tsunami period — indeed it is the only source of income for many people in the ANI — and arguably had positive socio-economic impacts during the pre-tsunami period. Furthermore, because much of the territory enjoys some form of protected area status, with some islands strictly protected as tribal reserves (backed up by the aggression of some indigenous groups towards outsiders), the negative environmental and social impacts of tourism have in general been carefully controlled. As government policy is now to open the islands up for more tourism development, this does pose threats to the indigenous tribes who are undoubtedly extremely sensitive to outside influence (including disease) and challenges relating to sustainability, such as gender inequalities in tourism employment, outside ownership of tourism enterprises and conflicts of interest between different public and private sector groupings. More research needs to be done into these areas to ascertain the processes and effects of tourism in the ANI.

The significant underlying issue here is that the government has significantly failed to engage in consultation with community representatives over how best to bring about and manage expansion of the tourism sector. The tsunami-wreaked devastation and urgent need to reconstruct the industry threw these issues into sharp relief following 26th December 2004, but the truth is that the discourse of community participation and consultation, which is considered to lead to empowerment and improved benefits to local people and has been a favourite of academics and development protagonists, has as yet failed to penetrate far into the hierarchical framework of ANI societal structures. It would have been interesting to see whether different reactions to the twinning agreement would have resulted — including defusing the more lurid criticisms of its possible effects — had the public sector made a genuine attempt to carry out this process. In the event, the twinning agreement does not appear to have been implemented to any noticeable extent (Sekhsaria, 2006), and tourism in the ANI seems largely to have recovered its former strong growth without inputs from the more experienced Thai industry.

Acknowledgements and Disclaimer

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Islands, and Professor Ram Kapse, the then Lieutenant Governor of the ANI, for his encouragement to complete the study, on which most of this paper is based. The views expressed in this paper remain those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of UNESCO.

References


Chapter 9

Economic Corridors and Ecotourism: Whither Tourism in Laos?

Robert Travers

A Million Elephants

Anyone who has visited Laos, once ‘the Kingdom of a Million Elephants and the White Parasol’ and now one of the world’s last remaining Communist states, will empathise with the words of one of its ‘first discoverers’ from the West, Francis Garnier:

A generous and luxuriant nature seems to have inspired the most gentle and peaceful of customs. No violent or cruel excesses trouble the dreamy nonchalance of the inhabitants; caressed by the light of a tropical sun, the enchanting landscape bespeaks a tranquillity, an innocence, that is unique. All the hubbub, all the fracas of civilisation is stilled and dies away when you enter the region: nothing manages to disturb the absolute silence. The memory of it that one cherishes after returning to the hurly-burly of the outside world seems so remote, so strange as to belong to another existence and involuntarily makes one wonder about the transmigration of souls. (Garnier, 1866 in Keay, 2005)

Laos — now the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, or Lao PDR — is indeed a special place, even though the Mekong banks are no longer the wilderness teeming with the herds of wild elephant, tigers and other wildlife that Garnier described. The Mekong Exploration Commission mapped out the course of the great river in the 1860s, paving the way for a French protectorate of sorts in the central Mekong region, splitting the Lao people between French Laos (East of the Mekong) and Siamese Laos (now Thai Isaan) to the West. Garnier and his comrades were not of course the first: the Dutch and the Jesuits have records of the rich civilisation of Lane Xang back in the seventeenth century; but it
is due to French intervention and eventual expulsion that the buffer state of Laos came into existence, separating Thailand and Vietnam (Evans, 2000).

In 1953 the Kingdom of Laos was formed under an independence treaty with the former colonial power of France. With the advent of the Cold War, Laos became a critical buffer state between the Communist East and the American-led West. Officially neutral in the conflict between northern Vietnam and the American-backed forces of southern Vietnam, Laos became the most bombed nation in history in the ‘secret war’ between CIA-backed Hmong tribesmen and the Royal Lao Army on one side and the Vietnamese-backed Pathet Lao on the other. This saw some 500,000 tons of explosive dropped on the hill-tribes of Laos over the 12-year period, most of it concentrated in the east of the country on the Plain of Jars and the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which formed the ‘back door’ from North to South Vietnam along which Vietnamese fighters travelled.

The eventual collapse of American intervention led to a communist victory in Laos, the abdication of the King and the foundation of a communist state. 1974 also saw the end of the country’s 600-year-old monarchy and the rich craft culture that surrounded the Luang Prabang court. The country’s intelligentsia disappeared to re-education camps or swam to exile across the Mekong, and a ‘bamboo curtain’ separated East from West (Kremmer, 2005). But in the mid-1980s the regime lost its Soviet backing and began to emerge from its initial totalitarian (although not excessively brutal) regime. It softened its line, and gradually emigrants have begun to return to benefit from what was perhaps the greatest gift the Communist victory brought: peace, through an end to 30 years of war.

Today, Laos is emerging as a more open economy, although the Communist Party remains firmly in control, much as powerful clans were in the royalist state (indeed these are sometimes the same clans). Much tourism and economic development priority is being given to changing Laos from a ‘land-locked’ to a ‘land-linked’ country, as roads and ‘friendship bridges’ are constructed through the country to promote trade between traditional enemies: the Thai, the Khmer, the Vietnamese and the Chinese. Ironically, the Communists’ priority has been the same as that espoused by the colonial French: the construction of roads.

The current Lao National Tourism Strategy highlights ‘economic corridors’ as central to its tourism strategy, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is facilitating much of this activity as part of the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Strategy (see also Chapter 4 by Sofield). Under this programme support is focussed on selected provinces and a very active initiative for ecotourism has emerged (ADB, 2006), with proposals that priority investments should be directed especially towards ecotourism and handicraft production (JBIC, 2006). However mining, timber and construction are in fact what drive the Lao economy: continuing felling of trees is very evident as the ADB, Chinese and Vietnamese funded road networks expand into the Annamite Mountains, and massive mining and

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1In an ironic twist of history, in June 2007 America arrested its former chief Hmong ally in Laos, General Van Pao, on the grounds of plotting a coup against communist Laos. Van Pao had been airlifted to safety in 1975 as America abandoned Laos, leaving the Hmong to face a bleak future.

2Despite a total ban imposed by the government, the largest single item exported (from Lao PDR) illegally is timber in the form of whole logs. Logging is almost entirely in the hands of the military. Export of timber to Vietnam in the past is said to have been in payment for the debt Laos accrued to the Vietnamese military during its revolutionary ‘thirty year struggle’ (1945–75). Export of timber to Thailand is entirely commercial. (Stuart-Fox, 2006, p. 61)
dam construction projects herald ‘progress and prosperity’ for the years to come. A highly complex and at times contradictory approach to the development of Lao tourism exists, and this is what this paper attempts to explore. At the root of this examination is a suggested need to question the positioning of Laos as an ecotourism destination and a call for a more comprehensive and research-based master-planning approach to tourism development in the country.

**Lao Tourism Performance**

On the face of it, Lao PDR has had a good tourism performance over the past decade, with international arrivals doubling to reach a record 1.2 million in 2006 and national tourism income estimated to have grown fivefold over the same period to over US$173 million in 2006. Table 9.1 illustrates this growth.

The average length of stay for international visitors to Lao PDR was estimated to be seven days in 2006, although recent research by the SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and LNTA (Lao National Tourism Administration) for the Mekong Private Sector Development Facility (MPDF)\(^3\) indicates that this estimate may be understated (MPDF/SNV, 2007).

Thailand is by far Lao PDR’s most important source market in volume terms. Thais make up over 55 per cent of visitors to the country (675,845 arrivals in 2006) and are crucial to the success of the tourism economy. Asian markets overall account for 83 per cent of arrivals to Lao PDR. Vietnam is the second-most important market, providing 190,442 arrivals (15.67 per cent). Growth in recent years has come mostly from ASEAN countries together with China and Korea. The dominant markets for arrivals to Lao PDR in 2006 are shown in Table 9.2.

Thus, despite the tendency of many commentators to think of tourism in terms of Western (European and American) outbound travel, the main market for Lao tourism is overwhelmingly Asian. With improvements in regional access and the advent of low-cost air carriers (LCAs), this dominance is likely to continue. Europe accounted for just 11.43 per cent of arrivals to Laos in 2006 and this percentage has been declining

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<td>Arrivals (Thousands)</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>614</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>1095</td>
<td>1215</td>
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<td>Revenue (US$ millions)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>119</td>
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</table>

*Source: LNTA (2007).*

\(^3\)The MPDF is an initiative set up by the International Finance Corporation in 1997 in Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao PDR to reduce poverty through sustainable private sector development. (www.ifc.org/mpdf)
steadily since 2003. (In absolute terms the number of Europeans visiting is increasing, but slowly.) America accounts for under 4 per cent of arrivals. The most important European markets are France and UK, each providing under 3 per cent of arrivals, and Germany with 1.5 per cent.

Tourism revenue is of course a more important indicator of tourism’s economic importance than simple visitor numbers: it takes into account visitors’ length of stay, and hence is a better indicator of tourist plant utilisation (in particular hotel bed-night uptake) than visitor arrival figures. Looking at tourism expenditure estimates, LNTA has ranked Thailand, USA, France and UK as being the most important generators of income for the past 4 years. This calculation is based on a number of unclear assumptions, however, and should be treated with caution; indeed the 2007 survey undertaken for the MPDF may well challenge these assumptions, which have not changed since 2001. The preliminary results of the 2007 research puts average spend per day in the region of just US$26.70; this is an interim figure and is likely to change as further interviewing is undertaken.

Air access is a significant limiting factor to tourism growth at present. The main inbound carriers to Lao PDR are Thai Airways International and Vietnam Airways, with Lao Aviation also connecting regionally, but in general the country is not well served by international airlines. LCAs, which are becoming increasingly important in regional tourism, do not presently fly to Laos, although their advent is anticipated. Their introduction is likely to have a significant impact: Air Asia for example has stated its intention to link Vientiane with Kuala Lumpur, thus opening up the Malaysian market and international links. Udon Thani International Airport in Thailand is at present an important gateway to Lao PDR, with budget links from Bangkok, Chang Mai, Singapore and Siem Reap (PATA, 2007).

Reflecting the current lack of air links, the majority of arrivals come overland. 56 per cent enter via the Friendship Bridge linking Vientiane and Nong Khai (Thailand). 16 per cent enter at Savannakhet (also from Thailand) and this is undoubtedly growing considerably following the opening of the second Friendship Bridge at Savannakhet in late 2006. Wattay

### Table 9.2: Principal tourism markets for Lao PDR (2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Arrivals</th>
<th>% of total arrivals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>675,845</td>
<td>55.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>190,442</td>
<td>15.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>50,317</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>46,829</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>32,453</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>31,684</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>23,147</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>22,021</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>18,004</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>10,963</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: LNTA (2007).*
International Airport, at Vientiane, accounts for only 10 per cent of arrivals and arrivals via air to Luang Prabang for just 2.9 per cent (LNTA, 2007).

In terms of dispersal, most tourists currently base themselves in Vientiane, which is the main tourism hub in the country, with 41.5 per cent of available rooms and 43 per cent of available beds in 2006 (figures for the city and province are combined) (LNTA, 2007). Luang Prabang is the next most important accommodation base, with 9.5 per cent of rooms, followed by Champassak with 10 per cent of the total supply.

Dispersal of tourism is a result of many factors including accessibility (road conditions, travelling times and air access), the location of visitor accommodation, and the location of attractions. These consist principally of Lao PDR’s two World Heritage Sites of Luang Prabang and Vat Phou; other historic cities and temples, particularly along the Mekong; and the candidate World Heritage Site of the enigmatic Plain of Jars. Future possible ‘honeypot’ sites include some of the many cultural monuments, waterfalls, caves, National Nature Reserves and the ‘cave city’ at Vieng Xai which was used by the Pathet Lao as their secret base before they gained power in 1975. The cave city is currently being developed as a tourist attraction, with advisors negotiating the difficult path between visitor attraction, museum, shrine and propaganda tool.

Tourist arrivals to Lao PDR are quite evenly spread through the year, compared to many more seasonal destinations. The high season is from October to February, although overall visitor numbers are not markedly peaked. The busiest month in 2006 was December, with over 127,000 arrivals, while the least busy month was July, with just over 79,000 arrivals. July and August see the most rainfall, when travel away from main roads becomes difficult.

**Tourism Planning and Control**

Provincial tourism policy in Lao PDR is particularly difficult to control, and tends to undermine policy set at national level. LNTA can keep some control over what is happening in Vientiane, but provincial administrations are effectively controlled by powerful province governors (Stuart-Fox, 2006). The shift to a transitional economy in the late 1980s led to decentralisation of control over revenue and expenditure. Lack of central government supervision was immediately evident, and recentralisation followed in the 1990s with appointment of officials at provincial level by central government ministries in an attempt to re-impose some form of central control. At the same time, the 1991 constitution abolished both popular participation through ‘people’s councils’ in local government and also elections for village heads. These moves strengthened the role of the Communist Party at all levels of society, and hence the power of the provincial administration: a large degree of provincial autonomy thus still remains, which the political leadership has failed to limit, even though it appointed all provincial governors to the Central Committee (Stuart-Fox, 2006, p. 63).

This conflict over national and provincial interests has resulted in clear contradictions in tourism policy, such as the development under provincial regulations of a mega-casino-resort-hotel near the Chinese border of Luang Namtha, a province which in national policy is highlighted as the model for ecotourism development, and the gradual establishment
of National Protected Areas (LNTA/SNV, 2005) in areas where timber felling continues and, under provincial policies, rubber plantations expand. Other casino-hotel proposals have recently been announced for the proposed Savannakhet Special Economic Zone: these may well result in much repatriation of earnings to other countries. Such high profile developments might be seen to be at odds with the stated National Tourism Development Strategy, and contrast with the strong and so-far successful control being exercised in the World Heritage Site of Luang Prabang where, guided by an enlightened Provincial Tourism Office and UNESCO, sensitive development of facilities to serve cultural and heritage-based tourism is well under way.

What Really Drives Tourism Growth in Laos?

An analysis of provincial tourism growth figures (Table 9.3) shows that the fastest growing provinces in terms of overall growth in visitor numbers are the cities of Vientiane (an increase of 300,000 visitors between 2001 and 2006) and Luang Prabang (an increase of 100,000 over the same period). In percentage terms the fastest growth has come from Khammouane Province, where a cave full of Buddha statues was discovered in 2004 and opened up to tourism, attracting extensive local, Thai and some international interest.

Table 9.3: Visitors by province 2001 and 2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Percentage increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>14,841</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bokeo</td>
<td>42,451</td>
<td>82,512</td>
<td>40,061</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolikhhamxay</td>
<td>23,900</td>
<td>71,394</td>
<td>47,494</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champassak (Vat Phou, 4000 islands)</td>
<td>55,142</td>
<td>133,684</td>
<td>78,542</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houaphanh (Pathet Lao caves)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>43,400</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khammouane</td>
<td>20,317</td>
<td>98,906</td>
<td>78,589</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luang Namtha</td>
<td>41,704</td>
<td>47,788</td>
<td>6084</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luang Prabang</td>
<td>51,207</td>
<td>151,703</td>
<td>100,496</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oudomxay</td>
<td>18,654</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>−8654</td>
<td>−46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phongsali</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>10,240</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saravanh</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>19,586</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannakhet</td>
<td>113,287</td>
<td>192,385</td>
<td>79,098</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sayabouli</td>
<td>9,014</td>
<td>3,760</td>
<td>−5254</td>
<td>−58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sekong</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>7,111</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vientiane Municipality</td>
<td>428,420</td>
<td>729,272</td>
<td>300,852</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vientiane Province</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>142,442</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xieng Khouang (Plain of Jars)</td>
<td>35,744</td>
<td>19,586</td>
<td>−16,158</td>
<td>−45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Luang Prabang with its extensive cultural tourism offer has doubled its visitor numbers. The performance of Lao PDR’s ecotourism flagship, Luang Namtha, is less strong — but as ecotourism does not necessarily target numerical growth, this may not be a negative factor.

A second and perhaps more reliable indicator of tourism growth is the number of accommodation establishments, which shows that the vast bulk of accommodation enterprise development is taking place in Vientiane Capital and Vientiane Province (which includes the popular backpacker destination of Vang Vieng), both of which saw the setting up of an additional 123 accommodation businesses between 2001 and 2006 (representing an eight-fold increase in the case of Vientiane Province). The next most popular investment locations are Champassak and Luang Prabang, with an additional 62 and 57 establishments, respectively, as discussed in Table 9.4.

The growth in room-numbers gets us still closer to the areas of real visitor demand (again shown in Table 9.4). The greatest room growth is in Vientiane Capital and its hinterland (Vientiane Province), followed by Champassak (Pakse), Savannakhet and Luang Prabang. A situation thus emerges where tourism growth is linked to urban Lao centres and the Mekong River, which all of these towns embrace.

Recent market research has given some important insights into what really motivates visitors to Lao PDR. For the MPDF programme a survey of 1800 tourists was undertaken in six places: Vientiane Municipality, Vientiane Province (Vang Vieng), Champassak, Luang Prabang, Savannakhet and Xieng Khouang (Table 9.5).

The highest levels of satisfaction are evident for Lao cuisine, food and restaurants, and the availability of natural and cultural attractions; activity tourism scores less well. The combination of Lao culture, Lao food and opportunities to interact with local people are all things that are secure and can be delivered upon. When visitors were asked what they liked most about Lao PDR, ‘the relaxed lifestyle’, ‘friendly Lao people’ and ‘peaceful and beautiful landscapes’ were most frequently mentioned. This was further backed up by market research amongst outbound tour operators from Europe, which found that Lao PDR is promoted as an exotic location representing a kind of ideal society, with hospitable, smiling people and an unhurried pace of life centred on traditional livelihoods. Life is still said to be ‘authentic’ and ‘pure’ — presumably by comparison with the ‘inauthentic’ and ‘impure’ world of Europe, and even with the more developed world of neighbouring Asian countries with which Lao PDR is often favourably compared (Cochrane, 2007). This implies that the Lao lifestyle and relaxed atmosphere, rather than ‘ecotourism’, is the central pillar upon which the marketing image of the country should be built.

**Luang Prabang and the River Mekong**

Luang Prabang is worthy of further examination as tourism here has recently been proven to show very clear evidence of poverty alleviation (Ashley, 2006). The continuing success of Luang Prabang is essentially due to strong planning control of development through UNESCO guidance, a modest scale of inward investment leading to a quality, value-for-money product, backed up by provincial control. The product offered is an old-world colonial and Lao time capsule, heavily sanitised by boutique hotel experiences and ‘heritage’ recreations, such as gas-powered street lights and brick-paved lanes. It offers a
Table 9.4: Accommodation establishments and room numbers by province, 2001 and 2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>2001 (Establishments)</th>
<th>2006 (Establishments)</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>% increase</th>
<th>2001 (No. of rooms)</th>
<th>2006 (No. of rooms)</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>% increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bokeo</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolikhamxay</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champassak</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>889</td>
<td>1679</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Vat Phou, 4000 islands)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houaphanh</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pathet Lao caves)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khammouane</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luang Namtha</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luang Prabang</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1173</td>
<td>1808</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oudomxay</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phongsali</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saravanh</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannakhet</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>1236</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sayabouli</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sekong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vientiane Municipality</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>2782</td>
<td>5342</td>
<td>2560</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vientiane Province</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>2077</td>
<td>1158</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xieng Khouang</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Plain of Jars)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
chance to step back in time, with the past, that ‘other country’, being an imagined ‘better experience’ than the present. More disturbing aspects of the city’s heritage, such as its role as the centre of all opium refining under French and royal licence, or the disappearance and subsequent deaths of the King, Queen and Crown Prince in Houaphanh Province following the final Communist *coup de grâce* of 1975, remain edited out. The realities of history, such as the strong socialist–realist style former Morning Market with dramatic stone gateposts and Vietnamese stars along its façade, are being swept away to make way for a ‘Luang Prabang style’ pastiche shopping complex. As ever, history is — in Napoleon’s words — ‘but a tale agreed upon’, and tourism thrives on the sale of such illusory dreams.

Luang Prabang offers a very charming and increasingly Westernised product. It is very successful in what it does, and managing undoubted future tourism growth here will be the significant challenge. On the one hand, the gentle atmosphere of this small town will be very difficult to maintain once mass tourism really begins to emerge; and on the other hand, an economy totally dependent on tourism fashion is highly vulnerable to future events that may be outside its control. Few have called for product diversification away from tourism in Luang Prabang, and based on the author’s observations of the draft tourism strategy proposed by the Provincial Tourism Office, the provincial authorities in reality seem to aspire to mass tourism growth rather than ecotourism. This is a high-risk strategy as tourism can be a fickle benefactor. Even in a high growth scenario the peaceful atmosphere of Lao PDR’s colonial riverside towns will be very difficult to maintain once mass tourism really begins to emerge in Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Savannakhet. It is issues like this that tourism development policy and funding agencies should be addressing. Visitor management plans have been few and far between in aid-funded tourism developments in Lao PDR, and often it is the requirements of UNESCO at sites such as Vat Phou and the Plain of Jars that impose them. The Vieng Xai caves are an

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Very interested (%)</th>
<th>Interested (%)</th>
<th>Not very interested (%)</th>
<th>Not at all interested (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning about Lao culture/history</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about nature and wildlife</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to interact with local people</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to try Lao food</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local handicrafts/products</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying souvenirs</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao textiles (silk, cotton)</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiking/trekking</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canoeing/kayaking</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

honourable exception; here, the SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and the UNWTO are assisting strong site development planning from the project’s initiation, in anticipation of significant growth. The growth of tourism to Houaphanh Province will however be dependent on significantly improved air access, and air access development policy has not really been considered in a tourism master-planning context. This once again indicates the lack of an overall integrated approach to tourism development in Lao PDR’s decentralised administration and multi-agency funding environment.

The lessons of Luang Prabang’s success in attracting tourists through architectural conservation have yet to be learnt in Vientiane and other Mekong towns such as Savannakhet, Pakse or the still largely intact and charming Mekong port of Thakek (Khammouane Province). At present these centres still offer the visitor a genuine slice of Lao life, with all its contradictions and enchantments, and therein is likely to lie the real key to future tourism growth, rather than the worthy academic and NGO ‘product’ of ecotourism (rarely seen in the real world of tour operator brochures, travel agency windows and mainstream tourism websites). It is the living, vibrant, charm-laden beauty of Laos as an overall destination experience that is the key asset for future tourism growth (UNDP, 1999). The Lao people always remind the jaded traveller that holidays and indeed life should be sabai sabai (easy-going, relaxed) and that so many of their worries should be forgotten, with the much loved Lao phrase bor pen nyang: it really doesn’t matter.

Travel guidebooks remark that the Mekong is central to the essence of Laos. Bridge and road construction have however almost completely superseded it as a transport highway. Surprisingly also, tourism development planning (even under the Mekong Tourism Development Programme) has under-played the potential of the Mekong as a transport corridor and tourism asset. Except for Luang Prabang, the river’s urban water-fronts are increasingly blighted by unsightly inappropriate buildings, some of the worst offenders being tourism-related. River transport is increasingly difficult to find, and the essential skills of pilotage on this most challenging of navigations are being lost with the passage of time. Comfort and safety standards on the busy tourist stretch north of Luang Prabang certainly need review. For much of its course the river is still a sealed border, and Riverside towns face each other without any strong tourism linkages other than a few official border crossings. The potential of the Mekong itself as a tourism asset has yet to be thoroughly explored (a water-based tourism strategy would not be a bad idea), and it is along the Mekong’s banks that most of the Lao population is based. Laos could become a unique river-linked, as well as a land-linked destination: could a Mekong cruise not become as essential a touristic experience as a Nile cruise in years to come? Could not steamers, which once connected Savannakhet to Vientiane, offer a more enticing (and more time-consuming and income-extracting) product that the rather dull eight-hour bus ride up National Route 13?

The Need for a More Comprehensive Tourism Planning Approach

Putting faith in the ADB economic corridors to drive tourism growth is a simple answer to a complex equation. The result maybe ‘corridor tourism’, as the new Greater Mekong tourist zooms from one main centre to another, from Bangkok to Hue, from Pattaya to
Halong Bay. Special economic zones as currently envisaged can play a part, but if not planned in an integrated way to link with the rest of the country’s product there is a danger of them becoming non-contributing centres for the repatriation out of Laos of tax-free income earned.

Much laudable work has been done by LNTA and MTDP (the Mekong Tourism Development Project) in the area of ecotourism, and given the low base from which the programme started progress has indeed been considerable. This paper suggests however that ecotourism is simply not the main reason why visitors come to Lao PDR and has considerable credibility problems in terms of its effect in addressing the threats of deforestation and rapidly reducing biodiversity, and in terms of the lack of certified ecotourism products. The emphasis on ecotourism is of course not a bad thing, but it simply will not provide enough visitors to fill the country’s visitor accommodation stock of some 17,600 rooms (6.4 million room-nights per annum), nor will it maximise Lao PDR’s potential for tourism growth in the future, nor answer sufficiently policy aims of increasing foreign exchange and employment.

Laos urgently needs a comprehensive national tourism development master plan. This plan needs to be committed to by all provinces, and needs to identify and put in place sustainable tourist products and attractions. It needs to consider the pros and cons of all types of tourism development, including casinos and large-scale hotels, and not just ecotourism and other NGO agendas. The MPDF market research programme referred to above identified areas of weakness including the availability of information on destinations within Lao PDR, the choice of transport options, and the overall service of travel agents and tour operators. These are issues which need to be addressed through nationally coordinated master planning, training and project implementation. The present piecemeal approach to ecotourism development in selected provinces is not a sufficiently effective response to the country’s tourism potential, or to the benefits and threats that mass tourism will bring following improved road and air access. Tourism development guidelines need to be developed around core assets such as the Plain of Jars, the Mekong colonial towns, minority cultures and some protected areas in order to hold ‘corridor’ tourists in Laos, as otherwise economic corridors will be of little benefit.

At present, the lack of strong central planning — once a cornerstone of Communist thinking — means that all comers may be welcomed in a poor country hungry for inward investment. Indeed as the Lao economy finally opens up, we can already see that inward investment is becoming the order of the day: in 2006 for the first time mining pushed tourism earnings to the second position in the Lao major exports league (LNTA, 2007), and, at US$485.6 million, minerals earnings (much of them repatriated to Australia) actually exceeded tourism earnings by almost three to one. Major plans for bauxite and copper mines have recently been announced. The last few individuals of the highly endangered Mekong dolphin species may well be the casualty. Unless tourism can win the economic argument, there is a danger of ecotourism becoming mere ecological window-dressing in a country where the real economic agendas are mining, timber extraction, electricity generation and road construction. Only with a more thorough and all-encompassing approach to tourism development planning, training, marketing and product delivery (not just ecotourism product delivery) can tourism’s future economic and poverty-alleviation potential be realised.
This paper thus concludes that recent tourism development initiatives focusing on economic corridors and ecotourism, whilst undoubtedly helpful, well-intentioned and sincerely motivated, are not maximising the potential of Laos to be its own, relaxed, friendly, culturally rich tourist destination; and that overall tourism planning guidelines and control to manage future growth remain weak. The positioning of Laos as an ecotourism destination simply may not be credible in the context of what Laos can deliver: the emperor is in danger of being seen to have no clothes. A more sophisticated and multi-faceted destination-wide approach based on proven and deliverable product strengths is needed, if this fascinating and engaging country is to emerge as a successful and sustainable bigger player in Mekong and South-East Asian tourism.

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Chapter 10

The Growth of Aviation in Asia and Challenges to Sustainability

Howard Cambridge and John Whitelegg

Introduction

Air travel in Asia has grown markedly over the last decade. Political and social change and changes in the airline industry itself have made it both cheaper and easier to fly. While many benefits stem from the growth of aviation and its associated industry of tourism, serious environmental, social and economic impacts could result if it continues unconstrained; in the long run, the impacts could damage the tourism industry itself. This chapter discusses the development of the aviation industry in Asia, outlines the principal impacts, identifies different growth scenarios and sets out a vision for future policy development based on more environmentally sustainable principles.

Development of Aviation in Asia

Approximately 60 per cent of the world’s population live in Asia and economic development in the region over the last decade has resulted in a massively increased demand for mobility. Allied to this has been strong growth in aviation in the region, averaging 6.2 per cent per annum over the period 1994–2004 (UNESCAP, 2005). This growth saw fare-paying passenger numbers increase from 493 billion Revenue Passenger Kilometres (RPK)¹ to 904 billion RPK over the same period (Figure 10.1).

Growth in RPK is expected to triple to just below 2500 billion by the year 2025. This increase will be due not only to economic growth and social and political change, but also to the fact that the aviation industry is relatively young and has great potential for further

¹Revenue Passenger Kilometres (RPKs) are used to measure the distance travelled by fare-paying passengers.
expansion, productivity gains and lower costs. Forecasts suggest that over the next 20 years passenger traffic in Asia (including China) will continue to grow at an average of 6.2 per cent per annum compared to a world average of 4.9 per cent (Figure 10.2). The annual growth in the domestic Chinese market may be as high as 8.1 per cent (Boeing, 2006).

Aviation growth has followed the liberalisation of air transport services between countries. The gradual introduction of ‘Open Skies’ agreements in Asia since the 1990s has removed restrictive regulations on flight frequencies, aircraft capacities and pricing controls and has allowed non-state-owned airlines (including those from other countries) to offer services. This has enabled competition between airlines, led to cheaper airfares and to the emergence of numerous low cost airlines (LCAs). To cope with this demand new international airports and capacity enhancements have been made, for instance Suvarnabhumi Airport (Bangkok), Chek Lap Kok (Hong Kong), Pudong International Airport (Shanghai) and Kuala Lumpur International (Malaysia), while many regional airports are being developed. Tourism growth is a key factor in securing loans from development banks, multinational companies and through foreign direct investment (FDI) to build or improve airports, for instance at Siem Reap in Cambodia and Luang Prabang in Lao PDR, both of which received Asian Development Bank funds to improve their airports linked to the increase in visitors to the World Heritage Sites of Angkor Wat and Luang Prabang respectively. Also, as in Europe, there has been widespread privatisation and commercialisation of different airport activities, for example air transport, navigation and airport services, including passenger terminal, cargo terminal, ground-handling, air traffic control and security services.
In many cases, bilateral agreements place limits both on the number of flights between countries and the airlines permitted to fly on the route. ASEAN has liberalised and integrated aviation routes between member countries, removing capacity restrictions on routes and entry barriers. Multilateral liberalisation by all ten countries is expected before 2010. Similar agreements between other country groupings are shown in Box 10.1.

China has the largest commercial aviation market outside the United States (Boeing, 2006) where its internal market of 700 domestic airport pairs (i.e. flights between 2 airports) serve over 1 billion Chinese people. The reasons for this include rising prosperity in China and an increase in the number of countries given ‘Approved Destination Status’ by the Chinese government, both of which are facilitating overseas travel for PRC residents. In 2005 the number of outbound travellers exceeded 30 million people for the first time. Eighty per cent of these were travelling for leisure purposes (although as Arlt discusses in the next section of this volume, only one in five Chinese travellers venture outside Asia). In addition, Beijing will host the 2008 Olympic Games, which has stimulated massive investment in tourism and airport development. In North-East Asia, regional flights have increased between countries such as Japan and Korea. Airport developments have matched demand, for example at Korea’s Incheon airport (serving Seoul), Japan’s Narita and Haneda airports (Tokyo) and with new regional airports such as at Nagoya.

The domestic market has grown in many countries because liberalisation has weakened the monopolistic position of the state-owned airlines. In India the increase in domestic tourism is largely due to the high number of LCAs, and the country has seen a corresponding
shift away from rail travel, predominantly by former first-class passengers. There are other countries whose aviation industry is at an early stage of development but which will become more significant in the future: Lao PDR, Myanmar, Bhutan and Cambodia are investing in new airport capacity not necessarily to compete with the major hubs in China and Thailand, but to become important spokes in international travel and as regional nodes for point-to-point air services.

The emergence of LCAs is a major development in Asian travel. Over 30 low cost/low frills airlines operate both domestic and intraregional flights across the Indian subcontinent, South Asia and South-East Asia, with airlines such as SpiceJet in India, Skynet Asia Airways in Japan, and JetStar Asia, Air Asia and Bangkok Airways operating in more than one country. The characteristics of LCAs include higher seating density (often removing business class altogether), not serving food or hot drinks, and not offering incidentals such as seat head covers and newspapers. Operationally, aircraft have higher daily utilisation rates and quick turnaround times at smaller airports, while passengers pay to bring additional baggage on board or for in-flight entertainment, and utilise online booking systems for seat reservation and check-in services. As a consequence, LCAs have lower overhead and marginal costs, and operating costs per passenger are significantly lower than those of a conventional airline.

A contrasting situation is that the removal of regulations has also enabled airline alliances such as Star Alliance, Oneworld and Skyteam to extend their membership to Asian airlines, providing them with a global market. Alliances operate in the opposite way to LCAs by offering passengers a full service while creating economies of scale through sharing resources between partner airlines in areas such as booking and check-in, baggage handling, common supply chains and purchasing, shared passenger facilities such as

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**Box 10.1 Air transport liberalisation agreements in Asia.**

BIMP-EAGA: The Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines-East ASEAN Growth Area has increased route choice by adding more air services and expanding cooperation among smaller airlines by applying ‘fifth freedom rights’ to EAGA states.a

MALIAT: Multilateral Agreement on the Liberalization of International Air Transportation, known as the ‘Kona’ Open Skies Agreement (UNESCAP, 2005), signed in 2001, involved five States from within the region: Brunei Darussalam, New Zealand, Samoa, Singapore and Tonga and two from outside, Chile and the United States.

CLMV: 2003 agreement to liberalise air transport involving Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam. For example, they agree not to impose limitations on each other for third, fourth and fifth freedom traffic rights, or restrictions on routes, capacity and frequency.

PIASA: The Pacific Islands Air Services Agreement involves many bilateral air services agreements between the 14 island members.

“Aviation agreements between countries confers certain rights on airlines: ‘Third freedom’ means the right to carry passengers from one’s own country to another; ‘Fourth freedom’ gives the right to carry passengers from another country to one’s own; and ‘Fifth freedom’ allows airlines to carry passengers from one’s own country to a second country, and from that country to a third country (US Department of Transportation).
lounge and code-sharing of routes. For the airlines these factors reduce costs and ensure competitiveness, while tourists benefit from wider route choice and better connectivity, combined fares and improved airport facilities. On the other hand, alliances can lead to reduced consumer benefits through reducing competition as prices freeze out non-alliance members (leading to subsequent airfare increases), cancelling unprofitable routes and adding to potential confusion over services (Morley, 2001).

Overall in Asia, more people are flying to more destinations, for longer distances and for more varied reasons. New markets have opened for both intercontinental and intraregional tourism including for different forms of business and leisure tourism such as health tourism, as well as for traditional forms such as visiting friends and relations. Much of this travel is for trips of short duration such as city breaks, and the distances travelled tend to be shorter and involve direct flights as opposed to using hub airports. As a consequence, smaller airports have become established serving smaller aircraft such as single-aisle jets (Boeing 737, Airbus 320, Embraer ERJ-145). There is also continued expansion in traditional mass tourism markets for package holidays serviced by new long-haul LCAs and aircraft with bigger capacities such as the Airbus 380 and Boeing 777.

Environmental, Economic and Social Impacts of Aviation

Aviation provides income and employment directly and indirectly through aviation-related activities, principally tourism. As the aviation industry grows, there is concurrent demand for increased services such as provision of accommodation, catering and transport linkages. There are, however, economic, environmental and social costs to this increased demand: the cost of mitigation against climate change, increased imports to replace depleted natural resources, loss of traditional livelihoods, a shift away from food production towards service provision, air and noise pollution and higher insurance premiums.

The environmental impacts of aviation occur at both the global (climate change) and local scales (air and noise pollution around airports). While current rates of carbon dioxide emissions from aviation globally appear low, at around 3 per cent of the global tally, these are expected to triple over the next 20 years, and by 2050 emissions from planes are expected to become one of the largest contributors to global warming (RCEP, 2002). Technological improvements and policy measures aimed at reducing noise and emissions are overshadowed by the overall increases in flying.

Many local impacts are difficult to differentiate from those caused by other sources, for instance local air pollution impacts from cars, lorries and buses, but a number of pollutants are emitted by aircraft engine exhausts that affect local or regional air quality, in turn affecting people’s health and damaging property. Air quality impacts are also experienced under take-off, holding patterns and final approach flight-paths. The major air pollutants causing local impacts are volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen, particulates, sulphur dioxide (SO2), hydrocarbons and soot. Other major emissions are nitric oxide (NO) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2) (which together are termed NOx).

Low-level ozone forms as a result of volatile organic compounds and NOx reacting in the presence of sunlight in the atmosphere. This can form city smog, especially in the warmer months, and can damage crops and other vegetation. Particulate matter (PM) includes
all types of solid (dust, pollen, soot, smoke) and liquid particles suspended in air, many of which pose a risk to health. Soot and very fine particles can lead to cloud formation as well as contributing to regional haze problems such as the Asian Brown Cloud. This is a highly visible manifestation of air pollution, a brownish haze formed by a layer of pollutants and particles from biomass burning and industrial emissions. The haze covers many countries in the region and can affect air and ground temperatures, the hydrological cycle, agricultural productivity and health (UNEP and C4, 2002).

While aircraft emissions of SO$_2$ are relatively small, still it is an important pollutant. Both SO$_2$ (which forms sulphate particles) and soot particles are aerosols (microscopic particles suspended in air). These can act as nuclei on which water molecules condense and freeze, forming clouds. The precipitation formed within and from these clouds (rain, fog, snow or dry particles) is acidic; it is known as acidic deposition or acid rain. This can be transported by wind for hundreds of kilometres and when deposited can damage buildings and historical monuments, affect vegetation and cause lakes and streams to become acidic and unsuitable for aquatic life.

Aviation noise is a health and human rights issue, and as aviation grows in Asia more and more people are exposed to it. The World Health Organisation (WHO) outlines the major adverse health effects of noise as hearing impairment, interference with speech communication, disturbance of rest and sleep, psycho-physiological, mental health and performance effects, effects on residential behaviour and annoyance and interference with intended activities (WHO, 1999). Noise impacts come not only from aircraft but also from the additional traffic in the locality, including passengers arriving and departing from the airport and service and goods vehicles. Repetitive vibration can undermine the structure of buildings, loosen roof material and even cause windows to shatter. To mitigate the effects of noise, air traffic controllers avoid concentrating flight paths over residential areas and make use of steeper, continuous descent approaches. One area of change is that the extremely noisy aircraft in service during the 1970s and early 1980s have largely been phased out through international agreements under the auspices of the International Civil Aviation Authority, which sets standards for levels of noise, among other things; although in Asia, some of the noisier aircraft still operate domestically as they are exempt.

Aviation and Climate Change

‘Climate change poses a real threat to the developing world. Unchecked, it will become a major obstacle to continued poverty reduction’ (Stern, 2006, p. 92).

In addition to the pollutants causing local-level impacts described above, the principal emissions of aircraft include the greenhouse gases carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) and water vapour (H$_2$O). Other major emissions are nitric oxide (NO) and nitrogen dioxide (NO$_2$) (which together are termed NO$_x$), sulphur oxides (SO$_x$) and soot (IPCC, 1999). CO$_2$ is the most important greenhouse gas from aircraft because of the large quantities released and its long residence time in the atmosphere. Globally, concentrations of these have increased significantly and have a direct effect on climate change (EC, 2005). NO$_x$ have two indirect effects on the climate. Firstly, at cruise altitudes (8–13 km altitude) in the upper troposphere and lower stratosphere they produce ozone under the influence of sunlight. This has
a climate warming effect (IPCC, 1999). Secondly, NO\textsubscript{x} reduces ambient atmospheric concentrations of methane (CH\textsubscript{4}) that has a climate cooling effect. While ozone and methane are both strong greenhouse gases, ozone tends to exert a greater overall effect and warms the earth (EC, 2005).

Water vapour from aircraft exhausts has a direct greenhouse effect but only a minor one, as it is quickly precipitated. However, the condensation trails (‘contrails’) which form under certain meteorological conditions can increase the cirrus cloud cover (the thin wispy clouds found at high altitude) (Minnis, Ayers, Palikonda, & Phan, 2004). The effect of these on global temperatures is still a major scientific debate, as some incoming solar radiation can be reflected by these clouds back into space (global dimming) without reaching the earth (BBC, 2005), while at the same time clouds act as a thermal blanket trapping the heat radiated from the earth (global warming). Overall, clouds have a positive warming effect as contrails trap more invisible infrared radiation than they reflect back to space.

A report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change entitled Aviation and the Global Atmosphere (IPCC, 1999) describes how the greenhouse effect from air transport is higher than from ground level modes of transport because of the greater warming potential of these gases at high altitudes (between two and three times greater, depending on the scientific literature) and because they stay in the atmosphere for longer. In spite of improvements to engine efficiencies, airframe technology and some operational measures such as the way aircraft descend towards runways, carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions are predicted to increase threefold by 2050, far more than from other transport or industrial sources (Stern, 2006). According to the IPCC, global emissions of carbon dioxide need to be reduced by 60 per cent of 1990s levels by 2050 (IPCC, 1999), but aviation is clearly heading in the opposite direction; its impact on climate change could represent as much as 15 per cent of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 if no measures are taken. Currently, international aviation is not included in the Kyoto Protocol\textsuperscript{2}, and emissions from international flights are not accounted for in national greenhouse gas inventories (which include only those that result from domestic flights).

In a broader environmental context, in the absence of any kind of international agreement limiting greenhouse gas emissions (or other pollutants) from aircraft, further climate change impacts are likely to be experienced. The Stern Review gives a stark warning, suggesting that ‘... severe deterioration in the local climate could lead, in some parts of the developing world, to mass migration and conflict, especially as another 2–3 billion people are added to the developing world’s population in the next few decades’ (Stern, 2006, p. 92). The environmental, economic and social impacts are inextricably interlinked and interdependent, and if the potentially devastating social impacts are to be mitigated, action has to be taken to address the environmental ones first. Clearly, since aviation is such an important part of industrial and economic activity in Asia now, policy-makers have to take the long-term impacts and implications for sustainability into account.

\textsuperscript{2}In 1997 the Kyoto Protocol set legally binding greenhouse gas limits for developed countries. It has been ratified by 104 countries, representing 43.9 per cent of emissions (19 other countries have signed but not ratified, including USA and Australia). Developed countries are required to limit their emissions to, on average, 5.2 per cent below 1990 levels: 29 per cent below pre-Kyoto estimates for 2010. The precise amounts vary. Developing countries, including India and China, are exempted from reductions until they become sufficiently industrialised.
Aviation and Economic Development

The case for expanding aviation in developing countries is a strong one as it stimulates economic growth through access to global markets for trade and enables faster and more widespread tourism growth. In some developing countries, especially smaller countries with few alternative resources, such as the Maldives, tourism has become the single most important economic activity and is extremely dependent on aviation. However, in order to develop, the aviation industry requires substantial financial investment in airports and infrastructure, which has normally been obtained through direct government subsidies, loans from development banks and FDI. This investment must ultimately be paid back either through loan repayments from taxation revenues or through profit and dividends payment, and much of this payment inevitably leaks out of the national economy.

Herein lies the underlying economic fallacy related to aviation growth, which masks true economic costs and creates imperfect market conditions. Aviation receives support from governments through subsidies, low interest loans and tax breaks; international aviation is exempt from paying duty on fuel or on aircraft sales; and government support is often required by airlines when they are facing a crisis such as oil price rises. For instance, Lufthansa claim that since 1991, EU member states have paid over €20 billion (£13.5 billion) in direct rescue aid for airlines (Lufthansa, 2006). Globally, aviation’s combined economic impact including direct, indirect and induced demand is estimated at US$2960 billion, equivalent to 8 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) (ATAG, 2005). However, if a different basis is used for calculation, the figures look very different. The arguments for including the indirect benefits of aviation (e.g. employment and activities of suppliers, construction companies, goods sold in airport retail outlets) could equally well apply to other industries, especially if they received equivalent subsidies. If only the direct economic impact from the aviation industry — derived from areas such as employment by airlines and airports, aircraft maintenance, air traffic control and passenger-servicing activities such as check-in and baggage-handling — is considered, then the industry’s contribution to global GDP is much smaller; one study has calculated this as $370 billion, or only 1 per cent of GDP (T&E, 2006).

The social impacts linked to aviation include positive ones such as local employment in airport and airlines services, especially for women; generation of local taxes; the development of a wider transport infrastructure linked to airports and provision of a market for locally produced goods. The negative impacts include community exposure to noise, air pollution and traffic congestion, and a possible lack of employment regulations (although this can also apply to other industries). One key issue concerns the cost-benefit balance of airport developments to local communities. The subsidies paid to the aviation industry in the form of loans, tax incentives and direct investment are effectively a subsidy to the traveller in that they are not paying the full market value for their ticket. Their journeys generate substantial external costs — or negative externalities — in terms of the environmental and social damage caused by aviation and borne by society at large. Such costs are borne by people living near airports who may have lost their land to build new runways, and who experience considerable noise and air pollution. Often, these are also the people who can least afford to fly. In such cases, there need to be specific measures aimed at ensuring that people in the vicinity of airports benefit from increased aviation activity through some form of revenue redistribution in the form of social projects or affirmative action in terms of training and employment.
More generally, one way to address these issues is to internalise the environmental costs of aviation, which to some extent is being done through the application of taxes and levies on passenger flights and other airport activities (although the success of this depends on how the revenues generated are used). In some cases, airlines and tour operators are inviting their customers to add an extra amount to the airfare that will be used in a variety of climate change mitigation measures — in other words a form of voluntary taxation.

Scenarios for Aviation and Tourism in Asia

The previous sections have noted the very strong growth rates in passenger aviation. It is also noted that Asia will be a key area of future growth, and that this growth will be both international and intraregional. Schäfer and Victor (1997) have predicted the growth of global mobility to 2050 and shown that high-speed transport (mainly aircraft but also including high speed trains) will grow to dominate transport choices by 2050 (Figure 10.3).

A number of other forecasts have also been made for the future of global aviation. Different futures can be explored through constructing scenarios, or structured visions of alternative futures; these assist scientists and policy-makers to understand which interventions might be needed to make a scenario more or less likely to occur. Aviation scenarios are usually associated with a baseline statement, e.g. passenger kilometres of flying in a selected year; a forecast of future activity levels in a target year, assuming current trends continue into the future (this is the ‘business as usual’ scenario or BAU) and one or more alternative views based on structured assumptions about departures from the BAU option.

Åkerman (2005) envisages three ‘images’ of air travel up to 2050 in order for CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere to stabilise at 450 parts per million (ppm), the target level set by the EU, which corresponds to a global temperature rise of 2°C in 2100. Åkerman’s results show that it would be possible to reach these targets if there was a change in aircraft design and hydrogen was used as the fuel source, or if aircraft flew at slower speeds and lower altitudes using advanced turboprop engines (as opposed to turbojet), and with society

![Figure 10.3: Forecasts of global mobility growth to 2050.](Source: Schäfer and Victor (1997).)
accepting slower GDP growth and less travelling. (However, if planes flew at lower altitudes, emission of greenhouse gases such as NO$_x$ and H$_2$O could actually increase, thereby undoing the benefit of reducing CO$_2$ emissions.)

A major effort at constructing alternative scenarios has been carried out by the OECD’s Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) project. Here, the structured assumptions about an alternative future are based on moving towards sustainability and on avoiding the BAU outcome, i.e. a continuing expansion of transport demand and its associated impacts on human health, climate change and landscape; the OECD EST work shows that this is not sustainable. Forecasts of the BAU trajectory were compared with an alternative, sustainable future trajectory; this is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 10.4.

There is, clearly, a policy gap between current practice with its forecast BAU trajectory and the desired achievement of EST. However, the OECD study showed that this can be made feasible through the adoption of specific targets (emission reductions) and goals in key areas (including noise, air quality, acidification and climate protection), with a target year of 2030 for achieving its goals. The changes can be achieved through a combination of technological interventions and demand management interventions. The result of this shows that compared to the BAU scenario for 2030, under the EST scenario there is a marked decline in aviation activity from 1990s levels.

![Diagram of pathways towards environmentally sustainable transport.](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/29/2388785.pdf)  
Implications of the EST Scenario for Tourism in Asia

The ‘no-growth’ aviation scenario need not imply a ‘no-growth’ scenario for tourism revenue. Tourism revenues could continue to grow through a variety of strategies including encouraging longer stays and a higher spend by tourists, a higher level of income retention in local communities and businesses through developing supply chain linkages, and through developing higher value markets such as conservation, health, education and cultural appreciation. To generate the political will for this to happen, governments must become aware of the true costs of aviation and focus on policy interventions that will bring about these benefits, even with lower levels of activity in the aviation sector.

The targets suggested by the EST approach require actions at international, national and local level with the aviation industry working closely with the tourism industry to ensure common elements of policy, including reducing emissions through improvements in operational efficiency, assessing aviation’s environmental impact using tools such as the ecological footprint and addressing the true cost of flying through relevant fiscal measures (in other words airfare rises). In addition, policies can be developed with greater stakeholder participation that address the social and economic needs of local populations in order for benefits to become more accessible and fairly redistributed. An enabling environment of supporting institutional and legislative structures is needed for this to be realised.

Although much Asian air traffic is generated by domestic and regional business and leisure travellers, policies would also have to be implemented in OECD countries such as the USA, Canada, the EU, Japan and Australia to bring about a no-growth scenario under an international framework setting charges on emissions proportionate to the damage they produce, including non-CO2 effects. A tax on aviation fuel should be accepted internationally, which can also only happen under international agreement.

A framework for introducing these measures and other moves to mitigate the environmental and social costs of aviation can be developed under existing international agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol, for instance allocating international emissions from aircraft to national inventories. International standards for aircraft engine and noise emissions are set by the ICAO, but these need to be applied and enforced nationally. Around airports, local air quality management and regulations regarding noise impacts can be mitigated through land zoning or using alternating runways and restricting night-time flying.

Interventions can commence at the outset of any new or expanding airport development through the application of strategic environmental assessments and other appropriate planning legislation. Stakeholder consultation should also be carried out to address issues such as resettlement, land acquisition, employment and training opportunities for local communities, while the barriers preventing poor and vulnerable groups from benefiting from growth in aviation and tourism should be addressed. Operationally, airports can address their environmental impacts using environmental management systems (EMS) that should be certified to ISO 14001 standards. ISO 14001 can also apply to airlines and other companies associated with the airport.

3ISO 14001 is an international standard that provides a specification for a complete and effective EMS that includes benchmarking, auditing and monitoring.
At a regional scale coordinated air traffic management (ATM) aimed at reducing delays on the ground and reducing atmospheric emissions is needed. Furthermore, the contribution of aviation to regional air pollution events can be partly addressed through flexible flight paths. Much of the Asia-Pacific region is oceanic and reliant on ground-based relay stations to track air traffic. By 2010 many countries in the region will use satellites for coordinated, communication navigation surveillance (CNS) and ATM systems, enabling aircraft to fly more direct routes and thereby saving fuel and reducing emissions; however this will require cooperation between countries to allow aircraft to fly across their airspace.

It is unrealistic to expect that having gained the aspiration to travel people will no longer do so, and therefore policies need to be developed aimed at ensuring that flying can be substituted by other modes of transport. Both international and domestic travellers can be encouraged to use railways and roads for shorter journeys. While more land is required to support railways, the environmental costs in terms of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions per passenger kilometre are lower. Also, improving railway infrastructure can bring the same economic benefits associated with aviation growth to a country such as enabling tourist access, providing jobs and stimulating investment.

The Internet has enabled tourists to make informed choices as to how they travel. A readily accessible comparison of the carbon footprint of different travel options would enable tourists to select routes with the lowest impact (e.g. non-stop flights rather than ones including a stopover) or to book holidays reaching environmental and sustainable criteria, and as awareness of the impacts of global climate change grows, there is likely to be increasing willingness among the general public to do this. Some measures are relatively simple to implement, such as access to reliable train timetables in different languages and the option of purchasing bus and rail tickets on-line and in foreign currency.

Conclusions

Aviation in Asia is extremely important because of the employment and revenues it generates, both directly and indirectly. However, it also entails a number of problems such as pollution, climate change and other negative social and economic impacts. This chapter has proposed an alternative scenario to continued growth based on the back-casting methodology used in the EST project of the OECD, which carries a clear policy steer towards lower levels of aviation activity and larger economic gains to local people, local businesses and sustainable development in Asia. This is in line with contemporary approaches to sustainable development that emphasise the incompatibility of year-on-year economic growth with improvements in quality of life, equity, social justice, health and environmental quality for low-income and vulnerable groups (Sachs & Santarius, 2007). The intention of this chapter has been to question the current trajectory of rapid growth and provide a realistic basis for an alternative approach which balances the need to protect people and the environment from the negative impacts from aviation while enabling people to earn a living from tourism and related activities.
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PART 2

MARKET DEMAND AND SUPPLIER RESPONSE

Xavier Font and Janet Cochrane

Introduction

The growth of tourism product offer in Asia over the last two decades has been unparalleled, ranging from micro-enterprise development and community-based tours to large-scale, all-inclusive resorts. This growth has not always been strategically led by the public sector, however, and with the private sector often left to take their own initiatives — if they are conscientious enough to do so — Asia has on the one hand some of the most amazing examples of good practice and, on the other, some of the worst cases of poor development.

This section follows on from the previous one by highlighting a range of situations which demonstrate the diversity of responses to market demand. As shown in the previous chapters, the role of government in the development of tourism markets can never be ignored: some of the pro-tourism policies outlined here demonstrate not only the currency, income and job creation benefits of tourism, but also the political agendas behind the promotion of certain types of tourism.

The importance of state intervention in responses to international markets as well as development of infrastructure and services is very notable in DeWald’s paper, where tourism entrepreneurs ignored by the colonial government had by necessity to specialise in niche sectors. The benefit of hindsight can partly explain the detailed and multi-levelled analysis from DeWald of tourism in Vietnam between the two World Wars, where he discusses the politicised and bifurcated development of tourism, its services and infrastructures. Interestingly, the pattern of much of today’s tourism development in Indo-China and other parts of Asia, of large resorts and small-scale enterprises, reflects the issues already encountered sixty years ago.

If we see reactive management of inbound tourism, the management of outbound tourism is sometimes somewhat slow and protectionist. The Chinese example of regulating approved destinations, opening or closing of borders, special permits and changing visa regulations, seen by Arlt from the outbound aspect as Chinese travellers venture further afield, and by Yuk Wah as it affects inbound tourism to Vietnam, shows the challenges faced by many increasingly prosperous Asian countries to manage latent demand for activities not always desired by the governments of either host or guest country — but at the
same time demonstrates the enthusiasm with which entrepreneurs will respond to this demand.

The advent of new Internet-based channels of sales and distribution has given rise to new methods of linking market and supplier: for instance the International Finance Corporation has funded World Hotel Link, which allows hotels and guesthouses to promote themselves efficiently to consumers, while responsibletravel.com provides a forum for SMEs to present their wares through virtual means. Despite these innovations, market access continues to be the bottleneck to appropriate tourism development and to successful tourism entrepreneurship, particularly for small firms. Donor-assisted products are sometimes set up without the essential market orientation, and lack of cross-cultural awareness sometimes limits the ability of destinations to understand market needs, meaning that they have to react to circumstances by interpreting the situation as best they can according to their own cultural norms. Hitchcock and Putra’s paper for example explains how the classic international markets for Bali (West European, Australian and Japanese) were more affected by perceptions of risk after the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings than the domestic and regional markets. With the former group collectively termed “old tourists” and the regional markets “new tourists”, the differences in behaviour mainly resided in the lower prices and lower added value sought by the latter.

The situation in Bali is by no means unusual: the markets for Asian tourism in fact are predominantly — and increasingly — regional and domestic. Reflecting this reality, most of the chapters in this section concern themselves with the behaviour of Asian tourists in Asia, and in other parts of the world as they venture further afield. These papers help to move us away from previously used Western behavioural models that do not travel well. Some of the studies help to break down national stereotypes, while others reaffirm that these are alive and well in the minds of host communities and tourism firms. The tendency to see markets as homogeneous because of poor cultural understanding and appreciation is one of the greatest challenges for tourism marketers. Several papers speak of the differences between international and domestic or regional tourists, particularly emphasising how travel is used to learn about and absorb different cultures (Rong Huang and Hamzah), short-term behavioural change or freedom from normal societal constraints during holidays (Yuk Wah and Feng Yi Huang) and post-holiday behaviour change. We see both the historical perspective in DeWald as well as the changes in the youngest groups of travellers that may influence future travel patterns (e.g. Hamzah, Rong Huang and Feng Yi Huang).

Asia’s collectivistic culture and an enthusiasm to engage in fashionable trends is obvious in the patterns of pop-focused travel, as explored by Ng in the case of young Hong Kong tourists travelling to Japan to experience the settings of Japanese popular culture. Such fads are strong right across Asia; in Korea, for instance, “screen tourism” makes a strong showing in contemporary tourism, as domestic and international tourists visit the settings of popular television dramas and even act out particular scenes. Even while engaging in tourism which more closely resembles Western models, however, the desire to maintain traditional social linkages remain strong, as seen with the Asian backpackers in Taiwan for whom souvenir-shopping is to find gifts for friends and relatives back home rather than for personal mementoes.
The authors also show how the market is changing and becoming more diversified. Younger people from countries which have been open to outbound tourism for at least a generation are no longer content with the ultra-organised groups of their parents’ generation which visit well-known sites such as heritage attractions, and which still emanate from newer markets such as China; younger people are more likely to book independent holidays, and the Japanese school groups visiting the Malaysian homestay programme (reported by Hamzah) complain of the lack of independent and free time and the overly structured nature of their activities. Nevertheless, what Hamzah describes as the search for existential meaning through travel cannot be interpreted in an individualistic way, but in the collectivistic way of seeking one’s roots or “furusato”. Indeed, several of the papers here speak of travel as a form of “belonging-seeking” and self-actualisation, be it backwards towards one’s past culture, forward to the contemporary images portrayed in popular culture or sideways towards parallel Western cultures.

While the growth of tourists who seek information on their holidays via the Internet is marked, uncertainty avoidance and convenience is also evident in the high propensity to buy through travel agencies, by Hong Kong youths and Indian pilgrimage tourists, for example. Furthermore, while there has been a great expansion in the independent traveller market, as yet this is mainly to cities and sites of popular culture, rather than more lonely pursuits such as seeking wilderness in nature. Having said this, it is evident from the increasing numbers of Asian visitors at “soft” adventure backpacker destinations such as Vang Vieng in Laos, dive resorts in the Maldives or mountain trails in Nepal, that younger Asian tourists are keen to experience the drama and thrills of activities such as “tubing”, diving or mountain-trekking.

Several of the papers look at the rich and varied range of perceptions and behaviour of different groups at the destinations visited. Feng Yi Huang speaks about the differing behaviour and motivation of Western and Asian backpackers in Taiwan, while Cheung looks at the market for different forms of ecotourism in Hong Kong, where it is more likely to be the international bird-watching market — sophisticated and knowledgeable — which appreciates the authenticity of the nature experiences, whereas domestic “mass ecotourists” prefer a more managed and commoditised nature tourism product. The packaging of events and destinations for tourism is a constant theme: Shinde describes the commercialisation of a pilgrimage in northern India, where both form and intrinsic meaning have been radically altered in the process, and Thompson and Matheson look at the commodification of a traditional sporting and cultural event — the Naadam Festival in Mongolia — for tourism purposes, and at different reactions to it by domestic and international visitors. For the international visitor, the site, attraction or event is a window into the local culture and further interpretation of the meaning of that situation to the overall culture is necessary, whereas the domestic visitor will generally be aware of these issues and is more concerned with the lived authenticity of the experience, be it a sporting event, food or any other attraction.

An important area of market development is the responsibility of consumers and suppliers towards the environment. Although tour operators are usually aware of the negative impacts of tourism and recognise that it is in their long-term interests for the environment to be protected, they generally see it as the responsibility of the host government to regulate causatory practices — but if the host government offers weak
governance, then there is little likelihood of regulatory measures being introduced. Much of the growth of the tourism phenomena discussed in this section is both facilitated by and a driver of the increase in low-cost transportation, while resort-style hotels — whether located on coastlines for sun-seekers, in protected areas for “ecotourists” or in cities for gamblers — will put increasing pressure on water, air and other resources as the demand for comfortable, air-conditioned surroundings continues to increase. While the social and economic benefits of tourism to the people who participate in it as consumers or suppliers are undeniable, it is essential also that the growth and expansion of the range of opportunities discussed in this chapter do not outweigh the capacity of the environmental and cultural resources to support similar growth in the future.
Chapter 11

Chinese Tourists in ‘Elsewhereland’: Behaviour and Perceptions of Mainland Chinese Tourists at Different Destinations

Wolfgang Georg Arlt

Introduction

China’s incessant economic growth in the last quarter of a century has increasingly gained global attention. Increases in wealth and decreases in bureaucratic hindrances have provided a growing number of members of the upper strata of Mainland Chinese society with a way of advertising their newly won affluence and gaining direct contact with the outside world by entering the international tourism market on the demand side. In 2007, over 35 million Chinese citizens will cross the border. Three-quarters of them will only visit Hong Kong or Macau, but the others will move on to one of the approximately 150 countries which have been granted ‘Approved Destination Status’ (ADS), which forms the legal basis for leisure group travel from China. Chinese leisure tourists can be found today in all corners of the world, from Iceland to Peru and from South Africa to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands — with North America being the noted exception.

In the tourism industry, the fact that Chinese tourists behave differently compared to Western or Japanese visitors has been learned through experiences — not always pleasurable ones — in the first decade of larger scale Chinese outbound tourism. In tourism sciences, however, the paradigm shift away from the idea that Western individualistic authenticity-seekers can serve as the role model for all tourism behaviour is only just beginning (Winter, 2007). For instance, notions of ‘primitiveness’ and ‘modernity’ excite different reactions among Westerners and Asians, and interpretation by one group of the behaviour and reactions of the other can lead to misunderstandings.
The behaviour of Mainland Han Chinese travelling to ‘foreign’ places has only recently started to be looked at by researchers. The few studies conducted so far are mostly concentrated on one area or aspect and often make no effort to compare their results with those of other research. This chapter seeks to address this by drawing together salient features of studies into outbound tourism from China. It looks briefly at the history of outbound mobility in China before discussing the behavioural differences of Chinese tourists in different surroundings, and reflecting on their interpretation of the various experiences which await them at their destination as they venture further and further afield. Many of these perceptions rest on the quest by Chinese travellers for primitiveness on the one hand, and modernity on the other.

A Short History of Outbound Mobility in China

In view of the vast territory of China, travelling from one place to another has, since time immemorial, been an important part of life for military, commercial, religious, educational and administrative reasons for the rulers, or out of necessity to flee from war, famine and disasters or to act as soldier or brigand for the ruled. Both rulers and ruled, furthermore, took part in pilgrimages to temples, shrines and holy mountains.

Outbound travel to areas beyond the realm of the Han culture, however, did not exist in China beyond the singular trips of monks like Fa Xuan and Xuan Zang in the first millennium, or the seven voyages of the fleet of Zheng He in the 15th century. The wish of the Chinese people to leave the ‘Central Kingdom’ and to travel to ‘Elsewhere-land’ can be traced to the changes of the 19th century, when the notion of China as the centre of the earth was shattered by defeat in the Opium Wars. Even then, rather than the rulers, it was the ruled who went looking for a better life in the goldmines of Australia or the railway construction sites of North America. Unlike Japanese rulers in the Meiji period (1868–1912), the rulers in China continued to see their culture as superior, admitting only the necessity to learn some technological and ideological tricks from the West (Arlt, 2006a).

In the 20th century, tourism in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was seen as a wasteful, bourgeois practice before 1978. ‘The desire to travel abroad was practically committing treason or defecting to the enemy’ (Gerstlacher, Krieg, & Sternfeld, 1991, p. 54). Pilgrimages, which still could be practised more or less openly in the 1950s, ceased during the Cultural Revolution, when countless religious sites were destroyed. With the beginning of the ‘Reform and Opening’ policy in 1978, however, inbound tourism started to be promoted as a fast and easy way to earn foreign currency.

As far as government policy towards inbound tourists is concerned, there were — and are — clear differences between policies targeted towards the ‘Chinese world’, i.e. Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and the Overseas Chinese living in other countries in South-East Asia and elsewhere, and those targeted towards the ‘non-Chinese world’. This differentiation becomes visible with a first look at Chinese tourism statistics and practices. All inbound tourism tables distinguish between waiguoren, foreigners or ‘outside-country-people’; tongbao, compatriots (literally: ‘born from the same womb’); and huaqiao, Overseas Chinese. The original division of responsibilities between the two established travel services China Travel Service (CTS) and China International Travel Service (CITS)
fell along the ethnic distinction between Chinese and non-Chinese, regardless of the countries of residence or the passport held. This peculiar form of organization is reported but generally not questioned in texts dealing with tourism in China.

During this period, domestic tourism re-emerged against the wish of the Chinese government: ‘the policy for domestic tourism has been one of ‘no encouragement’ ... Whether or not domestic tourism is encouraged, it continues to increase’ (Zhang, 1985, p. 141). It was only during the 1990s that domestic tourism became acknowledged as an important part of the service industry and an important element in the ideological switch from rural socialism to urban consumerism in China. In 2005, more than 1.2 billion domestic tourism trips took place, albeit with an average expenditure of only 436 Yuan RMB (US$56) (CNTO, 2006).

The gates to outbound travel were opened even more reluctantly and in several stages, not least spurred on by the impression of the Berlin Wall — and subsequently the Eastern Bloc’s Communist governments — falling to the accompaniment of chants for Reisefreiheit (‘freedom of travel’). Three distinct phases of modern outbound tourism from China can be identified.

It first started in 1983 with so-called ‘family visits’, first to Hong Kong and Macau and later to several South-East Asian countries, ostensibly paid for by the receiving side. This policy provided the opportunity for the development of clandestine outbound leisure tourism by offering a way to obtain the passports, foreign currency and visa necessary for a view of the world outside the PRC. In 1990 — following the student protests in China and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 — the ‘Provisional Regulations on Management of Organizing Chinese Citizens to Travel to Three Countries in South-East Asia’ opened Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia up for VFR group travel, with the Philippines added in 1992. At the same time, the beginning of China’s integration into the world economy resulted in a growing number of delegations travelling to the leading economic countries to attend fairs, business talks, training programmes, etc. With almost all of these trips having a touristic element, many were in fact simply pleasure trips in disguise, paid for by public or government money or in some cases arranged by the foreign business partner.

The second phase started in 1997 with official recognition of the existence of outbound leisure tourism (as opposed to family reunions and business trips) in the ‘Provisional Regulation on the Management of Outbound Travel by Chinese Citizens at Their Own Expense’ and the signing of the first Approved Destination Status (ADS) agreements with Australia and New Zealand. The ADS system is based on bilateral tourism agreements whereby a government allows self-paying Chinese tourists to travel for pleasure to its territory within guided package groups and with a special visa. Only ADS countries can openly be promoted as tourism destinations in Chinese media. Many more ADS agreements followed in the years after 1997 and especially after 2003. The regulations for visits to Hong Kong and Macau were relaxed at the same time to support the tourism industries of these two newly formed Special Administrative Regions (SARs). A stormy development pattern unfolded, with the increase in outbound travellers far outstripping the growth rates planned by the Chinese government.

With government policy still expounding ‘moderate, carefully managed growth’ and stressing the need for outbound travel numbers to mirror inbound arrivals, in reality a tripling of the number of outbound travellers occurred between 1999 and 2004, from 9 to 29 million.
A chaotic and mostly unregulated situation developed, with many travel groups organized by non-authorized agencies in the form of ‘zero-dollar’ (or ‘zero-cost’) tours, in which tours are offered at a low price and tourists are then coerced into buying goods and additional services for inflated prices at the destination. The loss of hard currency occasioned by this rapid increase motivated the government to overcome its reluctance to address the issue of the outbound tourism market. As a measure to rein in its growth, an exit tax of up to 200 Yuan RMB (US$25) was discussed at the beginning of the new century (Dai, 2005). However, some experts defended the levels of outbound tourism and pointed out that most of the money taken by the Chinese tourists out of Mainland China remains in the SARs Hong Kong and Macau, which are part of the wider Chinese economy (Zhang, 2005) (Figure 11.1).

In 2005, the number of outbound journeys exceeded 30 million for the first time. Of these, more than 70 per cent ended in the quasi-domestic destinations Hong Kong SAR or Macau SAR, which are nevertheless counted in Chinese statistics as outbound destinations. Another 20 per cent visited other Asian destinations, with only one out of ten Chinese travellers actually leaving Asia after crossing the border from Mainland China. Despite the fact that relatively low numbers actually left Asia, 2005 can be considered as the beginning of the third phase of China’s modern outbound tourism for a number of reasons; the four principal arguments are given below.

First, the increase in outbound travel that year to 31 million remained below 10 per cent, even though 2005 saw no outbreaks of SARS, similar health hazards or other internal problems, and there were no wars or other major external developments that stopped Chinese travellers from visiting foreign countries. Quite the opposite was true, in fact; many newly opened ADS countries provided a wider range of destinations to choose from. Second, a number of concerns and irritations ended the ‘honeymoon period’ on the

![Figure 11.1: Destinations of outbound Chinese tourists.](source: Arlt, Kelemen, Kröher, and Rubländer (2006).)
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supply side. The Australian ADS scheme witnessed a complete overhaul in the summer of 2005 to stop ‘zero-dollar’ practices and to prevent Chinese visitors disappearing into the local Chinese community. Only outbound and inbound tour operators who adhere to a new, strict ADS Code of Business Standards and Ethics continue to be supported, while any breach of the Code results in losing access to the Australian ADS visa-processing scheme. Furthermore, the Schengen countries within the EU re-introduced in July 2005 the pre-ADS methods of interviewing a percentage of all visa applicants and of insisting on proof by the tour operators of the return of all members of ADS groups.

Third, waning enthusiasm is also recognizable on the demand side. Reacting to the increased difficulties in obtaining an Schengen visa, Chinese tour operators threatened to take their customers to African instead of European destinations. The number of Chinese tourists to Thailand and Malaysia plunged as a result of the bad image created by the zero-dollar tours and protests over the treatment of young female tourists by immigration officers in Malaysia. Last, but certainly not least, the Chinese government changed its official stance on the question of outbound tourism. The Chinese National Tourism Administration (CNTA) adopted during 2005 the position that for a country’s tourism industry to be really strong, the outbound sector also has to be developed. Instead of trying to limit the total number of outbound journeys, the government is now taking measures to bring the chaotic situation under control through more detailed regulations. As part of this revised position, the earlier-mooted idea of an exit tax seems to have been discarded, at least for the moment (Arlt, 2006b).

Behavioural Differences of Chinese Tourists in Different Surroundings

Pizam and Sussman warn that ‘Nationality is only one variable that should be considered in predicting variation in tourist behaviour and should never be used as a sole explanatory variable. Certainly, not all tourists of the same nationality, regardless of demographic category, motivation, and life-style, behave the same’ (Pizam & Sussman, 1995, p. 917). Historical and cultural backgrounds should, however, be included in any analysis of outbound tourists’ behaviour, especially if tourism is seen as a tool to create national identities in domestic travels (Palmer, 1998) and to sharpen the perception of cultural differences in overseas destinations (Jameson, 1993; Robinson, 1998, 2001). For Chinese outbound travellers there are only a very limited number of historical precedents or role models to inform modern tourism, but the ‘cultural distance’ (Williams, 1998; Bowden, 2003) is clearly felt in most encounters between Han Chinese and non-Han Chinese actors in the play of tourism.

‘Foreign’ is a relative term; instead, a useful analytical tool can be to analyse the behaviour of Han Chinese leisure tourists in concentric rings of growing ‘cultural distance’. A starting point (both geographically and culturally) is to consider visits to ‘ethnic minority’ areas within China. Studies on the behaviour of the majority (Han) Chinese visiting areas inhabited by the designated ‘minorities’ within the PRC (Oakes, 1998; Xie & Wall, 2002; Xie, 2003; Li, 2004; Su & Huang, 2005; Nyiri, 2006) are mainly concerned with questions of regional development and/or authenticity. Viewed from a Western
perspective, paternalistic behaviour patterns normally associated with visitors to a zoo — or at best a kindergarten — are recognizable. Where Western tourists perceive with envy the concept of the 18th century Rousseauian ‘Noble Savage’ and his — albeit wrongly — perceived authenticity when confronted with the lifestyles of groups such as the minorities, most Chinese tourists see colourful primitiveness.

It has to be borne in mind that ‘the cultural experiences offered by tourism are consumed in terms of prior knowledge, expectations, fantasies and mythologies generated in the tourists’ origin culture rather than by the cultural offerings of the destination’ (Craik, 1997, p. 118). So the ‘minority’ areas can be considered as the ‘foreign land within’. Once overseas, patterns of behaviour which occur at the attractions present in the ‘minority’ areas are reproduced in foreign countries as a form of asserting the superiority of the Chinese culture (Nyiri, 2005; 2006). At the same time, visits to the innumerable theme parks offering replicas of famous international buildings can be considered as the domestic version of the quest for modernity.

Hong Kong SAR and Macau SAR, assessed in Chinese statistics as overseas travel destinations, are the liminal experience areas, half in and half out. The largest number of studies available concerns the majority of travellers who visit Hong Kong and Macau (Zhang & Heung, 2001; Lam & Hsu, 2004; Zhang & Chow, 2004; Huang & Hsu, 2005). As Huang and Hsu (2005, p. 203) point out, ‘Hong Kong is still perceived as being very different from Mainland Chinese cities in its capitalist economy, cosmopolitan prosperity, colonial history, and East-meets-West culture and lifestyle.’ For Chinese visitors it is for obvious reasons not the ‘Suzie Wong’-style Oriental flavour in a former British colony which is exotic, but visiting the remains of Western domination of the SARs, now back in Chinese hands (Du Cros, 2005), as well as the surviving Western elements of these places, for instance the pub scene of the Lan Kwai Fong district. ‘Being photographed by Mainland Chinese tourists’ is in fact mentioned in the Lonely Planet Guide for Hong Kong as a ‘must-do’ for backpackers. Such Mainland Chinese tourists’ behaviour is informed in the SARs by a ‘secure’ way of gazing at non-Chinese cultural elements, combined with pride in the fact that the symbols of colonialism like the Governors’ houses are now back in Chinese hands. Still, many Mainland visitors (especially non-Cantonese) complain about being mistreated or looked upon as easily exploitable ‘country cousins’ by Hong Kong tour operators and shop-owners.

The next concentric ‘ring’ is made up of East and South-East Asian countries with large or even predominant Overseas Chinese populations. These countries generate tourism behaviour which uses dominant successful Chinese communities as reassurance of the cultural or even racial superiority of the Han, and at the same time as a nostalgic vehicle for visiting the — fabricated — Chinese cultural past, of which little survived the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s in Mainland China. The ‘Chinatown’ of Singapore for instance, built for Western tourists for easy consumption of Chinese-ness (in a city inhabited by a 75 per cent majority of Chinese anyway), has become a tourist attraction for Mainland Chinese visitors. The ‘re-sinization’ of the Tiger Balm (Haw Par) Gardens (Teo & Li, 2003; Dann, 2005) in Singapore, or the celebrations for the Chinese seafarer Zheng He on Java (Handayani, 2005) offer other examples of the efforts of destination countries to extend the Chinese heritage into their image by offering visits to China’s past outside China.
A problem widely reported in South-East Asian countries is the sometimes over-lording behaviour of Chinese outbound tourists, which was even criticized in the official Chinese media. The *People’s Daily*, quoting a tourism manager, stated that ‘some Chinese look down on our poor neighbours like Vietnam, which offends local people’ (*People’s Daily*, 2003). Chinese visitors on the other hand are apprehensive about racial discrimination, as illustrated by the strong reaction in 2005–2006 against strip-searches carried out by immigration officials on young Chinese women entering Malaysia. In another incident a large Chinese tour group in Malaysia felt slighted by being provided with vouchers with a pig’s face stamped on them at a hotel-casino. Although the casino management said the drawings were meant only to distinguish their Chinese guests from Muslims, who may not eat pork — or gamble — the Chinese demonstrated their pique by staging a sit-in in the hotel lobby and belting out their national anthem. It took 40 police officers with dogs to dislodge them (Arnold, 2005).

Looking at a Chinese version of the map of the world, which puts Europe and Africa to the left and the Americas to the right-hand corners of the world, Australia and New Zealand appear to be the nearest non-Asian countries to China, and these can be seen as the next ‘ring’ of destinations. Both countries developed good political and strong economic relations with China in the 1990s and both offer a combination of Western culture and a large overseas Chinese community. They were the first non-Asian countries to achieve ADS status, and accordingly we encounter here the first Chinese tourists stepping out of the ‘Chinese world’ and the first conflicts between acquired Western and Chinese ideas of tourism behaviour. For instance, ‘when visiting caves in China, colored lights and emperor-style robes make for photo opportunities deep within grottoes. ... Chinese visitors to Australian caves find them too boring and educational, sometimes leaving after a few minutes’ (Blok, 2002, p. 13).

A similar example of clash of cultures comes from New Zealand, where New Zealanders complain about Chinese tourists’ lack of interest in a ‘deep immersion’ style of nature experiences (Becken, 2003). A new cultural experience for the Chinese visitors, on the other hand, is encountering the Western tourism value system of considering visits to attractions as more ‘valuable’ than shopping. The main attraction for Chinese visitors to New Zealand besides Auckland is Rotorua. In 2003, the major city of Auckland was the preferred destination for 91 per cent of Chinese visitors, with attractions connected to Maori culture and geothermal activities in the Rotorua region having a ‘pull’ factor of 52 per cent (TRCNZ, 2005). While the encounter with Western modernity beyond the facades of Chinese theme parks can create cognitive dissonances, the tourism experience of Maori ‘primitiveness’ can be safely connected to domestic visits to ‘minority’ villages in China.

The most ‘exotic’ destinations on the outer ring are the European (or African and South American) countries without large numbers of Overseas Chinese residents. In fact, in a traditional Chinese view of the world, they would sit in the corners of the square which makes up the Earth, outside the rings of decreasing benevolent influence from the centre of the Earth, where the Chinese emperor sits.

The general image held by the Chinese of Europe is of a picturesque continent full of culture, art, old cities, architecture and inhabitants with strange but interesting customs. The place of Europe as ‘head brand’, with its heritage and shopping opportunities, is supported by clichés and typecasts as ‘supporting brands’ for different countries. Images include
Germany as the home of scientists, artists and engineers, orderly and safe; France with Paris as the romantic place of art and sophisticated culture; Italy as the sunny country with monuments and Roman art; Greece as the place well-known from the Olympic Games; Austria as the home of Queen Sissy and famous composers; Switzerland as beautiful and rich. Specific cities have also acquired clearly distinguishable functions within the destination of Europe: Paris as the ‘romantic’ place for the Eiffel Tower and Crazy Horse shows; Amsterdam for buying high-value, low-volume diamonds and for watching women in shop windows in the red-light district; Nice and Monaco for the millionaire-for-a-day feeling; Rome to show interest in culture; Munich to drink beer; Berlin to look at the remains of the Wall which once divided East and West.

In a survey of Chinese tourism students about their image of Europe (Schwandner & Gu, 2005) the difference from China was stressed, with Europe envisaged as being romantic, small enough to allow travel to several countries in a short time, and safer than the USA but less modern. Such images try to duplicate the cultural markers connecting scenic spots in China to specific codified stories and, accordingly, ‘correct’ emotions. Europe offers much less than expected of visible modernity, as defined by many skyscrapers and perpetual traffic jams, leading Chinese tourists to complain that even Hangzhou is more modern than Berlin (Nyiri, 2006). Encountering European expectations of expressions of awe vis-à-vis the European culture and a strong distinction between ‘high culture’ tourist activities such as visits to museums and cathedrals, and ‘low culture’ activities like shopping, Chinese tourist behaviour in Europe dithers between a largely unsuccessful search for modernity and falling back on to the ‘minority’ pattern of sampling the strange customs of the local tribes.

**Conclusion**

The assertion of one’s cultural and national identity by encountering cultural differences is an important part of the international tourism experience (Edensor, 2002). Chinese tourists’ behaviour, which is not based on Western individual values such as self-actualization, recreation as non-activity or individually experienced authenticity, calls into question many of the normally implicit assumptions of ‘classical’ tourism behaviour theories as well as the expectations of the tourism industry outside the Chinese world.

This is most clearly visible in the encounter of Chinese leisure tourists with Europe. The expectations of the early visitors from China of finding modernity in Europe have by now mainly been substituted by the anticipation of a visit to a big open-air ethnological museum with shops attached. This is not a sign of immaturity, as some tourism planners think, but is based on the comparison of earlier Chinese travellers to European cities with places such as Beijing or Shanghai: ‘As a comparatively immature long-haul travel market, perceptions of the UK are very old-fashioned. Famous sights and the Royal Family may be recognised, but London is not associated heavily with creativity or modernity’ (Visit London, 2005, p. 4).

Until now, North America remains the only destination on which the Chinese hopes for a success in the quest for modernity still rest. But even the USA will probably not satisfy the interest in finding the modernity role model: “They don’t want to see spectacular
scenery [in the USA], they’ve got plenty of that at home. What they do want is to see how America measures up to the American Dream. They’re familiar with the stereotypes of the United States as the richest and most advanced nation in the world, its lifestyle as the holy grail of development. And they want to see it in all its brilliant modernity, to understand how far China has to go to catch up, and whether the struggle will be worth it. ... Given their high expectations, it’s not surprising they are disappointed. Even lovely San Francisco doesn’t fit the bill. ‘If that’s going to be the end result of China’s development’, says one, ‘then I’m really in despair”’ (Dunlop, 2004).

References


Chapter 12

Fortune or Misfortune? Border Tourism and Borderland Gambling in Vietnam

Chan Yuk Wah

Introduction

A specific kind of tourism — border tourism — began to develop along the Vietnamese frontier with China after the two countries repaired their diplomatic relationship in 1991. Border tourism mainly targets tourists from China and grew throughout the 1990s. Borderland gambling — an offshoot of border tourism — also gained increasing momentum, with more and more gambling facilities established in the border towns of Vietnam; these facilities were developed with a view to dipping into the huge reservoir of potential customers from increasingly wealthy communities in Mainland China, where gambling is illegal.

This chapter looks at the emergence of a gambling industry in the China-Vietnam borderlands as part of a thriving border tourism industry. It traces the opening of a casino-hotel complex in the Vietnamese town of Lao Cai, and shows how cross-border gambling is intertwined with trans-border money politics and has impacted on the already sensitive Sino-Vietnamese relationships. Crackdown measures by the Chinese authorities on gambling show that trans-border movements have often been subjected to high-handed state policies.

While illustrating the development of a borderland casino, this chapter examines the gaming industry in Vietnam’s tourism space against the backdrop of a macro trend of a prospering gambling and gaming economy across Asia. Places such as Macau have implanted a new model of the gambling and leisure economy in relation to tourism development. As tourism has been on the rise in the entire region of Asia, the impetuous growth of the gaming industry, which has been both caused by and contributed to the tourism boom, provides a particular niche for tourism researchers to look into the development of Asian tourism services.

1 After China and Vietnam fought a brief border war in February 1979, the border was closed until 1991.
Gambling and Tourism Studies

A number of studies (Pierce & Miller, 2004; Jensen & Blevins, 1998; Findlay, 1986; Collins & Lapsley, 2003; Wilson, 2001) have dealt with gambling history, state policies towards gambling and the socio-economic impacts of legalized gambling on local communities. While gambling offers a particular area of study for social psychology, such as the psychology of compulsive gamblers and the behaviour of addictive gambling (Walker, 1998; Rosecrance, 1988; Taber, 1987), it has also become increasingly important for tourism studies, as it has contributed much to the tourism boom in many places. Gaming facilities have attracted many people who would not normally move across national boundaries. This is particularly true for borderland gambling tourism in Asia, of which the most vibrant example can be seen in the Special Administrative Region of Macau (China). However in tourism studies, casinos and other gambling facilities are mainly treated as part of the touristic entertainment culture and as products for promoting tourism (Eadington, 1995; Parker, 1999; Deitrick, Beauregard, & Kerchis, 1999). In-depth studies on the relations between gambling and tourism and the gambling economy’s relations with local and regional politics are still rare.

The gaming and gambling industry has long been part of the infrastructure of modern leisure life and has been gaining a foothold in a number of economies in Asia. However, many of the casinos and gaming facilities aim at drawing customers from abroad rather than serving the local communities. With countries within their region becoming travel destinations for newly rich Asians, gambling tourism has offered a strong momentum for tourism development.

The borderland is a specific social space offering subaltern imaginations and practices for identities (Wilson & Donnan, 1994, p. 12). Frontiers are also contested spaces for international economy, politics and migrations (Heyman & Cunningham, 2004). These are places where state power is both at its most apparent and its most lax. Along the more than three thousand kilometres of the Vietnam-China frontier, entry and exit regulations are often subject to local regulatory flexibility and negotiations between borderland residents and control officers. There is a parallel with gambling in the western frontiers of America, of which Findlay (1986) provides a social history, suggesting that gambling had thrived on ‘high expectations, risk taking, opportunism, and movement’ (Findlay, 1986, p. 4) since the 17th century and had helped to shape a distinctive culture of ‘frontier societies’ where adventurers and impatient and fast people dwelt.

The development of gambling tourism along the Vietnam-China frontier is not an independent event; it has been occurring ever since the local economies began to grow in the early 1990s through border trade. The borderlands are meeting points for people on short-term contracts or dealing with one-off business transactions. These are places full of shifting faces, quick money, opportunism and adventures. Trans-border gambling activities are a subsequent development of the increasing availability of money, border-crossing people and inflated expectations of money making through adventurous activities, such as semi-legal or illegal trading and cheating. Border tourism itself has been promoted by both Vietnam and China with an understanding of employing more relaxed regulations and relative administrative flexibilities, with rapid growth during the 1990s.
Rather than looking into the gambling behaviour of the participants, this chapter unravels trans-border power relationships and money politics in borderland gambling tourism. The imposition of an occasional ban on borderland gambling by China not only indicates how the central state interferes in the local politics of the peripheries, but also shows that mobility — border-crossing in this case — may be sporadically taken away by the state. The case study below shows specific politico-economic contestations between China and Vietnam both at local borderland level and at central levels.

**Border Tourism and the Gambling Economy in the Borderlands**

The data for this chapter was collected during fieldwork in 2002 and 2003 in Lao Cai, which shares a border with the county of Hekou, in Yunnan Province of China. The two towns are separated by the Red River and the Nam Thi River. Since the early 1990s, border tourism began to grow after Vietnam and China resumed diplomatic relations and reopened the frontier. In the first few years, people from each country were only allowed to visit the border provinces, but from the mid-1990s, Vietnamese travel agencies began to organize longer tours for Chinese tourists to travel to cities in the northern part of Vietnam, including Haiphong, Hanoi and Halong. Under special arrangements, both Chinese and Vietnamese could cross the border in tour groups by applying for special permits at local police offices; neither visas nor passports are required.

The growth of tourism in the borderlands has not only brought economic prosperity to the frontier areas, but has also initiated interesting cross-border interactions between the Chinese and the Vietnamese, who have experienced long-term cultural intimacy as well as historical mistrust (Chan, 2005; also see Woodside, 1971). During the fieldwork, an event that added to the intriguing changes of the local social and economic landscapes was the building of a 4-star hotel and an associated casino. This was a US$500 million investment by a Singaporean-Malaysian group. Before it opened, the corporation had launched a number of recruitment exercises in the locality to train local young people as croupiers, which created some excitement. Many young people in Lao Cai yearned for a job in the hotel and casino since the salary was two to three times higher than the normal standard, and they queued up outside the corporation’s office building to await their turn for an interview. The new development also provided the ingredients for local gossip about who got jobs there, how much the salary was, how relationship networks could be used in order to secure jobs for sons and daughters, how much should be paid in bribes to get a job and so on.

**Gambling Lust and Fever: Happy New Year, Mr. Casino**

The grand opening ceremony of the Lao Cai casino was held a few days before the Chinese/Vietnamese New Year in 2003 (both countries follow the Lunar calendar). It was attended by a number of high-ranking officials from the Lao Cai government, including the provincial premier and the party secretary. Other important guests included over a hundred wealthy Chinese from Yunnan and other provinces; among them were owners or managers of travel agencies in China as well as local Chinese officials. There were also
Chinese businesspeople from South-East Asia and the USA. The morning of the grand opening saw tour buses running to and fro between the border crossing and the casino to transport Chinese guests.

At the opening ceremony, every guest was presented with a bag of souvenir gifts and Vietnamese currency in cash (the equivalent of US$5.50). Some VIPs were also provided with free accommodation at the hotel. During the week of the New Year holiday, several thousand people visited the casino. In order to draw even more gamblers, the corporation obtained the permission of the Hekou and Lao Cai governments to allow the border-crossing to remain open until 10 pm for the duration of the New Year holiday (it normally opened at 7 am and closed at 5 pm). After this, the border gate remained open until 10 pm on Saturday and Sunday nights, while the casino opened at 8 am every morning. During the whole month of the New Year, many residents of Hekou eager to make their New Year fortune viewed the opening hour with impatience: since there is an hour’s time difference between Vietnam and China, 8 am in Vietnam is already 9 am in China. Chinese gamblers would cross the border early in the morning and wait earnestly at the door of the casino. A casino manager commented that ‘people line up there as if they are going to work’.

There were 11 tables as well as a large number of slot machines in the newly opened casino. The tables offered different kinds of games, such as Cussec (usually called ‘big and small’ in Chinese), Blackjack and Baccarat. The tables were often fully surrounded by gamblers, men and women alike. Smoke from burning cigarettes filled the air. Some gamblers held small pieces of paper in their hands and used them to record the games’ results and ‘predict’ the next game’s outcomes. It was not unusual for some of the regular gamblers to lose tens of thousands of renminbi within one day. The casino provided free drinks for the visitors and free meals to regular guests. Big gamblers who bought 50,000 RMB gambling tokens at a time also enjoyed free accommodation in the hotel. One informant from the casino said,

Professional gamblers are people who treat gambling as their work. They travel around the world to gamble. We provide free meals for them, but they hardly eat, they just sit there and gamble. Some just eat a cup of instant noodles for a whole day, and drink endless cups of coffee.

In the months following the opening, Lao Cai continued to see tourist groups being transported to the casino in buses by the travel agencies. Besides sightseeing tourists who only stayed in the casino for a couple of hours,² there were professional gamblers from Mainland China, Macau, Malaysia and Singapore.

A sensitive issue was that the hotel-casino aimed mainly at drawing Chinese gamblers. Vietnamese nationals were not allowed to enter the casino (except for the Vietnamese tour guides who brought Chinese tour groups there). This was a condition set by the Vietnamese

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²Package tour groups visited the casino as their final destination. This was deliberate, since if the casino visit was at the beginning of their trip, they might lose all their money and could no longer go shopping, which would conflict with the tour guides’ interests since they earned commission from shops when their guests bought things. The guides also earned commission from the casino when they brought groups there.
authority when granting the necessary licences, and it was designed to thwart any spread of gambling-related social vices. However, by obviously orienting its market solely towards China to drain the pockets of the Chinese people, it caused increased tension in trans-border relations between the two countries.

Gambling Culture and Money Politics in the Borderlands

After the new casino in Lao Cai opened, Hekou residents were frequent visitors and a regular source of gamblers, but prior to this, the gambling economy was already thriving in Hekou. During the early years after the border reopened, many borderland residents had become rich through cross-border trading. Mahjong houses mushroomed to serve people who had money to lose and the desire to win. There were also illegal and semi-legal places offering different kinds of gambling games such as Baccarat and ‘Shaking Luck’. One informant in Hekou said that since the mid-1990s gambling had become one of the most popular leisure activities in the town. Gambling fever had created a number of social problems, such as a prevalence of loan-sharks and fights between different Triad societies.

The gambling houses in Hekou not only catered to the town’s Chinese residents, but also to many Vietnamese from Lao Cai. One Vietnamese woman who had frequented a gambling house in Hekou for over three years said she usually lost, but she kept on going back. She was a fruit trader and her parents ran a noodle shop in Lao Cai. Sometimes she had to borrow money from her parents when she lost all the money for buying her fruit stock. She also said that there was a crackdown on the gambling house once in a while, and that when the police came, the players escaped through the back door. The host of the gambling house was skilful in dealing with such police actions and could arrange for customers to escape smoothly. This Vietnamese woman said that she was not scared since even when gamblers were arrested, it was not hard to get away with a small monetary bribe.

As mentioned, the casino in Lao Cai aimed almost exclusively at luring Chinese gamblers from across the border. It had the blessing of the Vietnamese authorities, but the gambling economy was a sensitive issue for trans-border relationship. To operate smoothly, the casino corporation had to secure blessings from both the Vietnamese and the Chinese authorities. While it had obtained a licence for its hotel and gaming premises from the Vietnamese, it also needed to gain enough ‘recognition’ from the Chinese borderland authorities so that gamblers and tourists alike would be allowed to pass through the border smoothly. However, it was obvious that the Vietnamese were attempting to take advantage of their neighbours across the border, while forbidding their own nationals from entering the casino.

A few months before the casino opened, local gossips ran stories about how the casino management had undertaken intensive negotiations and lobbying in China, which were believed to involve agreements on sharing potential profits and earnings. Casino and gambling are deemed lucrative businesses, and in order to obtain the ‘trust’ of the Chinese partners — and at the same time secure a ‘green light’ from the local Chinese authorities for the smooth flow of tourists to the Vietnamese side — the casino company had to pay out handsome commissions to their stringers and networks in China.
Some rumours during the establishment of the casino were about which Chinese companies and Chinese officials were eager to reap a part of the potential profits of the casino and had taken the initiative to ‘bargain’ a price (for their sources of power as well as tourists) with the casino management. A number of Chinese businesspeople and officials had been ‘mouth-watering’ over the expected extraordinary profits of the casino. However, those who were not in positions powerful and resourceful enough to become ‘partners’ of the casino had obviously become jealous. After failing to secure a contract with the casino, a manager of a Chinese travel agency said grudgingly, ‘they [the casino corporation] should give us two [gaming] tables to manage, otherwise why should we give them customers...You must know, this is something related to the interest of our country. It is an outflow of renminbi!’

Epidemics, Gambling and Politics

There were two episodes that brought a halt to the rising waves of gambler tourists to the Lao Cai casino a few months after it opened. The first was the SARS epidemic in 2003, and the second was a crackdown campaign by the central Chinese authority.

By mid-March 2003 the SARS virus had spread to a number of East Asian and South-East Asian countries, and had begun to alarm the world. In mid-April, the government of Vietnam alerted the border provincial authorities to take measures against the virus. At the Lao Cai crossing, a clinical room was set up and the border officials began to wear masks. In late April, the tourism authorities of Hekou and Lao Cai issued orders to stop people from each country from travelling to the interior of the other country. Rumours also started to circulate that all crossings along the Vietnam-China frontier would be closed on the first of May, and that the border-crossing permits of borderland residents would be suspended after they expired. Renewal would only be allowed after the epidemic was under control.

Starting from May, all trans-border activities gradually came to a halt. Normal tourist groups were hardly seen. Vietnamese tour guides, who used to dot the border-bridge, now sat in their offices chatting with each other. A number were requested by their companies to take leave or stay at home until they were called upon. Traders stopped their daily activities of transporting petty goods across the border. One fruit trader said, ‘there is no more fruit in the Hekou wholesale fruit market. No-one works there now, the market is empty.’

However, there were still a few buses at the border-crossing carrying Chinese gamblers to the casino every morning, and throughout the period of the epidemic the casino continued to receive over a hundred people every day. The visitors were mostly men, accompanied by a few heavily made-up women. A notice bearing the words ‘twenty-four hour opening’ was attached to the front door. A clinical table was placed nearby the entrance, and two medical personnel took each visitor’s temperature. Inside the casino, the gambling tables were surrounded by Chinese male and female gamblers, but not a single person wore a mask. Many were smoking. It was remarkable that although SARS had stopped most trans-border economic activities, the gambling economy was surviving.

But while infectious diseases did not stop gambling fever, politics did. The SARS-induced stoppage of border flows lasted only for around a month, and in late May borderland residents learned that they could start crossing again by paying to renew their permits.
However in June, rumours started to circulate that the Chinese government had become very concerned about the large number of people gambling at border casinos and the large amount of renmimbi flowing out of the country. It was reported that in the Myanmar-China borderlands, gambling had led to criminal activities such as mafia groups and usurers kidnapping and murdering debtors. Some informants had also heard of gamblers committing suicide due to huge losses at the Lao Cai casino.

Residents of Hekou believed that the concern of the Chinese government over what was happening had forced the local authorities to implement firmer measures to stop people from crossing the border to gamble. In mid-June, travel companies in Hekou were given orders not to bring any tourists to the casino. Chinese residents of Hekou who had been employed by the casino began to quit. One of them said, ‘how can we work there? The police came and interrogated us. It is Chinese currency flowing out of the country! It is a serious problem’.

In July, the business of the casino had declined considerably. Hekou residents believed that a telescopic camera had been fixed to a high point of the border-crossing bridge, with the lens directed towards the entrance of the Lao Cai casino. Anyone entering the casino would be filmed, then detained once they returned to China, where their passports and identity cards would be confiscated. If such gamblers were found to be state officials, they would be either demoted or dismissed; some might even be sent to jail.

Despite this, people on both sides of the border did not expect the crackdown measures to last long or bring an end to all gambling activities in the locality. Many said that throughout the last decade, similar steps had been taken once in a while and that after these produced some results for ‘writing duty reports’, things would revert to their previous state. While the management staff at the casino began to worry about poor business performance, they expressed optimistic views on the long-term development of the borderland gambling economy.

The Gambling Economy and Internationalism

The Lao Cai casino was not a single, contingent phenomenon in the Vietnam-China borderlands. Long before its establishment, there were already casinos in other border towns, such as Lang Son (in Lang Son province) and Mong Cai (in Quang Ninh province). Some of these were established with investment from Chinese Mainlanders. Other gaming and entertainment complexes in Vietnam established with foreign capital included the Do Son casino in Hai Phong (owned by a Macau gaming company), the New World Hotel in Ho Chi Minh City, the Malavina in Hanoi and Hai Ninh Loi Lai in Quang Ninh (VIR, 2003). A Taiwanese group also invested in a new casino in the tourist destination of Ha Long Bay.

Soon after the opening of the hotel-casino in Lao Cai, a similar project was approved by the Prime Minister of Vietnam in Ha Giang (a border province to the east of Lao Cai). This was a joint venture enterprise of US$5 million by a Chinese company and the Ha Giang Import-Export and Tourism Company. It was the first investment project in Ha Giang province that involved foreign capital. There were a number of other inward investment projects awaiting government approval (VIR, 2003), indicating that international capital was enthusiastic about building entertainment and gambling premises in Vietnam, especially in the Vietnam-China border regions.
The influx of international capital from the hotel-casino group had enhanced the image of Lao Cai. The local government felt honoured by the presence of a 4-star hotel in the town, and the casino also meant big economic benefits for local development. The Lao Cai newspaper reported that the establishment generated two billion VND every month (BLC, 2003). With the presence of such international capital and large-scale investment by other groups, the Lao Cai authority had become more aggressive in planning for the town’s future development. For instance, in expectation of the upgrading of Lao Cai to a city, the provincial government had designed a plan to establish a new commercial and trade district and was eager to elicit the casino company’s support for implementing new development projects.

Discussion

The question may be asked as to why international capital chooses to invest in places like Vietnam, especially in peripheral areas such as the borderlands between China and Vietnam, and why borderlands are becoming beehives of gambling and gaming. Findlay’s (1986) account has related gambling to the geopolitical space of frontiers. In other words, gaming and casino entertainment have much to do with the construction of the geo-cultural identity of a borderland place. To Findlay (1986, p. 4), Las Vegas casinos (located in the state of Nevada near the border with California, where most forms of gambling are illegal) embody Southern California culture, and have emerged as new landmarks of US civilization.

The apparently lax ‘entry and exit’ control at the Vietnam-China border have made investors believe that they would be able to tap the enormous gambling market in China, which relies on the money generated by the country’s rapidly developing economy over the last two decades. One informant from the Lao Cai casino said, ‘China has produced many extremely rich people in the last decade. These are the baofa hu [people turned rich all of a sudden]. They do not have many places to spend their money in China ... we provide them ways to spend money’.

In China, baofa hu is a term used to describe people becoming rich quickly through activities such as trading, cheating, speculation and corruption. They may be businesspeople and officials of state companies or departments who have made money through semi-legal or illegal means. Although they have become very rich, they may hesitate to spend money freely in China lest their illicit money sources be revealed; the borderlands, with their lax and flexible border regulations, offer a relatively easy way for them to spend or transfer money.

A cultural explanation for the vigorousness of borderland gambling is the popular belief that Chinese people, men in particular, are mostly fond of gambling. This stereotype has been reinforced by different types of ‘Chinatown’ literature, which depicts such places as dens of vices, among which gambling is inevitable. China is now believed to be producing ‘big spenders and gamblers’ for Las Vegas, with reports that the majority of Asian customers at the Las Vegas casinos are from the PRC (Wu, 2003; also see Hsieh, 1997).

The gaming and gambling industry has gained a strong foothold both in tourism and the economies of a number of Asian countries. It particularly captured international attention
after Macau, one of the Special Administrative Regions of China, decided to liberalize its long-time-monopolized gaming industry. In 2002, the Macau government issued three new licences for international gambling companies and since 2004 several new casinos and entertainment complexes have opened. The opening-up of the market has drawn international gaming giants such as Las Vegas Sands, Wynn Resorts and MGM (FT, 2007; SCMP, 2006). The boom in gaming and gambling services is directly responsible for injecting millions of new visitors into Macau (reaching a record 24 million tourists in 2006) and has boosted its GDP to US$24,231 per capita. Macau’s gambling revenue stood at around US$7 billion in 2006, double the amount in 2003 (HKMP, 2007).

Singapore also decided to build two casinos in 2005 — one in the Sentosa theme park and the other in the Marina Bay commercial district. The casinos are expected to start operation in 2009 and attract 17 million tourists. Meanwhile, other countries in the region have been alarmed by the new developments. It was reported that Thailand, Japan, Taiwan and Indonesia were all considering taking counter-measures by building their own casinos (HKMP, 2005). Preceding all these developments, Cambodia had issued a monopoly casino licence in 1995 to the Malaysian-owned Naga Corporation, which started operating gambling-hotel entertainment complexes in 2003 in Phnom Penh.

In the last decade, Asian tourists have been active in visiting casinos in global tourism spaces, for instance, Asians are believed to be the driving force behind Australia’s gambling boom and even a decade ago to have contributed half its gambling revenue (Chow, 1997). China in particular is a major source of gamblers, and is already generating the largest number of tourists of any country in the region, with its outbound tourist numbers forecast to reach 115 million by 2020 (CLSA, 2005). Among these, a large number are actual or potential gamblers. As has been seen, China has provided the casinos in the Vietnam-China border regions with a constant flow of visitors, and it also supplies over 80 per cent of the visitors to Macau’s casinos (HKMP, 2007). Similarly, most Chinese package tours to Malaysia and Singapore include the Jenting Gaming and Entertainment resort in Malaysia as part of their itinerary. In the foreseeable future development of tourism in the region, Chinese tourists will continue to play a major role in gambling as well as in other tourism spaces (Chan, 2006).

Conclusion: Money, Relations and Power

The gaming industry has become a core part of tourism development in Asia and in other parts of the world. This chapter has used the case of a casino in the borderland of Vietnam to show trans-border struggles for economic benefit and border control between China and Vietnam. Aiming at exploiting the gambling lust of the Chinese, international capital has been active in establishing gaming and gambling premises in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government is also making use of this kind of investment to enhance Vietnam’s economic competitiveness. Since Vietnam is still losing out to China in terms of trade, the gambling economy in the borderlands is a special niche that allows the Vietnamese to take back some of the economic advantages which the Chinese have enjoyed. All these factors reflect the complexity of trans-border power and economic politics in the borderlands.
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Chapter 13

Are Chinese International Students in the UK Tourists?

Rong Huang

Introduction

It was recognised many years ago that student travel may make a considerable contribution to the tourism market because of the time available to students to travel during vacations and semester breaks (Gmelch, 1997). The fact that international students do not have homes close by adds to this process; they may also realise that visiting various parts of the host country could aid their understanding of its culture and people (Michael, Armstrong, & King, 2003). Furthermore, in some countries, such as the USA, international students cannot work off-campus and therefore have more time available to travel (Hsu & Sung, 1997). Recent studies suggest that international student travel is a significant market segment, but Michael et al. (2003), Kim, Jogaratnam, and Noh (2006) and Huang (2006) reiterate that despite the substantial size of this segment, little is known about its characteristics.

This chapter therefore aims to evaluate international students as tourists by drawing on the existing literature on the nature of tourists and conceptualising the international student experience in relation to different tourist experiences theorised in the literature. Research into international students’ motivations and life experiences in the host country will be discussed, with conclusions drawn which will point to how the findings might be used. The study relates particularly to international students from the People’s Republic of China (PRC), or Mainland China, in the UK.

The International Student Phenomenon and Overseas Study by the Chinese

The provision of education and training services to international students has become an increasingly important source of income for many countries (Bird & Owen, 2004). For
example, in 2000, Britain launched a £5 million 3-year worldwide marketing campaign to attract more international students (BBC, 2000), and international students — including 30,000 Chinese — bring around £20 billion (US$40 billion) into Britain each year (Massey, 2004). The language of Australian academic leaders is increasingly peppered with terms such as ‘globalisation’ and ‘internationalisation’, and most other Western countries and even some Asian countries all have a policy of attracting international students (Zhao & Han, 2004).

The terms ‘international’, ‘overseas’ and ‘foreign’ are all used to refer to students studying in another country. In American literature the term ‘international’ is often used, while in Britain ‘overseas’ is used. The term ‘foreign’ appears mainly in literature from Australia and other countries. For the purpose of this research ‘international’ is used to refer to students from countries outside the United Kingdom and EU, whose culture, language and religious backgrounds are often very different from the host culture. These are people in transition who have come to accomplish an educational goal with a view to returning home after their period of study (McLaren, 1998).

The PRC, with one quarter of the world’s population, has the greatest number of consumers of any country, which is one reason for its huge potential as a source market for tourism. Two other factors contribute to the promise of increased travel generally by the Chinese population: their increasing disposable income and the relaxation of outbound travel restrictions by the Chinese government (Cai, O’Leary, & Boger, 2000). These factors also affect the demand for study overseas. According to a report by the PRC’s Education Department, government scholarships (grants), scholarships from overseas institutions and self-funding are the three main ways in which Chinese students finance their overseas studies. From 1978 to 2003, more than 7 million Chinese went abroad to study, and numbers are increasing all the time; there are currently 3.6 million studying and researching in foreign countries (China Youth, 2004). The favourite destinations are English-speaking countries such as the USA, Australia and Britain.

Some general characteristics of Chinese international students in these countries can be noted. First, in the USA they are normally in receipt of overseas or government scholarships, while in other destinations such as Britain, students normally pay their fees themselves (Liu, 2004). Chinese people say that ‘if you get a Masters degree from America you must be very smart, and if you get a Masters degree from the UK you must be very wealthy. In China, Masters students are smart but they don’t have a lot of money’ (Massey, 2004). Secondly, over the last 20 years the average age of Chinese international students has shifted from 35–45 years old to 25–35 years old (Luo, 2003). This change has been driven partly by students who complete their first degree in China and then immediately come to the UK for their postgraduate studies. The main group of 25–35 year olds, however, has already had some work experience in different industries, most having been in management positions, and they then decide to study overseas in order to enhance their career prospects or as a career break. Finally, most students from the PRC come from coastal provinces such as Guandong and Zhejian and from big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, and most are from families which through increasing prosperity have recently joined the middle classes (Luo, 2003).

Britain’s popularity amongst Chinese students has grown since the USA tightened visa regulations after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. Because of the good reputation of
British education and the increase in the number of Chinese families who can afford high tuition fees, Britain has become the most popular destination for Chinese students, ahead of the USA (the previous favourite), and Germany — even though higher education there is virtually free (Bird & Owen, 2004). British universities facing deepening financial difficulties have seized on the economic potential of the Chinese market and have intensified their marketing strategies. These two ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors have resulted in startling figures (see Figure 13.1). In 2005, 52,675 Chinese students enrolled in British universities, whereas 7 years back there were just 2,860 (UKCOSA, 2006).

**Understanding International Students as Tourists**

In terms of the technical definition of a ‘tourist’, by 1963 the World Tourism Organization had already recognised that international students were a type of tourist (Page & Connell, 2006). However, they are often excluded in later definitions because of their long stay in the host country. In other words, international students undertaking a period of study of less than 1 year seem to be acceptable as ‘tourists’ while those studying for more than a year are not. For the purposes of this chapter the length of stay in the host country will be ignored since — at least while people are involved in their study programme — it is largely irrelevant in terms of their motivation for engaging in overseas study and their experiences while abroad. It is therefore interesting to examine the experience of overseas students in the light of key models of tourism.

According to Cohen’s (1974) typology of tourists, early international students showed the characteristics of his ‘explorer’ category in that they would apply to foreign educational establishments themselves, then apply for their visas (if applicable) from the corresponding embassies, and finally plan their journeys. Gradually, more and more private agencies appeared in response to this market opportunity, and nowadays these facilitate the travel of most international students (Bird & Owen, 2004), which makes them ‘organised mass tourists’ according to Cohen’s typology.

In Cohen’s (1979) later typology, his starting point is to ascertain where the ‘spiritual centre’ of the individual tourist is located; different individuals identify with and accept
(to a greater or lesser extent) their home culture and society. Based upon this, Cohen identified five categories of tourist experience: recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental and existential. International students have low visibility, spending time in non-tourist settings (e.g. private homes, ensconced in the language and culture of the hosts). It seems likely that they would reject a ‘tourist’ label, aligning their pursuits with educational goals, although they do share some of the characteristics of experimental and existential tourists in finding comfort in another culture (Cohen, 1979). The fact that their physical and psychological base is firmly in their home culture, however, means that they conflict with the experimental and existential tourist labels, and instead are similar to experiential tourists.

In ‘The Tourist Gaze’, Urry (2002) draws out the distinctions between tourists in terms of desired experiences such as ‘romantic’ and ‘collective’, and generates the forms spectatorial, environmental and anthropological. In accordance with this, international students more or less hold the anthropological gaze since they are in foreign countries, learning foreign languages and encountering foreign cultures. Most international students’ experiences are physical as well as visual; their experience of touching, smelling, hearing, tasting and seeing in foreign countries means that they are actively ‘doing tourism’. Their practices not only allow them to master expert knowledge or learnt knowledge in their chosen field, but also to gain lay knowledge of the country where their experience takes place.

As far as the motivations of international students are concerned, Mazzarol and Soutar’s (1999) research into international students from Indonesia, Taiwan, China and India proved that studying for foreign qualifications is not their only goal. Although gaining an overseas education was a factor influencing students’ decision, a better understanding of ‘the West’ and also the possibilities for travel were more important.

A further relevant discourse concerns the post-tourist. According to Feifer (1985), the post-tourist is aware of being a tourist, of being an outsider; not a time traveller when he goes somewhere historic; not an instant noble savage when he stays on a tropical beach; not an invisible observer when he visits a native compound. For the post-tourist, then, the traveller/tourist dichotomy is irrelevant. The traveller has matured and evolved into an individual who experiences and enjoys all kinds of tourism, takes each at face value and is in control at all times. In effect, the post-tourist renders tourist typologies meaningless. Considering the students’ experience in the light of this, it seems that in the host country they can enjoy freedom from being overly constrained by ‘high culture’ such as art appreciation and language learning on the one hand, and ‘low culture’ such as mass media production, advanced technologies and knowledge on the other. They delight in being able to move easily from one to the other and in the contrasts between the two. For them, the differences between study, work and travelling are vague; it is thus easy to ascertain similarities between international students and post-tourists. However, the idea of the post-tourist will exclude a large number of international students who come from non-Western countries, since the concept is predominantly a Western one (Meethan, 2001; Urry, 2002; Burns, 1999). This concept will be further examined in the light of the experiences and perceptions of the Chinese international students who form the basis of this study.

This section has tried to conceptualise the international student experience in relation to different tourist categories. Making a comparison between international students and
tourists, it has been found that international students’ experience is similar to that of other tourists. On the other hand, their experience has unique characteristics which disqualify them as tourists according to some sets of criteria. These considerations will be borne in mind during the following discussion of empirical research into the motivation of international students, their activities in their host country and their opinions on their status.

Methodology

The research used both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a two-stage process. First, a questionnaire survey was adopted to identify Chinese students’ motivation in travelling to the UK and their experiences while there. A non-random sampling method was used, and 371 questionnaires were received from all over the UK. Mean and frequency distribution were employed to explain their travel and tourism motivations, behaviour and experiences. In the second stage, semi-structured interviews were adopted to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese students’ experiences. Thirty students from Mainland China taking Masters degrees in Derby, London and Leeds were approached for face-to-face interviews (10 in each location). Contents and semiotic analyses were then carried out on the transcripts. After this, 10 interviewees doing postgraduate degrees in tourism-related subjects were formed into a focus group to discuss the research results and clarify the pre-determined research objectives.¹

‘Student’ or ‘Tourist’?

An individual’s personal motivations for travel are one of the critical factors in judging whether he or she is a tourist (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, & Wanhill, 2005). Accordingly, the Chinese students’ motivation for coming to the UK is explored below, followed by a description of their activities while in Britain. Finally, the students’ opinions of their own status and of their overall experience during their stay in the UK are presented.

Since they are students, the participants’ motivation in coming to the UK was automatically presumed to be ‘study’. However, this assumption was not borne out by the research findings; although for 24 per cent ‘study’ was the principal motivation, the majority (76 per cent) did not express this as their main priority. Forty-five per cent emphasised that their motivation was to gain a better appreciation of Western cultures, while 24 per cent stated that their main motivation was travelling. These results support the claim by Mazzarol and Soutar (1999) that the most important factor influencing Chinese students’ decision to come to a foreign country is to understand ‘Western culture’ rather than merely gain a foreign qualification.

The semi-structured interviews confirmed this, in that for a slight majority (18 out of 30) the principal motivation was to get a better understanding of Western cultures. However, this group was not homogeneous, and can be sub-divided into three different groups. People

¹The main part of the research was carried out in 2002–2003.
in the first group were primarily motivated by wanting to get to know Western culture, saying that after graduating from university at home, they wanted to see and check for themselves whether Western countries are really as portrayed in the Chinese media. As one of the male interviewees said:

\begin{quote}
I have just finished some horrible exams from my final year at university, I really don’t want to go to work to face competition in the real world just yet. I just want to have some time to relax. With my parents’ full support, I am very interested in exploring Western culture in Britain for a year. So I am here. The qualification is of secondary importance. (CIS10)
\end{quote}

The second group consisted of new graduates from China who had come to Britain for postgraduate study immediately after graduating. They realised that to get a better job at home, a good knowledge of Western countries (especially their culture and language) was very important. As a female interviewee admitted:

\begin{quote}
Nowadays, China has many international companies in the job market. I am young and have just graduated from university, but with no work experience. It is really not easy to find a good job. Going abroad to learn English properly and getting more of an understanding of Western cultures will possibly help me in future job applications in China. (CIS14)
\end{quote}

The third group consisted of more mature people, normally in their late 20s or early 30s, who had kept their job in China while studying in Britain. In many cases their colleagues or business associates were Westerners. One male interviewee in his early 30s, doing his MBA in Leeds (and still a top manager for his company in China), summarised the thoughts of his close group of Chinese student friends thus:

\begin{quote}
All of us have already been in middle or top management positions in companies in China. As far as we are concerned, British qualifications are just an excuse to get away from our jobs for a short while. I think most of us spend much more time thinking about Western culture and society than the coursework. Why? Because nowadays, we not only do business with Chinese people, but also with foreigners, especially Westerners. Some of us are working in international companies in China. If we can understand British culture and its society better, it will give us a lot of benefits for future relationships with our colleagues or commercial partners. (CIS26)
\end{quote}

‘Travelling’ is the second most frequently mentioned motivation for Chinese international students to come to the UK (6 out of 30). These students were in their mid-20s, having just finished their first degree in China. Because of various travel restrictions imposed by the Chinese government, going abroad from China is still not very easy, especially for younger people; so as one interviewee put it: ‘being an international student is just a way to be abroad.’ (CIS11)
Several people stated that the 1-year, postgraduate course of study was supplementary to just being abroad for them. Travelling around to ‘check up the planet’ was their main motive. Therefore,

*When I chose my university in Britain, I chose a place which was full of historical and cultural tourism sites, and it must be a big city which I presumed would have a convenient transport system to connect it to other cities for travelling around the UK and abroad.* (CIS16)

This accounts for why London is the ‘hottest’ city in Britain for Chinese students. Furthermore, they reasoned that it would be much easier to travel to other countries from a base in Britain than from China. Hence, they not only travel around in Britain, but also to other countries and continents; of the 30 interviewees, 12 had been to countries in Continental Europe such as France, Germany and Italy, 3 had been to African countries such as Egypt and Morocco, 2 had been Canada and the USA and 3 had been to Australia.

Of the interviewees who gave ‘travelling’ as their main motivation for coming to Britain, most came from comfortably off families whose parents owned businesses in China. As long as they got good results for their study, their parents were happy to contribute to the cost of their travel as well. Only four interviewees reported that their principal motivation was ‘study’ when they decided to come to Britain, although even this group emphasised that ‘study’ for them was not only their degree course, but also the interaction that they had with British people and culture. It was interesting that two interviewees reported their motivation as ‘unknown’, since — at least at the time when they went abroad — they simply obeyed their parents’ wishes and did not ponder too much as to why they were travelling.

As far as their life experiences in the UK were concerned, the students in the questionnaire survey were asked to summarise their whole experience in the UK. Most said that this could be expressed as ‘study/part-time work/travelling’ (77 per cent), while 18 per cent reported that their experience consisted of ‘study/travelling’. Only a small group described their life as ‘study + part time work’ (5 per cent), while none described their life as purely ‘study’. Similarly, all the interviewees agreed that their experiences could be described as ‘study + part-time work + travelling’, and this experience was expressed in such terms as:

*As a postgraduate, I have a lot of time on my own. My language is OK, so I do not have too much of a burden from my studying. Most of time I will do part-time jobs and then travel around in the UK.* (CIS07)

*Travelling around in the UK and also to Europe was one of my aims when I decided to come to the UK. Therefore a small part-time job covering travelling expense is necessary. Certainly, study is unavoidable, otherwise I cannot get my Masters degree.* (CIS17)

In respect of their status in their host country, the people who responded to the questionnaire survey were asked whether they considered themselves to be students, tourists.
or a blend of the two. The majority thought that to some degree they were tourists; in fact 36 per cent claimed their status as wholly that of a tourist rather than as a student. Only 7 per cent (25 people) thought their sole role was that of a student.

Amongst the 30 interviewees, only two people — both in their late 30s — thought they were simply ‘students’. Two of the focus group interviewees also came to this conclusion. The main reason for this seems to be that the concepts of ‘student’ and ‘tourist’ are still very much differentiated for the Chinese. This is partly because tourism is relatively new in China and the domestic market is not yet well developed, and Chinese people still have few tourism products to choose from. Their perceptions of tourism are still ‘narrowly perceived as the ‘3S’ type (sun, sand and sea), or visiting famous places luxuriously’ (CIS02), according to one participant who considered herself to be just a student. However, most of interviewees (26 out 30) thought they were more akin to tourists in the UK from their own perception and that of their families, as they have gone away from home to study and enjoy a new culture.

In the focus group, all 10 interviewees agreed that their role was that of a ‘tourist more than a student’. They were then asked which kind of tourists they thought they were and the reasons for their choice. The interviewees were aware that due to the expansion of the global tourism infrastructure in the latter part of the last century, contemporary tourists can travel to nearly every corner of the globe and in general find facilities to accommodate them relatively easily, and that the range of experiences offered by the tourism industry is steadily expanding. As international students, while studying for qualifications, they can take advantage of being abroad to enjoy these opportunities. Hence, it is very difficult to categorise them as a specific type of tourists according to the categorisation proposed by academic researchers. During the discussion, the ‘Grand tourist’ and ‘post-tourist’ were mentioned frequently and discussed in detail; some discussion will now follow of these two kinds of tourist.

**The Grand Tourist?**

The focus group interviewees thought an obvious model for international students could be extrapolated from the young men of the 18th-century European upper classes who undertook the ‘Grand Tour’. They believed that like the Grand Tourists, international students express a desire to be educated through their travels, to learn of other places and people, to experience historical sites, to meet local people, and to be seen as well travelled and worldly wise. They wanted to meet a range of people from across the social spectrum in the places they visited, and saw opportunity for career advancement through such encounters and experiences.

The focus group interviewees agreed that there are several key distinguishing factors between this early group and the international students. The 18th-century Grand Tourists were exclusively young men from the élite classes who sought to connect with others of a similar class, while today’s international students are both men and women and of varying ages, who possibly come from different social classes. There are also similarities, however; the focus group interviewees consistently asserted that Chinese international students would come from middle-class families because of the high tuition fees in the UK, with few benefiting from a scholarship or grant. Furthermore, most of those on the Grand Tour
wished eventually to visit Greece and Rome, places seen as the source of all that was sophisticated and valuable about the world in which they lived, while in a similar vein, the international students wish to connect with a European history which is a key influence on the contemporary state of human society and therefore part of the global culture. By travelling to other countries as well as the UK, the Chinese students add to their social capital by achieving much the same objectives as the Grand Tourists did.

**The Post-Tourist?**

The focus group interviewees recommended that another possible model for international students could be extrapolated from the concept of the ‘post-tourist’. Like post-tourists, international students circle the globe, happily engaged in the consumption of images, the hyper-reals, signs and significations. Also like post-tourists, international students take pleasure in playful attempts to convince them that they are actually seeing the ‘real back’, or that the marker of a tourist site is not important.

The focus group interviewees agreed that it was very easy to understand international students as post-tourists. But whether Chinese international students — especially people such as the interviewees who all come from Mainland China — can qualify for this concept is doubtful. Their personal doubts were expressed thus:

*Post-tourist, this idea is based on Western society realities. When MacCannell, Urry talk about post-tourists, they talk about it relating to a specific stage of Western society. For instance, Urry (1995, p. 148) argues that in the post-modern era of ‘disorganised capitalism’ everyone is a tourist, all the time, now that tourism is nowhere yet everywhere. (CIS22)*

*The Chinese government categorises itself as a developing country with a socialist system. But the longer I stay in the UK, the more confused I am about this idea. Certainly in China, there are a lot of areas which haven’t developed too much, but in other countries such as USA, they also have these kinds of areas. Also, I doubt that the systems of ‘socialism’ or ‘capitalism’ are the determining factors for post-tourists. (CIS12)*

**Discussion**

The interviews with the 30 students about their motivation for coming to the UK largely confirmed the results of the questionnaire survey, in that although their official status was as students, they emphasised the importance of learning and understanding about Western culture, and their ability to travel while in the UK. This finding contrasts with the generally accepted view of the UK education and tourism industries that foreign students are here principally to ‘study for a foreign qualification’. The students can therefore be evaluated as different types of tourists according to several of the categories proposed by tourism scholars, as shown in Table 13.1. Given that international students to the UK fit the above categories rather well, it seems appropriate to understand them more as tourists than solely as students.
The research findings showed that ‘study + part time jobs + travelling’ was the most frequently mentioned life experience, with not a single person claiming that their life in the UK was just for studying. Also, when they were studying and not travelling around, they tried to have some contact with their local community. This was so that they could understand British people and their culture better, and at the same time let British people know about the real China. Their experience in the UK therefore allows them, again, to be categorised as different types of tourists, as proposed by tourism scholars and shown in Table 13.1.

The focus group participants also agreed that their status was more that of a tourist than a student, although the interviewees found it difficult to categorise themselves as one

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key literature</th>
<th>Tourist experiences</th>
<th>Types of tourists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical definitions (WTO, 1993)</td>
<td>Leisure, business or other activities</td>
<td>Other categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray (1970)</td>
<td>Sunlust — rest, relaxation and the 3S’s Wanderlust — to experience different peoples and cultures</td>
<td>Wanderlust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohen (1974)</td>
<td>Experiencing familiarity to strangerhood holiday environment</td>
<td>Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohen (1979)</td>
<td>Where the ‘spiritual centre’ of the individual is located; different individuals identify with and accept their culture and society. Based on this, five categories of tourist experience are identified.</td>
<td>Experiential tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plog (1977)</td>
<td>From exotic or untouched destinations for novelty, to well-established tourist destinations for familiarity</td>
<td>Allocentric tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacCannell (1976, 1999)</td>
<td>Authentic experience</td>
<td>Tourists searching for authentic experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poon (1993)</td>
<td>Old tourists — follow the masses; new tourists — experience something different</td>
<td>New tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-tourists</td>
<td>Simply a lot more choice</td>
<td>A pastiche of different interests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research findings showed that ‘study + part time jobs + travelling’ was the most frequently mentioned life experience, with not a single person claiming that their life in the UK was just for studying. Also, when they were studying and not travelling around, they tried to have some contact with their local community. This was so that they could understand British people and their culture better, and at the same time let British people know about the real China. Their experience in the UK therefore allows them, again, to be categorised as different types of tourists, as proposed by tourism scholars and shown in Table 13.1.

The focus group participants also agreed that their status was more that of a tourist than a student, although the interviewees found it difficult to categorise themselves as one
specific type of tourist. ‘Grand tourist’ and ‘post-tourist’ were two possible models, although the participants were aware of differences between these models and themselves. They also acknowledged that the mainstream tourist industry did not pay much attention to them, due to their special travelling behaviour, which differs from what ‘normal’ tourists would display. A contributory factor to the lack of interest in the students’ travelling behaviour from both academia and the tourist industry may be a misunderstanding of the true nature of the ‘tourist’ and ‘traveller’ concepts.

Conclusions

From comparing the international student experience with the tourist experience and from research into a particular group of international students in Britain, the conclusion can be drawn that, by and large, international students should be considered as tourists. The results paralleled the findings of Hsu and Sung (1997) and Zeng (1997) that most international students travel around a considerable amount during their period of overseas study. The research shows particularly that, no matter what the students’ expressed motivation in travelling to the host country, their experiences while there and their own perceptions of their status indicate that they form a significant tourism market for the host country.

This finding has important implications for both tourism industry and educational institutions. Destination cities could develop strategies to capitalise on the opportunities presented by the international student market and remove potential barriers to their engagement. Airlines and accommodation providers which target international students could tailor their services to the true needs of the market. Tourism authorities could use these findings as a useful starting point for more research into international students’ travelling behaviour, while academics may consider it as a foundation for further research. Educational institutions could reconsider their strategies on international student recruitment and management; currently, few will be aware that the ‘travel’ motivation in fact outweighs the desire to obtain an overseas qualification.

Overall, this can be seen as a ‘win-win’ situation for the principal stakeholders. The students (and their families) benefit from increasing their social capital and from their improved job prospects back home; the host educational institutions benefit significantly from the tuition fees; the host country benefits from the students’ expenditure in-country; and society as a whole benefits from the increased international linkages and understanding that this type of travel should create. More broadly, the research findings indicate the difficulty of categorising students according to Western-generated models. It is possible that a new conceptualisation is needed, based on the newly understood drivers for international student travel. This would also need to take into account the motivation of other (non-Chinese) students; this research has focussed on a particular group of students, and it is possible that investigation of other nationalities would uncover a different set of motivations for travel. In either case, it is an area which would bear a considerable degree of future investigation, since the policy and management implications of the findings are significant.
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Chapter 14

Western and Asian Backpackers in Taiwan: Behaviour, Motivation and Cultural Diversity

Feng Yi Huang

Introduction

Recent development and changes in the backpacker style of travel have encouraged an increasing number of young Asian adults to undertake this type of travel experience. As societies evolve, changes in life-cycles and social structures give people greater self-determination to pursue their needs and desires. Furthermore, the growing complexity of individual tourism trips and the desire for self-realisation mean that people no longer have one specific reason for undertaking their travel; several motives may be combined in one trip.

This chapter focuses on international backpacker motivations and behaviour in Taiwan and compares young adults from Asia and the West. Many Asian social values and cultural characteristics differ from those of Western societies, and it is important to understand how these elements influence behaviour, perception and motivation towards travel. Hence, another of the aims of this chapter is to understand the extent to which cultural and national identities influence the travel motivation and behaviour of Western and Asian backpackers.

Background to Backpacker Travel

The origin of backpacker travel can be traced back to the Grand Tour of 18th century Europe. As travel with an educational purpose, the Grand Tour was primarily the domain of young, aristocratic European men who sought exotic and adventurous experiences to
contribute to their self-development and awareness (Hibbert, 1969; Swinglehurst, 1974, cited in Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995). Independent travel continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries alongside the development of the package holiday industry, and by the 1960s participants were characterised as ‘drifters’ and ‘wanderers’ to differentiate them from institutionalised mass tourists. This style of tourism became long-term, budget travel with a high degree of flexibility, and it became increasingly common for young people to undertake such journeys (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995). In the 1990s, backpacker travel became distinguishable as a mainstream phenomenon within the independent market for long-term, long-haul travel (O’Reilly, 2006). Independent organisation, enthusiasm for cross-cultural experiences, and an emphasis on flexibility and self-development are typically recognised as the symbols that construct the backpacker’s identity (Welk, 2004; cited in Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; O’Reilly, 2006).

In post-modern societies, as the nature of life and work patterns have been modified to fit the trend towards greater expression of individual free will, rapid changes have taken place in people’s lives: the sense of living for oneself has been strengthened, and the growth of individualism has opened up new scope for people to rethink their life patterns. Changes in education and the workplace also influence lifestyle and expectations. Contemporary backpacker travel has been transformed to fit the varied needs of participants. Its availability and accessibility have been influenced by the processes of globalisation that have fostered political and cultural changes (O’Reilly, 2006), and it has evolved into many different forms due to social and cultural differences between participants. It might be a career gap for some travellers, or a chance to obtain freedom from routine obligations. According to Richards and Wilson (2004), the major motive of backpackers remains the search for experience in different cultural settings, while Alvarez and Asugman (2006) argue that while there is a general similarity in motivation and travel tendency, backpacking trips are becoming more purposely diverse, driven by the need to obtain variety.

Push and Pull

From the perspective of the tourist motivation model, the most important motives were clarified by Dann’s (1977) ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. The ‘push’ force refers to tourists’ innermost desires. Taking backpackers as an example, the hunger for unusual experiences and the longing to be independent might be the push factors, whereas ‘pull’ factors are external attributes such as which destinations can offer more exotic experiences (Dann, 1977, cited in Brown & Lehto, 2005).

Based on this concept, Crompton (1979, cited in Yoon & Usyal, 2005) expanded motivational factors for travel to nine: escapism, self-evaluation, relaxation, prestige, regression, and relationship enhancement are categorised as push factors, whereas novelty, education, and social interaction facilitation are pull factors. Similarly, Weissinger and Bandalos (1995, cited in Goosens, 2000) suggested a motivational scale to measure the ‘intrinsic motivation’ of pleasure tourists, aiming to investigate people’s self-determination by understanding their innermost needs and personal goals and values beyond the obvious reasons for travel. These intrinsic motives, which push people to pursue their desires and
needs, also determine decision-making behaviour on the choice of activities, destinations etc.; they effectively form the pull factors to gain the reward of personal benefits and development (Klenosky, 2002).

**Asian ‘We-Ness’: Culture and Behaviour of South-East and East Asian Travellers**

As societies modernise, significant changes in traditional culture and social norms occur. Urbanisation and industrialisation, accompanied by an emphasis on technology and economic efficiency, have contributed greatly to changing lifestyles and patterns. In recent years, Western ideas have challenged many traditional practices in South-East and East Asian countries (Inglehart & Baker, 2000), although for certain types of norms and cultural behaviour, these practices may still be preserved as part of a deep-rooted national identity, such as bowing to show respect in Japan.

Asians inherit such deep-rooted cultural influences and exhibit them in their daily lives, and they form predetermined factors in their travel perception and decision-making. The four primary differences in the cultural characteristics of Asian societies compared with Western societies are collectivism as opposed to individualism, femininity as opposed to masculinity, expressions of power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (Kim & Lee, 2000). ‘Power distance’ is the degree of respect or deference which people in a lower social position demonstrate to people higher up the social scale, while ‘uncertainty avoidance’ is the amount of preparation people undertake in order to face potential risks and uncertainties (Hofstede, 1980, cited in Litvin, Crotts, & Hefner, 2004). Kim and Lee (2000) argue that people who live in a collectivistic culture have more respect for authority and order; clear instructions for proper behaviour in social situations are respected and followed; ‘we-ness’ is the central cultural concept. With regard to travel behaviour, Asian tourists are more emotionally attached to groups, since the characteristic of social interdependence is predicated strongly on people; separation from ‘in-groups’ is largely unacceptable.

This was demonstrated, for example, by the early travel patterns of the Japanese, who are strongly influenced by collectivism and exhibit strong power distance and masculinity characteristics, and were traditionally rather group orientated and uninterested in adventure-seeking (Pizam & Sussmann, 1995). More recently, however, they have begun to enjoy a ‘higher authenticity of local culture’, made possible by independent travel, instead of the organised tours of previous decades (Baláz & Mitsutake, 1998). What is more, the continuous influences of Westernisation have gradually changed South-East and East Asian tourists’ travel pattern and behaviour, and several traditional social manners are disappearing. The travel concept of many Asians nowadays is shifting from a collectivistic experience and becoming more individualistically orientated towards gaining a genuine, authentic experience and a sense of independence (Sorensen, 2003).

This transition is not yet complete, however, and given the abiding influence of home culture and norms, it cannot be assumed that Asian travel patterns will simply mirror Western ones. As discussed by Maoz (2004), for backpackers the trip represents perceptions, values, and attitudes towards life. As a consequence, travel behaviour and attitudes
during the trip can be recognised as reflections of the characteristics of their societies, with Western travellers relying on their individualism during their journey, while Asian travellers rely on their collectivistic characteristics.

**Survey Methods**

In this research, the aim was to gain an understanding of distinguishing features between Western and Asian backpackers’ travel motivation and behaviour. The methods adopted were semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire surveys for quantitative data, and face-to-face in-depth interviews for qualitative analysis. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select the participants. Three main locations were used for conducting the survey based on the potential volume of travellers at each: the Departures area of C.K.S International Airport; youth hostels in Taipei; and pubs and bars in Taipei city. The data were collected between July and October, 2004. The target population was backpackers aged between 18 and 35 travelling to and within Taiwan. The respondents mostly originated from Europe, America and Canada, Oceania, and South-East and East Asia.

**Research Findings**

A brief outline of the socio-demographic profile of the respondents will be given as an overview of different characteristics of respondents. Seventy per cent of the respondents were aged between 21 and 30 years. Respondent nationalities were widely spread over more than 25 countries, but the majority (54.3 per cent) were of Asian origin, in particular Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and South-East Asian, with Western travellers accounting for 45.7 per cent. The majority of respondents (63.4 per cent) had gone through higher education before their trip to Taiwan.

Most of the travellers revealed several purposes for their trip (Table 14.1). The greatest interest was in ‘learning local culture’, followed by ‘meeting new people’ and ‘relaxing’. These primary motives parallel the research of Howard (2005), who also found that backpackers highlighted the importance of experiencing local life and different kinds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of trip</th>
<th>No. of times mentioned</th>
<th>Responses (%)</th>
<th>Cases (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning about local culture</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>66.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxing and having a break</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going somewhere near home</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting new people</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoying local food and drink</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning the local language</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of cultures. 4.3 per cent of the respondents were on their honeymoon, and the principal motive for 1.1 per cent was to meet friends in Taiwan.

In terms of the reasons for choosing Taiwan as their destination, both Asian and Western travellers cited ‘friendly people’ as the most important. ‘Nice food and drink’ and ‘cheap prices’ were ranked as the next most important factors for Asian travellers, while Western travellers were more concerned with the scenery and travel experience (Table 14.2). As with the survey by Kim and Lee (2000) of cultural influences on travel motivation, Japanese tourists exhibited a stronger predilection for family togetherness and prestige/status, whereas American tourists expressed their main motive as the search for new experiences.

The respondents were also asked about their principal needs and considerations in travelling to Taiwan. Mohsin and Ryan (2003) found that for some backpackers undertaking tours in certain destinations, safety and convenience are important considerations. The results of the current research also showed ‘safety’ and ‘relaxation’ as two of the most important needs for Asian travellers, whereas Western travellers focused more on ‘broadening our minds and mental growth’ and ‘independence and self-confidence’ as the two major factors (Table 14.3). The emphasis on physiological and safety needs by Asian travellers compared with the search for esteem and self-actualisation by Western travellers illustrates the difference in context of backpacker trips between Asia and the West. Although the literature suggests that Asian travellers are gradually moving towards a more individualistic form of travel behaviour, the differences in behaviour and perception between the two groups of respondents imply that Asian backpackers are still strongly embedded in their social and cultural contexts.

Table 14.2: Principal factors in choosing Taiwan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Western travellers</th>
<th>Asian travellers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendly people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful scenery</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing new things and places</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy access of transport</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice food and drink</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheap prices</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14.3: Principal needs in travelling to Taiwan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Western travellers</th>
<th>Asian travellers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To broaden mind and achieve mental growth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enhance independence and self-confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To relax and enjoy the holiday</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety concern and security needs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To achieve dreams</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the backpacking context, the chance to strike up friendships, independence, self-development, and low-cost travel are symbolic motivations of the backpacker experience (Sorensen, 2003; Mohsin & Ryan, 2003; O’Reilly, 2006). Trip motivations between Western and Asian travellers are, again, quite different (Table 14.4). Western travellers were highly motivated by ‘flexibility in style of travel’, followed by ‘self-development’ and ‘the chance to make new friends’. In contrast, Asian travellers indicated the importance of ‘personal freedom in behaviour’ and low costs at the destination. ‘Flexibility’ was ranked as the third most important motive for their trip after satisfying their demands for personal freedom and cheap prices. It is evident from this that Western travellers associate themselves more with experiential motivations, whereas Asian respondents attempted to save money and saw the advantages of this kind of travel as focusing on freedom from their normal societies or daily constraints. This finding again illustrates the influence of collective culture on Asian travellers and, by contrast, the strong influence of individualism on Western travellers.

Respondents were also asked about various aspects of their behaviour while in Taiwan in terms of things like choice of food, accommodation, and attractions visited (Table 14.5). It was also interesting to find out how people planned their trip and with whom they decided to travel.

The choice of accommodation (generally a hostel type) was little different between Westerners and Asians. The influence of individualism may also account for the fact that more Western travellers than Asians seem to plan the trip on their own (34.8 per cent) with friends as the major external source involved (21.4 per cent). The situation is much less marked with the Asian group, who show a slightly greater inclination to involve friends and relatives in organising the trip (30.5 per cent) rather than planning it alone (29.7 per cent). This could be explained by differences in culture and society which lead to a different attitude towards planning: in a collectivistic culture, people are more likely to be interdependent and prefer to share and look for opinions from others, whereas people in individualistic societies have greater self-awareness and a tendency to evaluate personal value and attitudes more highly (Sun, Horn, & Merritt, 2004).

In terms of the main places visited, while some of the literature characterises backpackers as interested in ‘authentic and non-touristic’ sites, this survey found a contrasting view of backpacking travel. During their stay in Taiwan, travellers mostly enjoyed visiting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Western travellers</th>
<th>Asian travellers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in style of travel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The chance to make new friends</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low prices in the destination</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to be independent</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous travel experience</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal freedom in behaviour</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14.4: Ranking of motives for trip.
night markets, natural places, and museums or exhibitions; in total, these constituted over 70 per cent of people’s preferred activities. However, the primary choice of activity was different between the two groups of respondents. While Asian travellers stressed visits to the night market (28.5 per cent) as their first choice, followed by museums and exhibitions (28 per cent), Western travellers were more likely to visit ‘natural sites’ (33.3 per cent), followed by ‘night markets’ (22.4 per cent). The choice of preferred activity was in fact rather standardised, and it appears that neither respondents from Western or Asian countries follow the ‘nomad’ style of backpacker travel sometimes indicated in the literature.

Tourists’ eating habits during their holiday were also examined. For people coming from a background high in uncertainty avoidance, trying unfamiliar cuisine is seen as a risk (Pizam & Sussmann, 1995), in that they may not want to expose themselves to the danger of becoming ill or disliking the taste. Korean and Japanese people have been cited as examples of this, with the explanation that they may attempt to avoid the adventurousness of trying the unknown as a result of living in a collective culture, which unconsciously makes people avoid unknown situations for which they are not prepared (Kim & Lee, 2000). In fact, though, the survey found that a high percentage of both Western and Asian travellers chose to consume Taiwanese cuisine. The search for adventure and authenticity by Western travellers may be the dominant factors encouraging them to be in touch with local products. The acceptance of local cuisine by Asian travellers (only 10 per cent of whom were inclined to maintain a preference for home-style cooking during their holiday) might be explained by the fact that with greater travel experience and greater

Table 14.5: Behaviour of backpackers in Taiwan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel variables</th>
<th>Western travellers (%)</th>
<th>Asian travellers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eating behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwanese food</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food similar to home country</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main places visited</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural place</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum/exhibition</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night market</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel party size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With 1 other person</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With 2–4 people</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants in trip planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/relatives</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostel/hotel</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self catering/family house</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Souvenir purchasing</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>82.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
distance from their home country, individuals more readily adapt their behaviour and social characteristics to the destination. Additionally, the survey respondents were a self-selecting group in that they had chosen to undertake independent travel to Taiwan, and can therefore be presumed to display a higher degree of allocentric behaviour than their compatriots at home.

Regarding the souvenir purchasing behaviour of backpackers, a majority of both groups engaged in this, although the percentage was much higher for Asians (82 per cent) than for Westerners (66.7 per cent) (Table 14.5). Again, this reinforces other research, such as Pizam and Jeong’s (1996) findings on cross-cultural tourist behaviour that revealed that Korean and Japanese tourists made more purchases compared to Americans. The substantial difference between the groups can, again, be explained by cultural differences, and is consistent with Park’s (2000) comment that gift-giving in South-East and East Asian cultures plays an important role in maintaining human relationships and is recognised as good manners; through this behaviour, relationships are enhanced, trust is engendered, and thoughtfulness and respect are created between parties (see also, Souza, 2003).

In respect of the number of travelling companions, solo travellers made up 31.3 per cent of Western respondents, whereas a lower number of Asians (24.7 per cent) preferred to travel alone (Table 14.5). The preference for independent travel by Western travellers corresponds to Loker-Murphy and Pearce’s (1995) explanation that young independent tourists are the product of liberal, individualistic societies (their discussion centred on a Western market). These young tourists take the opportunity to travel extensively on a tight budget, as well as taking pleasure in lone, unplanned journeys. Conversely, Asians are more inclined to be group orientated, which is consistent with Sakakida, Cole, and Card’s (2004) assertion that the preference of Asian tourists for travelling in larger groups is because learning to make compromises and gaining the tolerance and respect of other people is all part of the goal of the travel experience.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Backpacker travel has now developed to the extent that it is no longer a rite of passage or educational travel, as contended in the early literature. In its current manifestation it has gained considerable complexity, with travellers attempting to combine many different factors and needs to choose the appropriate destination to satisfy their travel motives. The need to relax and the search for exotic experiences seem to be the dominant motives for travellers undertaking independent backpacking travel. The assumption can be made that contemporary backpackers see personal development and the desire for new experiences as their main purpose of travel.

This study aimed to ascertain the differences and similarities in the behaviour and travel motivation of different nationalities as expressed in terms of cultural influences. It was found that travellers from different cultures do exhibit distinctive behaviour patterns and perceptions. The degree of influence of individualism and collectivism is presented in the behaviour and choices of the travellers, from the way the participants plan their trip to souvenir purchasing behaviour, the motives for the trip, and their needs during it. Diverse motivations and travel choices were found between Western and Asian
backpackers, as also suggested by Sun et al. (2004) and Pizam and Jeong (1996). To a great extent, it can therefore be assumed that the demand for travel and meaning of the trip are on different levels, depending on an individual’s cultural background, as this provides a different framework of concepts and perceptions of life patterns and rules in social situations.

Furthermore, it appears that among backpackers who travel to Taiwan, only a relatively small proportion appear to be fully engaged in satisfying psychological needs. Most of the backpackers demonstrated a mix of motivation and need towards their trip, although Western and Asian travellers emphasised different factors. The findings enable greater understanding of the diverse goals held by two distinct international groups, and provide another perspective on the backpacker phenomenon.

The survey revealed some differences between Western and Asian travellers in terms of travel style, the number of travel companions, the type of attractions preferred and advice taken in planning the journey, as well as the motivations for undertaking the holiday in the first place. Most importantly, it appears that both Western and Asian travellers experience constraints and influences from their home society in terms of their travel motives and values. Some backpackers — especially Asian travellers — encompass aspects of both collective and individualistic identity, but in general they seem to demonstrate the tight hold of deeply rooted cultural influences that form their self-consciousness as a 'social individual' rather than as an independent individual.

In summary, this chapter has attempted to describe and compare travellers from two different regions. The respondents from Western and Asian regions demonstrated significant differences between their travel needs and motives, with Westerners more inclined to seek to satisfy inner needs such as personal growth and psychological fulfilment, while Asian travellers lay between collectivism and individualism, as the respondents from this region sought temporary freedom from society’s constraints but nevertheless showed that their choices were still bounded by cultural pressures.

Overall, most of the backpackers in the survey sought to gain knowledge and insights through their trip to Taiwan. The desire to encounter either locals or other travellers appeared to be important, while the chance to relax and have a break from routine life was also of particular interest. As shown in the above discussion, the results suggest that although each individual might have his or her own preferred viewpoint or perception of their holiday, influenced by their home environment, travellers initially pursue different levels of needs and requirements. It may be due to the influence of collectivistic culture that Asian travellers are likely to accentuate physiological and safety needs before going for a higher level of pursuits, while Western travellers demonstrate different aspects of holiday motivation — in particular, self-development and interaction with other people are preferable to physical needs.

Previous analyses of backpackers have indicated that they express, to a higher degree, an interest in embracing unique experiences and a willingness to learn about the destination culture and people. This study has shown, however, that in terms of visiting places and shopping behaviour, backpackers share similar features to budget conventional tourists in their activities and perceptions. Today’s backpackers demand both freedom and comfort; they still manifest an independent travel pattern, but to some extent also qualify as participants in a more conventional tourism segment. The more independent
and knowledge-seeking style of backpacker travel still exists, but as part of a spectrum of backpacker tourism patterns which are more differentiated than previously due to the increasing diversity of cultural groups and nationalities participating in the sector.

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Chapter 15

Hong Kong Young People and Cultural Pilgrimage to Japan: The Role of Japanese Popular Culture in Asian Tourism

Benjamin Wai-ming Ng

Introduction

In addition to the principal forms of tourism such as beach tourism, heritage tourism, cultural tourism and nature tourism, other niche forms such as pop-culture tourism, sex tourism, study tourism and ecotourism have also mushroomed. The rise of pop-culture tourism is perhaps one of the most significant recent developments; it refers to tourists who visit locations featured in popular movies, novels, television dramas or other forms of popular culture. For example, the fans of *The Da Vinci Code* visit the Louvre, whereas *Brokeback Mountain* fans go to Wyoming (where the fictional Brokeback Mountain is featured in the novel and movie) and Alberta (where the movie was actually filmed) to pay their tribute (Metcalf, 2006). Pop-culture-related attractions such as theme parks, amusement parks, fashion streets, live concerts, *manga* (comic) museums, and film locations are becoming increasingly popular in both domestic and international tourism (Cooper & Eades, 2006; Christenson, 1998), and academia and the business sector have begun to pay attention to this phenomenon, as they begin to understand that it can be as influential as natural landscapes or historic sites.

Japanese popular culture is now an integral part of global culture and plays a significant role in attracting tourists from other parts of Asia to Japan, especially Asian youths, who have distinctive tourism preferences and patterns of consumption. Unlike their parents, who prefer package guided tours to attractions such as Mt. Fuji, Kiyomizu Temple, Meiji Shrine and Himeji Castle, as well as enjoying hot-springs and Japanese traditional cuisine in Izu or Hakone, Asian youths mostly travel independently to Japan for their cultural pilgrimage. They visit famous places featured in Japanese television dramas in
Odaba and Aoyama, buy the latest fashions in Daikanyama and Uraharajuku, have a good time at Hello Kitty Land (formally Sanrio Puroland) or Osamu Tetsuka Manga Museum, go to live concerts to support their favorite Japanese idol singers, or buy ACG (Animation-Comic-Game) products in Akihabara (the best-known place to buy Japanese ACG products) and attend Comic Market (the world’s largest comic convention) in Tokyo’s Big Sight international exhibition center.

In the age of globalization, transnational and cross-cultural tourist flows have become increasingly active, multi-dimensional and reciprocal. An example of this in the Asian context is of Asian tourists performing cultural pilgrimages to Japan, whereas Japanese fans of Korean and Taiwanese television dramas and Hong Kong movies visit their dreamlands throughout Asia. Transnational tourist flows jumpstarted by popular culture—a relatively new and powerful trend—deserve empirical and theoretical investigation through the lens of globalization. Through ethnographic and anthropological research methods, this chapter examines cultural pilgrimages to Japan by Hong Kong youths. Using Hong Kong as the main reference, it discusses the rise of pop-culture tourism in Asia and identifies the changing pattern of outbound tourism to Japan from package guided tours to independent, self-guided tours. It aims to deepen understanding of the importance of Japanese popular culture in Asian tourism, and will have important implications for new business strategies and tourism studies.

Making Cultural Pilgrimages to Japan

From 2004 to the present, Japan has been one of the top tourism destinations among Hong Kong people (UNWTO, 2006), with more than half a million Hong Kong citizens visiting Japan each year, making Hong Kong the fifth largest source of overseas tourists to Japan (Table 15.1).

There are several reasons for this ‘Japan travel boom’. First, it is a continuation of the growth of outbound tourism to Japan. In the first decades after the Second World War, few Hong Kong people visited Japan because applying for a visa was troublesome and travel was costly; most visitors were businessmen and from the middle-class. Later, however, following the strengthening of bilateral economic and cultural ties and the rapid growth of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Arrivals</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>460,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>484,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>521,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>479,804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>586,380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>578,140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15.1: Hong Kong visitors to Japan, 2000–2005.

Source: Hong Kong Tourism Board (2007).
the Hong Kong economy after the 1980s, Japan became one of the most popular tourist destinations amongst Hong Kong people. In the late 1990s, Hong Kong experienced a craze for Japanese popular culture and as a result, many young people went there to seek their ‘Japanese dream’. The lifting of visa requirements for Hong Kong residents in April 2004 (which was implemented in part as a response to poor arrivals in 2003) gave the sector an immediate boost: Hong Kong passport holders can now visit Japan without a visa for up to three months.

In order to understand the relationship between Japanese popular culture and tourism, a survey was conducted in June 2006 to investigate tourism consumption and motivation among young Hong Kong tourists to Japan. The respondents were 100 Hong Kong residents, aged between 18 and 29 years old, who had visited Japan. The following are the key answers and their results.

On Question 3: ‘Do you like Japanese popular culture?’, 99 percent replied that they liked it to a certain extent. Only 1 percent replied ‘not at all’. 56 percent of the respondents admitted that they liked Japanese popular culture ‘very much’. The result clearly shows that young Hong Kong tourists to Japan are mostly lovers of Japanese popular culture. Investigating this further, Question 12 asked: ‘What is the major attraction for you to go to Japan for vacation?’ 55 percent replied that they wanted to get in touch with and purchase pop-culture-related products, 28 percent wanted to visit historic sites and experience Japanese traditional culture, while only 4 percent went to Japan primarily for its natural beauty.

It seems that to Hong Kong youths, pop-culture tourism is more important than heritage tourism and nature tourism, and they care more about Akihabara or Shinjuku (a famous shopping area in uptown Tokyo) than Osaka Castle or Mt. Fuji. Many of the tourists also included temples, shrines and castles in their itineraries but when asked why, they usually replied that it was because they watched certain comics or animated series about these places and thus wanted to pay tribute to them. Hence, visiting historic sites is not immune to the pop-culture factor, and the boundary between pop-culture tourism and heritage tourism has become blurred. For example, one tourist said:

I visited the Seimei Shrine in Kyoto because I like Onmyoshi [a popular comic about the ancient diviner Abe Shemei] very much. I also wanted to visit the Japanese Go Academy to see whether Hikaru no go [a famous comic and animation about the ‘go’ board game] is right about it. (Mr B, 12 June 2006)

Urry’s notion of the ‘tourist gaze’ and MacCannell’s discussion of ‘staged authenticity’ help us understand how young tourists from Hong Kong and other parts of Asia go to the ‘real’ Japan to look for the ‘imaginary’ Japan as formulated by the movies, television dramas, comics, animated works, magazines and pop songs they have consumed (Urry, 1990; MacCannell, 1973). Japanese souvenirs for foreign tourists (such as T-shirts, samurai swords, toys, kimono, etc.) have been designed to suit the taste of foreigners. In a sense, many of

1A survey form was posted on the Internet on 12 June 2006, asking Hong Kong residents aged 18-29 who had visited Japan to fill it in. There were no other requirements such as gender, educational background or the length and nature of their stay in Japan. The target of 100 was reached on 15 June.
these pop-culture-related works have become ‘para-tourist arts’ that have a great appeal to international tourists (Wollen, 1993).

On Question 15: ‘When you travel to Japan, what aspect of Japanese popular culture are you most interested in?’ 41 percent replied ACG, ahead by a very wide margin of the second largest group (13 percent) who cited Japanese fashion and cosmetics as their principal reason. In fact, the third most important reason, dojinshi (self-published fan comics), cosplay (dressing as ACG characters) and maid café, is also ACG-related. If we combine ACG and dojinshi, cosplay and maid café, then ACG-related factors occupy 52 percent of the replies (Figure 15.1).

For the research, in-depth interviews were also conducted with a number of Hong Kong young people who have visited Japan primarily to consume Japanese popular culture. Some of the most interesting highlights are presented below.

I have been to Tokyo twice. The first time, I went to the University of Tokyo, because Akamatsu Ken’s Love Hina [an animation about the efforts of a young man to enter the University of Tokyo] was very hot during that time. As for the second time, my main purpose was to attend Comic Market 69 [Comic Market is the largest comic convention in the world, held twice a year in Tokyo]. I went to the first day, only to find that the day was only for female-oriented works. (Mr S.)

Figure 15.1: Principal motivation for travel to Japan.

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2Maid cafés target Japanese comic fans who like comics about maids serving their master. All waitresses dress as maids and treat their customers as ‘masters’. This kind of role-play has become very popular.
I went to Koshien (a baseball stadium in Kansai) to watch high school baseball. The cheering was great, just like Adachi Misturu’s Touch [an animation about high school baseball] had depicted. I was moved. (Mr W.)

One place that I would like to go to pay tribute is Matsusakicho in Izu, the location for the television drama, Crying out Love in the Center of the Earth. I plan to call out loud the name Aki [the heroine in the drama]. (Mr F.)

I am not rich, but I try my best to save money to go to Japan several times a year just to attend live concerts. Sometimes, I cut class and borrow money for this purpose. I am just crazy about J-pop [Japanese pop music, in particular referring to idol pop] and I cannot help it. (Ms F.)

My father and I love cars and comics, and we went to Japan to try the famous Mt. Akina course [featured in Initial D, an animation about illegal car racing]. It was a fun ride. (Mr L, July 2005)

In the past, popular culture was consumed in the guise of pilgrimage (Reader & Walter, 1992). Today, pilgrimage is performed in the process of consuming popular culture; indeed, the spirit of modern tourism is said to be in agreement with ancient pilgrimage (MacCannell, 1973, 1999). Cultural pilgrimage to Japan made by international tourists also reflects the formation of a transnational and cross-cultural otaku (Japanese ACG fanatics) identity and community, showing that international tourism and identity are closely related (Lanfant, 1995).

The Rise of Self-Guided Tourism to Japan

Exploring independently is emerging as another significant trend in Asian tourism. Although the figures for Hong Kong outbound tourists on independent (or self-organized) tours to Japan are not available, from observation and research it is clear that most young people travel to Japan independently. The Japanese National Tourism Organization (JNTO) did a survey in 2004 on 238 tourists from Hong Kong and found that 162 (or 68.1 percent) went to Japan as FITs (JNTO, 2005). The June 2006 survey indicates the same trend. On Question 8: ‘How do you travel to Japan?’, 64 percent of respondents replied that they went on self-guided tours, whereas only 31 percent were on package tours. Most of the interviewees confirmed that they would definitely choose to go to Japan independently, and would only join package tours if they went with their families. The reason is simply that in the latter case, their parents would pay for the trip, and thus they were willing to compromise. Many wanted to explore Japan by themselves following their self-made tourist maps. Young people from Hong Kong usually go to Japan with friends, and planning for the trip is a pleasant and exciting experience for them.

Most self-guided tourists to Japan from Hong Kong seem, to a greater or lesser extent, to be motivated by their passion for Japanese popular culture. Some Japanese comic and animation fans go to Japan every year to attend the Comic Market in Big Sight. Die-hard
J-pop fans go to Japan for live concerts. Japanese television drama lovers go to visit famous film locations in Tokyo (Lee, 2004). ACG-related theme parks such as Hello Kitty Land, Anpanman Land, Miyazaki Hayao Museum and Osamu Tetsuka Manga Museum are always popular among foreign tourists. Fashion-conscious people go to buy the latest Japanese youth fashion in Shibuya and Harajuku. Many go to Japan with a well-planned and unique itinerary to pay special tribute to their favorite Japanese cultural icons.

Why do Hong Kong young people prefer self-guided, independent tours to package, escorted tours? According to the interviews and observation, the most important reason is flexibility. They find organized tours too rushed, regulated and old-fashioned. Some said that they had already been to Japan on package tours and thus wanted to try something different. Others pointed out that guided tours cannot cater to their specific interests, such as live concerts, ACG activities or maid cafés, and that they do not include places of specific interest to them, such as Miyazaki Hayao Museum in Tokyo and Takarazuka in Kansai. This reflects the increasing maturity of the Hong Kong market in its travel patterns (UNWTO, 2006) and in its consumption of all things Japanese.

The Internet has changed the landscape of global tourism, and the rise of independent travel is one of its byproducts. It has become the major source of travel information for travellers, making people more independent and informative in their tourist consumption (Mills & Law, 2005). Tourists often do a ‘virtual tour’ prior to the actual tour, and because of this, going to Japan nowadays on an independent tour is easy; information about travelling there is abundant. According to a 2005 JNTO survey, 54 percent of foreign tourists (5161 respondents) to Japan acquired information from the Internet, making it the largest source of travel information about Japan (JNTO, 2006). The same trend can also been seen in Hong Kong. In the past few years, websites, discussion forums and blogs set up by and for Hong Kong people about travel to Japan have mushroomed. For example, ec2Japan (http://www.ec2japan.com, since 1999, currently with 7000 registered members) and Nobita World (http://www.nobitaworld.com, since 1993) provide useful and comprehensive information for FITs to Japan, offering a platform for people to exchange ideas, share experiences and organize activities. Some of their members are ardent travellers who have visited all 47 prefectures in Japan.

The Japanese government also makes use of the Internet to promote tourism: for instance the JNTO has a very good website (http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/) that provides travel information in Chinese and English. Recognizing the significance of ‘soft power’ in tourism, JNTO has a special section on otaku tours to Japan, telling overseas otaku where to go for ACG products, maid cafés and related events. Alternatively, Hong Kong people can visit JNTO’s Hong Kong Office to gather travel information. The Japanese Consulate General of Japan in Hong Kong also gives travel tips in its homepage, and representative offices of Japanese Prefectures in Hong Kong try their best to lure Hong Kong people by organizing exhibitions and even occasional chartered flights (such as to Okinawa in the mid-summer and to Hokkaido in the winter).

On top of Internet sources, independent tourists can access travel information from guidebooks, magazines and newspapers. Travel guidebooks on Japan target independent tourists, with special emphasis on pop-culture attractions. Since Japan is the most popular tourist destination, about one quarter of travel guidebooks sold in local bookstores are about Japan. Some are especially written on how to visit famous locations of Japanese
television dramas, whereas others introduce Japanese animation locations and museums. Popular youth magazines and major newspapers frequently report on the ‘hottest’ tourist spots and latest trends in Japan.

Having gathered travel information about Japan, how do Hong Kong young people actually make their travel arrangements, such as air tickets, JR (Japan Rail) passes, hotels, travel insurance and theme park tickets? A surprising finding was that the majority of respondents (53 percent) made their arrangements through travel agencies in Hong Kong. Arranging flights and hotel bookings has become very big business, large enough to make up for the loss caused by the declining popularity of package guided tours. Jumping on the bandwagon — and responding to market conditions — most travel agencies have set up an independent division to cater to the needs of FITs. For example, Hong Tai, one of the largest travel agencies in Hong Kong, has launched the so-called YO2 (Your Own Tour) to make travel arrangement for independent tourists. To make things easier for youngsters, it operates a telephone hotline open 7 days a week for customers to make bookings and consult with travel advisors.

39 percent of the independent tourists in the survey made their booking through the Internet. Usually, on-line bookings offer a better deal than booking through travel agencies. At low season, an airfare plus a 3D2N (three-day-two-night) hotel package can be purchased for less than 4000 HKD (US$510). Hong Kong university students enjoy the longest summer vacation — May to August — in the world, which coincides with the low season, and many go to Japan at that time, spending as little as possible on the airfare and hotel, so that they have more money to spend on pop-culture products such as concert tickets and games.

The research showed that there are two groups of Hong Kong youths, namely J-pop fans and ACG fans, who go to Japan on a regular basis. J-pop fans mainly go just for live concerts, buying tickets through Yahoo Auction on the Web. The Sakai Noriko Official Fanclub in Hong Kong, for example, has organized several tours to Japan for Sakai’s concerts. A graduate student interviewee, Ms Y, who is doing research on seiyu (voice acting), often goes to Japan for concerts by her favorite seiyu singers. Ms F, a former student of the author’s and an ardent J-pop fan, likes the Japanese singer Fayray so much that she has attended live concerts more than ten times, following her idol to Tokyo, Osaka, Fukuoka andSendai. She successfully asked Fayray to sing the birthday song and sign her autograph for her.

ACG enthusiasts go to Japan for ACG-related events and activities, including the most popular Comic Market in August and December, or to buy the latest products such as new game consoles and software in Akihabara. One interviewee, Mr C, only gets 10 days’ annual leave in his current job, and always uses the entire allowance to go to Japan in mid-August to attend the Comic Market.

As the survey was conducted on a random basis and the respondents were not necessarily ACG or J-pop lovers, the 27 percent who had been to Japan for ACG-related activities and the 17 percent who had been for live concerts is relatively high.

The Changing Itinerary of Package Guided Tours to Japan

As mentioned above, Hong Kong travel agencies have changed their business strategies to cater to the interest of young tourists to Japan. In addition to providing services for independent tourists, they are changing the itinerary of package guided tours. The escorted
tour has good reasons to exist and will not disappear; many families, couples and older people prefer this mode of travel, but the content of package tours to Japan has altered tremendously in the past decade to cater to changing consumer tastes. In the past, the major attractions were historic and natural sites such as mountain and hot-spring resorts, temples, shrines and castles. Nowadays, the major attractions are places such as the locations of television dramas, theme parks and shopping arcades. Some travel agencies include concerts, J-league (professional Japanese soccer league), baseball tournaments or horseracing in their itineraries to attract young customers. The research included checking all the itineraries of Japan tours offered by six major travel agencies in Hong Kong; Table 15.2 shows the itineraries of one major agency as an example of the kind of packages offered.

As illustrated in the table, the top three most popular places in Japan for Hong Kong tourists are Tokyo, Hokkaido and Osaka. The itineraries are quite standardized: for instance, almost all tours to Tokyo include Hello Kitty Land, Rainbow Bridge, Fancl Square and Akihabara, while Tetsuka Osamu Shop and Hello Kitty Café are standard items in the tours to Osaka and Hokkaido, respectively.

Travel agencies are quick to exploit the latest craze. Wing On Travels asked the famous J-pop DJ and Japanese street fashion spokesman, Cheng Kai-fai, to lead a shopping tour to Tokyo in 2005, and the famous model, Kathy Chou, to take a group of young women to Tokyo to study make-up and buy cosmetics in 2006. When a certain Japanese work is ‘hot’ in Hong Kong, then travel agencies will add related sites to attract customers. For example, in late 2005 when the Japanese television drama, Oku (a TV drama about palace politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tour</th>
<th>Itinerary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tour to Tokyo</td>
<td>Hello Kitty Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rainbow Bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Namja Town (Ikebukuro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fancl Square (Ginza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burberry Blue Label Boutique (Ginza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Battleship Yamato (cruise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toys Museum (Ginza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ramen Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bandai Gundam Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Akihabara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour to Osaka (Kansai)</td>
<td>Tetsuka Osamu Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hello Kitty Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anpanman Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Herbis Mall (Beauty Tour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shinsaibashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour to Hokkaido</td>
<td>Oku Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White Lover Chocolate Factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nostalgic Toys Museum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EGL tours (travel agency specializing in tours to Japan).
in the Tokugawa period), was screened in Hong Kong, many related historic sites were quickly included in the package guided tour. All these destinations reinforce the ‘tourist gaze’ for Hong Kong tourists.

**Concluding Remarks**

Pop-culture tourism is undoubtedly becoming a major form of modern tourism. Compared to traditional cultural tourism, which puts the emphasis on traditional art forms, it uses pop-culture-related sites and modern cultural products to attract young tourists.

This case study of tourists from Hong Kong visiting Japan has identified three important developments in Asian tourism which depend on the popular culture factor: first, many Asian youths go to Japan on a cultural pilgrimage; second, Asian youths to Japan are almost all independent tourists; and third, Asian travel agencies include pop-culture-related sites in their package tours to Japan. Tokyo has become a Mecca for youths from other parts of Asia, and Japanese popular culture has thus changed the landscape of Asian tourism. Making cultural pilgrimages to Japan has become a powerful niche trend that the tourism industry, government agencies and academia cannot afford to overlook.

In Hong Kong, many travel agencies see this trend as a business opportunity rather than a threat, and have readjusted their business strategies to cater to the needs of young customers. The Japanese government and entrepreneurs, meanwhile, try to make use of popular culture to attract international tourists. For example, shops in Akihabara have recruited staff who can speak English, Chinese and Korean and most ‘hot’ tourist spots have written explanations in different foreign languages. Other Asian nations are building Japanese pop-culture-related theme parks, such as the Ultraman theme park in Bangkok, the Pokemon theme park in Taipei and the Hello Kitty park in Macau. Pop-culture tourism is thus emerging as a key driver that promotes transnational tourist flows, an important but little-studied topic in Asian tourism that is in need of more public and scholarly attention.

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Malaysian Homestays from the Perspective of Young Japanese Tourists: The Quest for Furusato

Amran Hamzah

Introduction

The evolution of the homestay programme in Malaysia can be traced back to the early 1970s at the then ‘drifter enclave’ of Kampung Cherating Lama in Pahang, when a local lady by the name of Mak Long Teh took in long-staying ‘drifters’ and provided breakfast, dinner and a space to sleep within her humble kampung (Malay village) home (Hamzah, 1997). Essentially, the pioneer homestays were mostly located along the beach and the kampung ambience merely provided the backdrop to an otherwise typical holiday by the beach. In the late 1980s, the homestay concept took on a different dimension with the arrival of Japanese youths on exchange/field programmes. The current President of the Malaysian Homestay Association (MHA) was the pioneer of such programmes, in which Japanese youths stayed with their ‘adoptive family’ and participated in communal activities related to the pastoral way of life. Since then the homestay programme has been used by the Ministry of Agriculture as a catalyst for revitalising the rural economy in tandem with its agrotourism programme. In 1993, another Federal ministry, the then Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism (MOCAT) formed a special unit to oversee the growth of the homestay programme in Malaysia.

Homestay is a generic term used to describe a form of holiday that involves staying with the host’s family. While the ‘Bed and Breakfast’ concept also involves the guest staying within the host’s dwelling, the homestay is characterised by the guest’s participation in the host’s way of life. This contrasts with the working definition of homestay in Indonesia, which is budget accommodation constructed within villages or small towns and operated by local people; another term for these is losmen. In essence, the homestay in Malaysia bears many similarities with the farmstay concept practised in Germany and New Zealand.
Central to both the homestay and farmstay concepts is the agrarian way of life, and besides offering an affordable form of holiday, it contains a high degree of educational elements (Hall, 2000). Despite being commonly associated with rural and agrotourism, the homestay concept has also been adapted to an urban setting as in the case of Singapore. Interestingly, there are many variants of the homestay concept (Table 16.1).

Table 16.1: Variants on the homestay concept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Homestay concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Discovery Island, North Vancouver, West Vancouver Island, Quadra Island, Richmond, New Westminster, Burnaby</td>
<td>Cultural homestay, farmstay, heritage homestay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>California, Colorado, New York</td>
<td>Agricultural homestay, educational homestay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Mid North Coast of New South Wales, Hannam Vale, Emerald City, North of Melbourne</td>
<td>Farmstay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Narita, Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Otsu, Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, Kurashiki Okayama, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, Kumamoyo, Miyazaki, Chiba, Nara</td>
<td>Home visit, educational homestay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Seoul</td>
<td>Educational homestay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Happy Valley, Elandsberg Mountain, Hogsback, Eastern Cape, Botswana, Mpumalanga, Namibia, Zambia, Gauteng, Limpopo, Kwazulu Natal</td>
<td>Leisure stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Queenstown, Devonport, Northshore Auckland, Te Anau Armette</td>
<td>Cottage homestay, farmstay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Manila, Davao, Baguio, Palawan, Boracay, Bohol, Cala Barzon</td>
<td>Cultural homestay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Mae Hong Son Village in Chiang Mai, Nakorn Sawon, Chumphorn, Surin, Ampawa Village (Bangkok), Hmong Hill Tribe Village (Chiang Mai), Doi Ithanon (Chiang Mai)</td>
<td>Student homestay, cultural homestay, volunteer homestay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Singapore City</td>
<td>Urban homestay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Yogyakarta, Bali</td>
<td>Cultural homestay, leisure homestay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


(Oppermann, 1997) and vacation farms in Canada (Weaver & Fennell, 1997).
Definition and Overview of the Homestay Programme

In Malaysia the official definition of the homestay programme, according to the then MOCAT (1995), is: ‘where tourists stay with the host’s family and experience the everyday way of life of the family in both a direct and indirect manner’. In order to regulate the homestay programme, the current Ministry of Tourism (MOTOUR since 2004) will only issue a licence to operate if the house owner is able to abide by a list of selection criteria, which are that there should be easy access from the main road, adequate facilities for guests such as separate bedroom and proper toilet, that no one in the family should have a criminal record or be suffering from communicable diseases and that there should be good security and a high standard of hygiene.

In 1997, there were about 286 households participating officially in this programme throughout the country. By 1998 this had increased to 321 households, by 2004 there were 948 and a year later there were 76 homestay sites and 1089 providers (MOTOUR, 2006a). However, many of these kampungs are finding it difficult to sustain tourist arrivals. Apart from the more established ‘model’ kampungs, such as Kampung (Kg.) Banghuris in Selangor, Kg. Desa Murni in Pahang, Kg. Relau in Kedah and Kg. Sarang Buaya in Johor, most of the others have lost their initial momentum, notwithstanding the fact that more and more are being encouraged to join the bandwagon (Hamzah & Ismail, 2003).

The Relationship Between Japanese Youths and Homestays in Malaysia

The types of holidays that the Japanese take have been modelled (albeit simplistically) according to the various phases of their lives, namely holidays as children, which benefit from half-price child fares, school trips, travels upon graduation, the honeymoon, family holidays, retirement holidays and holidays with grandchildren (Figure 16.1).

Up to the 1990s, Japanese tourists were known to participate in overseas recreational tourism only in the form of package tours. Lately, however, Japanese youths have been observed to break away from this stereotypical way of travelling, which has been described by Rea (2003, p. 638) as being forced by the ‘state of alienation’ created by contemporary Japanese society. As a result, Japanese youths currently travel outside Japan in considerable numbers, often independently, to seek existential meaning, contributing to the growth in the number of Asian backpackers. This radical change in travel behaviour has also been associated with the quest for Furusato, which means the ‘old village’, ‘home’ and ‘native place’ (Rea, 2003). Rea further identified the natural landscape and pastoral lifestyle as the two main elements of Furusato, which is represented pictorially by villages and rice-fields set against a picturesque view of mountains and rivers. Together with an agrarian way of life, these are the embodiment of ‘rustic simplicity’ (soboku), which is central to the quintessential Japanese Furusato (Rea, 2003).

The Japanese youth tourism market, covering the 11–30 age group, constituted almost half (45.5 per cent) of the 13.6 million Japanese who travelled overseas in 2004. Out of this, the largest group of tourists were the ‘thirty-somethings’ (22.2 per cent). This was followed
by those in their 20s (22.2 per cent) while the teens (11–19), who were commonly associated with educational tours or school trips, comprised 4.8 per cent (Figure 16.2).

In Japan, schools have been taking their students on educational tours abroad since the mid-1980s. Broadly speaking, educational tours can be divided into two categories: curriculum-based tours directly linked to the lessons taught in the classroom and extracurricular excursions. The number of Japanese school children taking domestic and especially international school trips is expanding. In 1984 the Ogura Commercial High School was the first school in Japan to take its students on an international, curriculum-based field trip.

Figure 16.1: Conceptual diagram of typology of Japanese tourists.
Source: ASEAN — Japan Centre (2001).
Since then, there has been a rapid growth in the number of these trips: by 2004 a total of 268 high schools in Japan had taken more than 54,000 students overseas (Japan Ministry of Education and Foreign Exchange, 2005).

Organised tours to Malaysia involving Japanese youths began about 15 years ago (personal communication, Noridah Alias, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2006). Initially, the so-called educational tours abroad favoured English-speaking countries such as Australia, the UK and the USA, but Asian countries later became popular destinations because of the imposition of the 100,000 Yen/student cap, which limited such travels to nearby countries such as China, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. As educational tours abroad are included in most high school curricula, several youth travel programmes have been established by the Japanese Ministry of Education (MONBUSHO). These include the Malaysia–Japan Cultural and Educational Exchange Programme, the Junior Ambassadors’ Friendship Mission to Malaysia, ASEAN Students Exchange Programme and Ashiya Minami to Malaysia.

In addition, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia has been actively involved in bringing educational tours from Japan to Malaysia since 1990. Besides the efforts of related government agencies, major tour operators such as the Japan Travel Bureau (JTB) and NGOs like the Japanese Association of the Experiment in International Living (EIL) have been conducting educational tours to homestays in Malaysia (although the latter has ceased to include Malaysia as one of its destinations). Another active player is the MHA, which has been directly marketing and promoting the homestay programme in Japan; to date, it has played host to more than 50,000 school children from Japan (personal communication, Shariman Hamdan, President of MHA).

Educational tours involving Japanese schools are administered by MONBUSHO, which vets and approves the list of partner schools abroad. The related schools in Japan then liaise with specialist operators such as JTB to select the partner institution in the country chosen as the destination. In the next stage of the travel arrangement, the Japanese travel agent will consult its counterparts in Malaysia who would then recommend a list of educational tour packages. At this stage, the travel arrangement could take two separate paths, namely a homestay and cultural exchange trip, or an educational tour/student exchange.
In the case of the homestay and cultural exchange trips, consultation and negotiation are often held with MHA. The association is often represented by its President who also operates a travel agency based in the Desa Murni Homestay, which as mentioned above is one of the most successful homestays; the agency has strong business connections with Japan. The entire negotiation process is conducted in Japan, spearheaded by the delegation from MHA. Upon confirming the travel bookings, which is usually done a year in advance, MHA will then handle the details of the travel itinerary in collaboration with the other homestay coordinators, MOTOUR and other stakeholders. Sometimes travel arrangements are also negotiated by other tour operators independent of MHA. Often, the deal is done directly with the homestay coordinator at the particular destination, and several tour operators have formed smart partnerships with successful homestay sites in Malaysia. Among the established and successful homestays, the Desa Murni Homestay has focused mainly on Japanese youths (95 per cent) while Banghuris Homestay and Relau Homestay have also managed to attract a significant proportion of Japanese schoolchildren (72 and 58 per cent respectively) (Table 16.2). Interestingly, repeat visitation among Japanese youths to the Desa Murni Homestay is around 80 per cent.

In contrast to the homestay trip, the educational tour/student exchange involves a ‘school-to-school’ programme under the auspices of the Ministry of Education Malaysia. The programme often involves educational and cultural activities carried out at a selected school, which may or may not include a visit or stay at a homestay site (Figure 16.3).

Within the Ministry of Education, the International Relations Division is responsible for the overall planning and coordination in collaboration with MONBUSHO. In essence, the educational tour/student exchange is a two-way programme, which involves reciprocal visits to Japan by Malaysian schools. Although the overall planning and scheduling of the programme are decided by the Ministry of Education Malaysia and MONBUSHO well in advance, there are also Malaysian tour operators who liaise with their Japanese counterparts to bring in educational tours on an ad hoc basis. More often than not, they will seek assistance from the Ministry of Education, for instance in identifying suitable partner institutions or in providing venues for the programme’s itinerary. At the implementation level, the Schools Division is responsible for selecting the partner institution, monitoring and providing financial assistance to schools participating in this programme. Once a particular school has been selected to host the event, the school administrations in collaboration with the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) are responsible for implementation of the programme, which includes the provision of accommodation and meals. In the past, there

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homestay site</th>
<th>Japanese tourists (%)</th>
<th>Other foreign tourists (%)</th>
<th>Domestic tourists (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banghuris homestay</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relau homestay</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desa Murni homestay</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelegong homestay</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

were cases where the Japanese guests were taken to visit or stay at homestay sites, but in most cases the school administration and Ministry of Education preferred them to stay with the teachers or parents selected by the PTA.

It can be surmised from the above discussion that despite targeting the same market segment, the homestay/cultural exchange trips and educational tour/student exchange programme are working independently of each other. Needless to say, there is little collaboration between MOTOUR and the Ministry of Education in terms of planning, implementing and coordinating the organised trips from Japanese schools. Furthermore, despite the success of both the MHA and the Ministry of Education in attracting Japanese youths to Malaysia, it has been estimated by specialist tour operators handling the Japanese youth market that the Malaysian tourism industry has only managed to penetrate less than 5 per cent of the Japanese youth market (personal communication, Wan Mohd. Asri, Japan Travel Bureau, 2005).
Objective of Educational Tours/Student Exchanges and Programme Itinerary

The educational tour/student exchange programme is a collaboration between schools in Malaysia and Japan that aims to strengthen relations between the two countries. Through this programme, participants from Japan will have the opportunity to learn and experience various traditions and customs of Malaysia’s multi-racial society, and vice versa. The homestay concept is also central to this programme but as mentioned earlier, the adoptive families are often teachers or parents selected by the PTA. Otherwise, the homestay concept is similar to the programme handled by MOTOUR in terms of its aim, i.e. for participants to stay with their ‘adoptive family’ to experience living in a developing and peaceful country.

A typical educational tour to Malaysia is usually conducted over a period of 7 days. A student exchange session is the highlight of the tour, in which the Japanese students are ‘handed over’ to their adoptive families (Table 16.3). Day trips to nature-based and cultural attractions make up most of the itinerary but communal activities such as gotong royong\(^1\) and rewang\(^2\) are also central to the programme.

Case Studies and Research Methodology

The author’s research on Japanese youths as a phenomenon in relation to the homestay programme in Malaysia started in 1999 in the form of a case study of the homestay programme at Banghuris Homestay. Subsequently, several other case studies were carried out at the other prominent homestays, which culminated in a study commissioned by the MOTOUR (2006b) Malaysia. In all the case studies, both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used. Quantitative techniques included questionnaire surveys at homestays, which was practical given that the Japanese youths were always in a hurry. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with relevant government officials, specialist tour operators, homestay coordinators, homestay providers, local communities and NGOs (both in Malaysia and Japan). A tracking exercise was also carried out at major (youth) tourist generating cities in Japan, again using a questionnaire survey.

For the questionnaire survey, a non-probability sampling method was used due to constraints such as the short study duration and difficulty in tracing past visitors. Nevertheless, the sample is representative of the main tourist-generating cities related to homestays, i.e. Fukuoka, Osaka, Kobe and Tokyo. The fieldwork was conducted between May to September 2005 and the tracking exercise in Japan took place from 26 June to 3 July 2005. The tracking exercise was originally intended to solicit the response of Japanese youths who had previously participated in the homestay programme and was essential because

\( ^1\) Voluntary communal activities carried out by the entire village. It used to be a norm in the kampungs, when public activities such as building a village hall or repairing a damaged road as well as private occasions such as weddings would involve a contribution from each member of the community.

\( ^2\) A communal activity carried out in preparing a wedding feast, a joyous occasion often attended by the whole kampung. Each member of the village will contribute in a specific way such as setting up the stage/tent, cooking, providing ingredients, washing up, etc. This practice is, however, being slowly replaced by the use of professional caterers, thus reducing the level of social interaction in Malaysian villages.
Table 16.3: Example of itinerary for Japanese students’ exchange programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Arrival of the Japanese delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opening ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Handover of foster child and souvenir ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photography session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>School session special assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The introduction of Japanese students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speech by the representative of Japanese students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The handover of the Japanese students to the form teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional food cooking activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>School session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The launching of the Independence Celebration Month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opening ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Birds releasing ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independence Day banner signing ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telematch (for selected students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Educational trip to Pontian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bugis Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pineapple Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tanjung Piai National Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A tour of Johor Bahru and Royal Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 5</td>
<td>‘Rewang’ activities with the villagers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Ketupat’ making activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch feast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speech by the Principal of SMK Impian Emas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 6</td>
<td>Arrival of guests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arrival of VIPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screening of video clip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speeches by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student representative of Hyogo Prefecture, Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student representative of SMK Impian Emas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speech by Mr Saibi b. Ibrahim, the Principal of SMK Impian Emas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance by the Japanese students of Hyogo Prefecture, Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speech by the representative of Japanese delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Closing address by Mr. Jailani bin Rusni, the Director of Johor Education Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prize and souvenir giving ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Closing ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 7</td>
<td>Foster Child returning ceremony to the Johor Educational Department/Education Ministry of Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

previous experience had shown that conducting ‘in-situ interviews’ is problematic, given the hectic nature of the pre-arranged itinerary, because tracking facilitated the analysis of trip satisfaction and the post-visit tourist image, and because it was relatively easily carried out and inexpensive through collaborating with the various schools and associations in Japan which participate in the homestay programme.

Analysis and Results

The SERVQUAL technique was used to analyse the gaps between expectations and satisfaction levels in terms of the service quality at the homestay sites visited by the tourists. Both the expectations and satisfaction levels were rated using a 5-point Likert scale according to 5 dimensions (Table 16.4), namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility.

In terms of reliability, the homestays were rated satisfactorily (Gap = 0.26), with enthusiasm (0.33) scoring better than organisation (0.18). This means that while the guests were very impressed with the enthusiasm shown by the hosts, there is still room for improvement in terms of their organisation. The responsiveness dimension was also well rated by the respondents (0.52), with kindness being rated very highly (0.66), followed by responsible (0.38). This is a clear indication that there was genuine warmth and caring attitude towards the guests which they could feel and appreciate. Likewise, in the assurance dimension, attributes such as courteousness (0.36), friendliness (0.32) and concern for guests (0.32) were well rated. However, the overall assurance dimension was marked down (0.28) by cultural exchange and tolerance (0.11) which may reflect the effect of having little time to spend with the adopted family.

In terms of empathy aspects, as with cultural exchange and tolerance, the respondents did not rate cultural bonding too favourably (0.01). This is an area of concern as the homestay programme is often associated with cultural exchange and bonding. In addition, it may confirm the view of the specialist tour operators interviewed that the homestay programme and itinerary have become too rigid, hectic and commercialised, leaving little time for the guests to bond with the hosts. Overall, the attributes associated with the tangible dimension were rated poorly (0.05). The most positive attribute was the fact that local food was served (0.35) followed by the good taste of the food (0.25). In contrast, the cleanliness and hygiene of the meals served were rated poorly (−0.2). In relation to this, the cleanliness and hygiene of facilities such as toilets had the least favourable rating (−0.26). The rating of cultural experience was only satisfactory (0.09) and authenticity was singled out as an attribute that respondents were disappointed with (−0.19). Other tangible attributes that were not rated favourably were safety of journey (−0.18), smoothness of journey (−0.12) and accessibility (−0.09).

In addition to the SERVQUAL technique, the open-ended questions revealed the following findings: more than one third of the respondents (36 per cent) stated that the experience they expected from their visit or stay was to learn and understand other cultures, followed by the wish to experience a different way of life from Japan (14.6 per cent), to get to know their adoptive family (13.7 per cent) and to learn English (8.4 per cent) (Table 16.5).
Table 16.4: Japanese youths’ expectations and satisfaction at homestays in Malaysia (SERVQUAL dimension).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>GAP df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Me</td>
<td>Sd</td>
<td>Se</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability dimension 0.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.0505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.0473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness dimension 0.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.0526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.0495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance dimension 0.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.0521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for guest</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.0507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courteous</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.0508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural exchange and tolerance</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.0478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy Dimension 0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural bonding</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.0484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangibles dimension 0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleanliness/hygiene</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Easy access</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety of journey</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoothness of journey</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve local food</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleanliness/hygiene</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good taste</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural entertainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness of experience</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyable</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness of experience</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyable</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Me, expectation mean; Ms, satisfaction mean; Sd, std. deviation; Se, std. error mean; df, total.

Table 16.5: Tourist experience expected from homestays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tourist experience</th>
<th>(^aN = 550)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(^bn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to speak and communicate in English language</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience Islamic life-style</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience rural setting</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn and understand different cultures</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to speak and communicate in Malay</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience local cuisine</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange opinion with local community/host family</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A different way of life from Japan</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly shopping environment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get to know and mix with villagers/adopted family</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n)</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Fieldwork (2005).*

\(^aN\), total respondents.

\(^bn\), number of respondents that answered this question.

---

Table 16.6: Most memorable and most unpleasant aspects of the homestay experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most memorable</th>
<th>Most unpleasant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delicious food such as curry</td>
<td>Little time for interaction with host family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots of food and fruits such as <em>durians, rambutans,</em> etc</td>
<td>Communication problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using fingers to eat/enjoy meal</td>
<td>Short time period and no free time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly and honest hosts</td>
<td>Smelly toilets and bad hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large gardens and houses</td>
<td>Hot weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning a bit of Malay language</td>
<td>A lot of flies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going through photo album</td>
<td>Having to wear uniform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to the night market</td>
<td>Irregular meal time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing with children</td>
<td>Little time to walk about alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packing sweets</td>
<td>Could not practise English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural ambiance</td>
<td>No chance to go to the sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life of luxury</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to <em>kerepek</em> factories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning traditional games such as <em>lompat tali, congkak, gasing</em> etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing traditional clothes — wedding costumes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Fieldwork (2005).*
Qualitative Evaluation of Tourist Experience at Homestays

In response to the open-ended questions, the respondents regarded the rural way of life, local food and bonding with the adoptive family as the most memorable aspects of their stay (Table 16.6). Even mundane ‘family’ activities such as going through the family album, packing sweets and going to the night market were memorable to them. Interestingly, wearing traditional clothes and costumes (such as wedding costumes) were also memorable. In contrast, there were few fond memories of the visits to the SMEs or the tree-planting ceremony with the exception of visits to kerepek (potato crisp) factories.

The most unpleasant aspects of their trip were mainly centred on the unhygienic condition of the toilets and communication problems. It is also interesting to note their lament regarding the lack of time spent with the adoptive family, the lack of free time for the visitors to wander about away from their group and the regimented nature of their trip (such as having to wear uniforms).

Major Findings and Discussion

Ever since the inception of the contemporary homestay concept in Malaysia in the early 1990s, Japanese youths have been the main market segment. However, the relationship between Japanese youths and the homestay programme has been understudied. The above case studies have shed some light into this distinct phenomenon, and the major findings are summarised below.

In essence, the homestay programme has been developed along the lines of a quintessential Japanese Furusato, in which the ‘rustic simplicity’ of Malaysian villages and the agrarian way of life are central to the homestay experience. As such, the Malaysian homestay is viewed by the MONBUSHO as an appropriate setting for learning about foreign cultures without losing the focus on Furusato as the foundation of the ‘Japanese centre’. Consequently, specialist tour operators and the MHA have interpreted the homestay concept to suit the needs of MONBUSHO and Japanese schools. Central to the homestay programme are visits to theme farms, rural SMEs and communal activities to reflect the elements of the expected ‘rustic simplicity’. However, in the process of being shaped, the homestay concept — which appears to be grounded in the principles of alternative tourism (low density, local control, cultural exchange, etc.) — has become rigid, regimented and stereotyped, often lacking in spontaneity.

Both the quantitative and qualitative analysis showed that despite the heavy emphasis on the agrarian way of life as a basis for the creation of the ‘rustic simplicity’ image, what the youths found wanting was the limited time spent with their adoptive family. In this light, mundane activities such as going through the family album, playing with children, riding a bicycle with the family and having a picnic were regarded as memorable experiences. In contrast, there was little mention of the communal activities and visits to themed farms, SMEs, etc. Likewise, several homestay providers revealed that their adopted son/daughter would shed tears when put to bed or when the adoptive father/mother would pull up the blanket over the sleeping son/daughter on cold nights. The next morning the adopted son/daughter confided that they had felt moved by this small but meaningful gesture since their
own father never had the time to show his affection in the same way, given that they always came home late and most of the time not in a sober state.

Overall, a large proportion of the participants (65 per cent) were satisfied with their experience, which had lived up to their expectations. Nonetheless, a significant 30 per cent were not satisfied with the experience, reportedly due to the short time period and regimented itinerary. Despite this, about 80 per cent would recommend the homestay experience to their friends and relatives while 70 per cent indicated their willingness to revisit in the future. Although there is no data on the proportion of repeat visitors (with the exception of Desa Murni Homestay), many homestay providers reported that they still receive letters, postcards and phone calls from their adopted son/daughter and many took the trouble to fly all the way from Japan to attend family occasions such as weddings and even birthdays. However, there have been many cases in which the postcards started to arrive less regularly or ceased arriving because the adoptive family had not been writing back. In Relau Homestay, the coordinator has developed a novel way of mitigating this problem by giving out stamped postcards to the homestay providers to reply to the letters/postcards sent to them.

Conclusions

The homestay programme in Malaysia is gradually evolving into a mainstream tourism product that is being aggressively promoted by the government as a form of catalyst for revitalising the rural economy. Although variants of the homestay concept have been introduced, such as the kampung stay, the more successful homestay sites are still positioned to cater for the needs of Japanese youths. The MHA feels that Malaysian homestays are still not ready to receive large numbers of Western tourists, while their recent efforts in attracting youths from Korea have been less successful.

Japanese youths are expected to continue visiting homestay sites in Malaysia, given the symbiotic relationship between the hosts and the guests. However, there are already clear signals warning against the over-commercialisation of the homestay programme by tour operators. Moreover, new homestays are being established which are almost carbon copies of the Desa Murni model. This includes the regimented itinerary and stereotyped gimmicks such as the compulsory tree-planting ceremony, which is meant to encourage guests to revisit the kampung to see how tall their trees have grown. However, now that this gimmick — introduced by Desa Murni Homestay — has been copied by almost every homestay site in the country, it has lost its novelty.

Amidst the rapid growth in the number of homestays catering for Japanese youths, it is sad to reflect that real motivations for their visit have rarely been understood by policy makers and the tourism industry. Even Rae’s (2003) excellent deconstruction of the Japanese youth’s psyche has been unable to fully explain the reason for Japanese schools taking busloads of youths to Malaysian kampungs. While seeking Furusato in foreign lands may seem the valid reason from the perspective of the teachers and MONBUSHO, the cases studies have shown that the youths were pleasantly surprised by the attention and loving care from their adoptive families as a form of substitute for the father whom they seldom see due to the long working hours of ‘salarymen’ in Japan.
All in all, it was the empathy dimension of their trip that took participants by surprise, having expected merely a stay in a natural and pastoral setting. Not surprisingly, it was not the agrarian lifestyle or ‘rustic simplicity’ (Furusato) that they cherished most; instead, it was whatever little time they had with their adoptive families that they considered the most memorable aspect of their stay. This is reflected in their strong desire to get to know and mingle with the family, the emotional bonding while carrying out mundane family-based activities, the tearful and melodramatic farewell, the long and sentimental letters written in perfect Malay and the subsequent visits just to attend a family gathering before flying back to Japan.

As for the homestay providers, the income from the homestay programme has been marginal, although tour operators and the MHA have enjoyed high economic returns from it. Even so, all the homestay providers interviewed have not regretted participating in the programme, citing that they do not care about material gains but are more than happy and proud to ‘have friends and children from all over the world, notably from Japan’.

References


Old Tourists and New Tourists: Management Challenges for Bali’s Tourism Industry

Michael Hitchcock and I. Nyoman Darma Putra

Introduction

The Indonesian island of Bali was shaken by explosions on 12 October 2002, an event which became known as the ‘Bali Bomb’ in English or Bom Bali in Indonesian. There were in fact three bombs, which had exploded outside the American Consulate, Paddy’s Bar and the Sari nightclub, causing at least 202 casualties. The island experienced a dramatic fall in visitor numbers, which was compounded by the war in Iraq and the outbreak of SARS in Southeast Asia. The slump — which resumed after the second round of bombings in 1 October 2005 following a brief recovery — was only part of the picture, since what was also happening was a change in the profile of visitors to Bali. What this paper explores is how Balinese managers working in tourism-related businesses perceive this shift and are adapting to it.

Literature Review

Tourism analysts are generally of the view that international visitors are very concerned about their personal safety (Edgel, 1990) and that ‘...tourism can only thrive under peaceful conditions’ (Pizam & Mansfield, 1996, p. 2), though many accept that it may be impossible to isolate tourists from international turbulence (Hall & O’Sullivan, 1996). In recent history, two crises have impinged on tourists’ perceptions of security and on visitor arrivals to Indonesia: the Gulf War of 1991 (Hitchcock, King, & Parnwell, 1993) and the Asian Crisis of 1997–1998 (Hitchcock, 2001). As has been noted in a variety of cases (e.g. the Rome and Vienna airport attacks in 1985), terrorism is a real barrier to tourism expansion (Salah Wahab, 1996) since it not only reduces activity in the short term, but also relocates tourism.
away from the afflicted destination and has an impact on long-term investment. There is an emerging literature of the impact of the bombings on Balinese society and Balinese cultural responses to the crisis (e.g. Couteau, 2003; Jenkins & Nyoman Catra, 2004; Vickers, 2006), and this chapter adds to this by addressing the management concerns of those working within the tourism sector. The chapter will also touch on a less well documented impact of terrorism on tourism, which is that not all tourists are equally deterred by strife and the activities of terrorists and that some may be prepared to take risks, especially if prices fall sufficiently to enable them to take advantage of a destination that hitherto would have been beyond their reach.

Methodology

The authors received a grant from the British Academy to investigate the impacts of the bombings on Bali’s economy and society, and part of their research involved interviewing managers of hotels and restaurants and others concerned with tourism in the southern Balinese resorts of Kuta, Sanur and Nusa Dua. The respondents reported sharp falls in business, as might be expected, but they were also keen to talk about another phenomenon: the change in the countries of origin of the guests who were starting to visit Bali after the collapse in prices that followed the turbulence. The visitors who were staying away — the so-called ‘old tourists’ — were usually defined as European, Australian and Japanese, whereas those who were starting to arrive — the ‘new tourists’ — were predominantly of Asian origin (with the exception of the Japanese). Asian tourists had been coming to Bali for some time, but now the ‘new tourists’ were becoming more obvious and respondents wanted to talk about them.

The research was carried out in two main segments of about a month’s duration in July 2003 and July 2004, though work continued intermittently in between. There was also a follow-up series of interviews in March and November 2006 to take into account the impacts of the bombings of 2005. In view of the sensitivity of the issues raised it was not possible to administer a questionnaire, and all informants remain anonymous. The approach used involved semi-structured interviews ($n = 34$), usually in the informant’s office, with Balinese tourism officials, the leaders of Indonesian trade associations and general managers of hotels. There were no language barriers since one of the authors is Balinese and both researchers speak and read English and Bahasa Indonesia, the widely spoken national language. The authors also attended workshops designed to assist the recovery of Bali’s tourism industry, which were attended by representatives of local government, industry, NGOs, academia and the media. The former Minister of Culture and Tourism, I. Gde Ardika, has described these constituencies as the main stakeholders in Bali’s tourism industry (Ardika, 2000).

The authors also referred to the local media, especially the island’s most popular newspaper, the Bali Post, which is read by comparatively well-educated Balinese. The newspaper cannot be said to be genuinely representative of all stakeholders on the island, but it does serve as a valuable record of the dates of events and the activities of officialdom and provides insights into the perspectives of Bali’s intelligentsia, whom Picard (1997) has defined as personnel of the provincial government, academics, journalists,
bureaucrats, technocrats, entrepreneurs and professionals. They do not necessarily all share the same opinions, but they do tend to live in and around the capital, Denpasar, mediating between the village and the state by speaking on behalf of the Balinese to Jakarta, and by conveying the national capital’s ruling to the province. Through their actions they simultaneously affirm their Balinese identity and Bali’s integration into the Indonesian state (Picard, 1997, p. 207).

Recent and Future Development

There is no doubt that the Bali attacks have slowed the development of tourism, and at the same time they have provided unprecedented challenges for tourism stakeholders — and especially managers — to cope with business realities. In the past, much of the promotion and marketing for Bali had been done by external agencies such as international hotel chains and airlines, while local hoteliers and investors were too busy with managing their investment and with property maintenance and refurbishment. Since the attacks, however, Bali’s hoteliers and other stakeholders have been forced actively and progressively to ‘pick up the ball’ by going out to market their businesses. The need to increase security, the quality of services and products and other issues were discussed in a number of tourism workshops in order to ensure that Bali remained attractive and competitive in the international market. The Bali Tourism Board (BTB), which represents the private sector and was established just before the bombings, has had to intensify its work to ensure Bali’s recovery as quickly as possible. Despite internal friction among BTB’s board members, this organization in its infant stage was able to mobilize and achieve a great deal of promotion throughout 2006, after the second bombings. Granted Rp. 67 billion (US$7.3 million) by the central government and under the coordination of BTB, Bali’s tourism stakeholders went to many of the countries in Asia and Europe and to Australia for a promotion labelled ‘Bali is My Life’, which included performances by a Balinese dance troupe. It was the first time that the Balinese had promoted their own island overseas on a large scale, since in the past it had mostly been carried out by outsiders.

Despite a significant drop in the number of tourists coming to Bali after the bombings, the myth of ‘magical Bali’ held good. Within a relatively short period of time, visitor arrival figures increased steadily and returned to the previous number of over one million per year. As Table 17.1 shows, Bali not only attracts tourists from countries in the region, such as other parts of Asia and Australia, but also continues successfully to lure the European market. One-third of its 15 main markets are European (Germany, France, the Netherlands, the UK and Switzerland). Italy, Russia and Spain are also close to the main markets level. Viewing this, it can be argued that Bali remains attractive not only because of its ‘magic’, but because it already had a solid reputation on the world tourism circuit.

The island continues to create new markets, with new tourists arriving either on their own initiative or via external agencies. A Middle Eastern airline, Qatar Air, began flights to Bali via the Indian city of Chennai (formerly Madras) in March 2007, and will likely provide a new market. It will increase the seat capacity already provided by other Asian airlines such as Brunei Air, Thai Air, Malaysia Airlines and Singapore Airlines and further connect Bali with the Middle East, Europe and the United States. It can be argued that to

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<tr>
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<td>Japan</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>296,282</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>301,380</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>185,751</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>326,397</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>310,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+/- %</td>
<td></td>
<td>-18.22</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td></td>
<td>-38.37</td>
<td></td>
<td>75.72</td>
<td></td>
<td>-4.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>238,857</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>183,561</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>139,018</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>267,520</td>
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<tr>
<td>+/- %</td>
<td></td>
<td>-23.15</td>
<td></td>
<td>-24.27</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>92.44</td>
<td></td>
<td>-6.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South of Korea</td>
<td>IX</td>
<td>35,634</td>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>41,036</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>46,365</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>80,273</td>
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<td>+/- %</td>
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<td>15.16</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>73.13</td>
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<td>-2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>116,323</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>96,806</td>
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help strengthen their position on the world tourism circuit, Balinese managers need to adjust their business strategy to cope with the new atmosphere created by the arrival of the new tourists. For instance, the traditional cultural attractions of Bali should be complemented with broadband facilities to answer tourists’ needs for communication while on holiday.

Perceptions of Changing Economic Behaviour

In the research, the respondents usually differentiated the ‘new tourists’ from the old in terms of their behaviour — especially their economic behaviour — and commonly used their experiences of ‘old tourists’ as the starting point for comparison. These managers provided pithy portrayals of the changes in behaviour from a business point of view, and there was a great deal of consistency. It was clearly a reality that they shared, and the majority had to adapt the way they ran their businesses to take these changes into account. For some the changes were painful and they clearly looked back on the pre-bombings era with a sense of nostalgia, but the majority were more circumspect and were realistic about the need to adjust to these new visitors, who are by no means homogenous.

The general feeling was that the ‘old tourists’ comprised Japanese, Australians and Europeans, whereas the ‘new’ are the Taiwanese, Chinese, Koreans, Malaysians and Indonesians; though the respondents also pointed out that they were not necessarily all that new since these countries had been supplied tourists well before the bombings. It is just that their numbers had risen sufficiently for managers to have to take their different characteristics more seriously into account. The ‘new’, moreover, were not limited to Asians since many of the managers had become aware of a different kind of German who had started sojourning in Bali, and whose numbers had swelled as prices fell in the wake of the bombings. This new category of Germans seemed to include significant numbers of people — often in their late forties and older — from the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany). This is a group that the respondents found most puzzling. They do not associate with the other Germans and Europeans, and are characterized as renting cheap properties in urban Denpasar for long periods. They are known to be careful with money and to eat at local food stalls. Many are thought to be on welfare or pensioners on a budget. There are no statistics to back this perception up, however; since they are all now German citizens, it is not possible to disaggregate them from German visitors in general.

One of the national groupings that managers often use as a baseline for comparison is the Japanese. Japanese tourists began to arrive Bali in significant numbers in the early 1980s, and their numbers rose until the mid-1990s. The national air carriers of both countries — Garuda Indonesia and Japan Airlines (JAL) — provided a high frequency service between Japan and Bali, followed by another Japanese airlines company, All Nippon Airways (ANA). The flights became so frequent that they amounted almost to a daily service, providing Japanese tourists with a great deal of choice and flexibility. Such was the growth that Japanese-managed tour operations and hotels, such as Nikko Hotel and the Imperial, and Japan Travel Bureaux (JTB), opened for business in Bali. Local hotels also tried to cater to this growing market by providing special facilities in
hotels, notably Japanese-style bathrooms and spas. Virtually all the hotels in possession of a star rating tried to obtain a share of the Japanese trade. But following outbreaks of cholera in 1994 and 1997, which Japanese tourists were believed to have contracted in Bali, the number of Japanese arrivals fell, causing severe problems. The problem was resolved with a speedy promotional campaign by the Bali Tourism Authority (the public sector body responsible for tourism) with strong support from the airlines, hotels, tours operators and Japanese expatriates doing business in Bali.

Japanese tourists generally take shorter holidays than other nationalities, but are popular with their hosts for making extensive use of their hotels’ facilities despite their short length of stay. They like to take full-day group tours visiting Bali’s cultural heritage sites and temples. The World Heritage Site of Borobudur near Yogyakarta (Central Java) is also a favourite place to visit from Bali; indeed a full-day tour by air transfer from Bali to Yogya features as one of the main items on Japanese tour itineraries.

According to the survey respondents, the Japanese are said to value security and hygiene, and are politely demanding if facilities are not up to standard. They like to eat in the hotel restaurants and want to try local dishes, providing there are also Japanese options. The young, in particular, enjoy sporting activities (e.g. scuba diving, white-water rafting), whereas older age groups often opt for cultural activities and are particularly interested in local dances and festivals. Also popular with Japanese tourists are golf, marathon running and gate ball (a game invented in Japan in 1947 that resembles croquet). The game requires little space and equipment and was introduced by Japanese tourists to Bali, where it became popular with the locals. In the mid-1990s the Nittoh Bali Marathon was held for a couple of years and hundreds of Japanese tourists of a wide range of age groups participated.

The Japanese are widely praised for their politeness and cultural sensitivity, and it is noted that they tip generously and do not haggle over bills. They are also enthusiastic and sometimes adventurous shoppers, deliberately seeking out quality Indonesian goods. Many Balinese working in tourism can muster a few words in Japanese and there are some who speak the language with fluency. Early Balinese tour guides for Japanese tourists were ‘old generation teachers’ who learned the language during the early 1940s, when Japan occupied Indonesia. Since then, many new guides have been learning Japanese with great enthusiasm because working for Japanese tourists is equated with prosperity. Shop signs and tourism leaflets are also provided in Japanese. Hotel doctors often turn out to be proficient linguists because patients are often fearful of using a second language in case they inadvertently provide physicians with incorrect information. Many managers are pleasantly surprised to find that, although the Japanese often do not speak an international language such as English, many try to learn Indonesian phrases, notably courteous terms such as *terima kasih* (‘thank you’).

The Japanese tourism experience has also changed over time, with fewer of them taking pre-arranged tours and tightly scheduled holidays. In the past they liked to travel in relatively large groups, but by the mid-1990s the young were increasingly travelling in smaller groups or on their own and had come to resemble Western tourists. Individual Japanese tourists became less interested in purchasing pre-arranged tours, preferring to travel with more flexible itineraries, often renting cars or chartering taxis. Many arrived with no fixed plans, often opting to do nothing but relax and read by their hotel poolsides. The Japanese
also proved to be reliable tourists and — unlike the Americans and Europeans — remained undeterred by the Gulf War in 1991, possibly because their air routes were far away from the source of the conflict.

Another group who often served as a baseline for comparison are the Australians, who until the bombings dominated the top six groups of arrivals by nationality (although by September 2006 it was the Japanese who occupied the top slot with 28,419 arrivals, compared with the Australians in second place with 14,556 — BTB, 2006). Undoubtedly popular with their Balinese hosts, the Australians are often gently mocked for their lack of cultural sensitivity and cause much amusement with some of their habits, such as walking down main roads in urban areas without shirts. Whether the culprits are invariably Australian remains unknown, but it is a stereotype that is associated with them. Australians are perceived as generally not as interested in shopping as the Japanese, though they do not rule it out, and they are known for their enthusiasm for sports such as surfing, white-water rafting and mountain biking. They are also known locally for their love of nightlife and their penchant for beer. As one respondent opined: ‘they are easy to please — give them beer!’

Australian visitors may be the subject of a bit of light-hearted stereotyping, but respondents are quick to point out how much they appreciate their Australian visitors and how friendly and generous they are. Some commented on the fact that Australians have become increasingly familiar with Indonesian cooking traditions and that some have endeavoured to learn Indonesian. A favourite among Australian tourists is a Balinese cooking class in Ubud, which is run by an Australian woman and her Balinese husband and has received a great deal of media coverage. Also popular with Australians are shopping in traditional markets and lessons in traditional culture, notably local dance and instruction in playing the instruments of the gamelan orchestra. The latter activities mostly take place in the environs of Ubud and are attractive to students and more mature Australians alike.

The Australian market has been the hardest hit since the 2005 Bali bombings, with arrivals dropping by 50 per cent in 2006 as compared with the previous year. This is understandable given the insecurity felt by Australian travellers and the widely held view that they were specifically being targeted, but as at least one analyst has argued that travelling to London was ‘riskier’ than travelling to Bali (Allard, 2006). The collapse in the Australian market had severe repercussions for airlines and tour operators in both Australia and Indonesia, causing the Bali-based company Air Paradise International to suspend its service at the end of 2005 and Garuda Indonesia to cut more than 35 per cent of its services between Bali and Australia. Both Balinese tourism stakeholders and Australian companies have tried to win back the Australian market, and towards the end of 2006 an Australian advertisement showed Asian and European tourists continuing to visit Bali, but not Australians. The advertisement copy mimicked the catch-phrase used to attract British visitors to Australia — ‘where the bloody hell are you?’ — as ‘Aussie, where the Bali are ya?’ and featured phrases uttered by a fictional Balinese tour guide, K’tut, such as ‘Hey look! The Japanese are surfing your bloody waves’, ‘The Italians are drinking your bloody beer’ and ‘The Germans are laughing in your bloody pool bars’ (dressed in lederhosen, of course) (AAP, 2006).

The advertisement captures the flavour of the changing market, with the fictional tour guide representing the local tourism industry desperate for Australians to return. The campaign
to woo back Australians has received official support, with Bali’s former head of tourism, Bagus Sudibya, saying that ‘our friends’, the Australians, should support Bali in the war against terrorism by showing that they had not been scared off by the bombers. Sudibya also added that as a ‘traditional’ market, the Australians would doubtless return in the near future, but while they continued to stay away they had no choice but to fill rooms with visitors from the emerging markets of China, Russia, India and other parts of Europe. India for instance has an increasing percentage of affluent people, and the religious and cultural affinity between Bali and India has been an additional encouragement for Indians to come to the island. The Oberoi hotel chain (an Indian company) and other international chains have played significant part in grabbing the Indian market. Indian tourists normally travel to Bali via Kuala Lumpur or Singapore, which provide a greater flight frequency and make it easier for them to plan their holiday. Sudibya also pointed out that China was becoming the largest world market and that Bali should not hesitate to claim a share of it.

Another grouping popular with local managers are the West Europeans. Like the Japanese, they are said to be interested in cultural pursuits and willing to take tours. They are seen as economically valuable guests, partly because they are willing to eat in hotel restaurants and are interested in trying local dishes. They also make use of other hotel services (e.g. massage, hairdressers) rather than accessing them outside the hotel. The French in particular are characterized as experienced tourists and are believed to know the value of things (i.e. not quibbling about the prices of high value goods and services). In the early 1990s, UTA French Airlines ran a service between Paris, Singapore, Bali and Noumea which contributed significantly to the rise in French tourists, but with the reduction in the number of direct flights, the French and other European markets have also declined. (Having said this, the decline in French tourists may be short-lived since the number of French tourists coming to Bali had been showing a long-term increase, possibly because of a specific French interest in Balinese culture.)

The so-called new tourists who are most evident are the Koreans, who represented in 2006 the fifth largest number of arrivals. They have been visiting Bali for many years, but are regarded as somewhat new in the sense of not having generations of experience as tourists. They also came in for a surprising amount of criticism because of their tendency to look for bargains and their unwillingness to spend more in their hotels other than the basic cost of staying there. They are said to like eating at local food stalls, which Balinese managers interpret as a cost-saving strategy, but could well be something they simply enjoy since eating al fresco is popular in Korea. Most respondents opined that Koreans were not as interested in cultural pursuits as the Japanese, and there was no mention of attempts to speak Indonesian. Some Balinese managers are baffled by their habit of saying that if they had complained about something they should not pay for it, and thus complaints are seen as a strategy to reduce costs. Given their lack of experience in dealing with Koreans as opposed to the Japanese, it is possible that the Balinese staff in hotels and other facilities have simply not as yet become as good as interpreting their true intentions as they have with the Japanese. Hardly any Balinese have yet learned much Korean and this may further hinder understanding.

The Taiwanese, like the Koreans, are also the subject of a certain amount of criticism. They are widely regarded as inexperienced tourists who do not yet know the value of things. They are believed to be fond of shopping in supermarkets and not buying hotel products.
They are not thought of as being especially interested in local food, but they enjoy eating at local food stalls, which is again something with which they would be familiar in Taiwan. They are believed not to be especially interested in cultural attractions but are willing to take tours. Again, it may be linguistic barriers that prevent effective communication with the Taiwanese since many speak a combination of Taiwanese (a variant of Hokkien) and Mandarin, or Hakka and Mandarin, languages with which the Balinese are not especially familiar.

One group with whom there is no language barrier is the Malaysians, since most speak English (widely spoken in South Bali), as well as Malay, which is closely related to Indonesian. Malaysians, however, are perceived as being in the less economically valuable ‘new’ category and are regarded as intrepid bargain hunters. They are familiar with local food, which is similar to the food available back home, but like the Koreans and the Taiwanese shun hotel restaurants in favour of roadside food stalls, which again is what they would be used to back home. Malays — who physically resemble Indonesians — stand accused of pretending to be Indonesians and trying to sneak into attractions at Indonesian prices, though this may be an assumption about an economic strategy that could in theory be open to them. The decision by Malaysia Airlines to make Kuala Lumpur a hub servicing Europe, America and the rest of Asia, including Bali, has made it easier for Malaysian tourists to visit Bali.

Perhaps some of the most surprising comments are about the Chinese, given that these visitors have been the subject of press coverage elsewhere in South-East Asia on account of some of their culturally insensitive habits, such as spitting in public places. Newspapers in Thailand have, for example commented on the Chinese habit of partly undressing in public by rolling up their trouser legs and stripping to their vests when encountering tropical climates for the first time. But in Bali the respondents were less familiar with these tourists and their views were less sharply defined. Visitors from Mainland China are sometimes described as smartly dressed, but careful with money. They do not appear to be interested in inexpensive souvenirs, but are thought to be more interested in cultural attractions than the Taiwanese. Some shopkeepers in Ubud, however, expressed dismay at the Chinese tendency to bargain hard for souvenirs, and because few Balinese speak Chinese many of the guiding jobs went to the Indonesians of Chinese ethnicity or to Chinese tour leaders accompanying groups from China. In recognition of the growing importance of Chinese tourists, who often visit in large numbers around the Chinese New Year in February, Bali’s tour guiding associations have encouraged their members to learn Chinese.

Perhaps the most heavily criticized tourists are domestic ones, who are mainly identified as Jakartan. They are believed mainly to stay in cheap hotels and eat at inexpensive outlets, and they drive retailers ‘crazy’ by investigating products in detail but not buying them. The young are believed to like clubbing and the introduction of entrance fees for ‘orang lokal’ (local people), i.e. for Indonesians only, is justified on the grounds that they do not drink much, unlike the Europeans and Australians. There are rumours of Indonesians having an interest in visiting brothels, but since so few of them stay in mainstream hotels the respondents in this study were unable to verify these claims. Some Jakartans are believed to take a keen interest in Bali’s cultural attractions, possibly because of their shared historical connections with the Balinese, and partly because of the extensive coverage given to Bali in the Indonesian media.
It is worth mentioning the existence of high-spending domestic ‘incentive’ tourists who come to Bali with support from either the government or their respective companies. As they are on expenses they are willing to stay in the more expensive hotels, to eat out in upmarket restaurants, to sign up for tours and cruises and to play golf. Many of these domestic tourists are of the MICE type, often coming to Bali to attend conferences and involving professionals such as doctors who are financed by pharmaceutical companies. The number of domestic tourists is difficult to ascertain since their arrival is not logged at the airport or harbours. It is often assumed by Bali’s tourism authorities that domestic arrivals were more than double the number of international arrivals and thus a recorded influx of 1.2 million of the latter meant at least 2.4 million domestic arrivals. After the bombings of 2002 the Indonesian government encouraged its ministries and departments to hold meetings and conferences in Bali to help restore confidence, rationalising the cost on the grounds of helping the recovery.

**Conclusion**

Clearly, tourism sector managers have had to adapt fairly rapidly to changes in their customer base, and it would appear that these adjustments are being carried out on a fairly *ad hoc* and trial and error basis. It takes time to understand the needs of the relatively new arrivals, and it possible that they may be less economically valuable than their older, established customers. It is also possible that the economic value of these ‘new’ tourists may increase in the long term as the economies where they originate grow and they become more knowledgeable about what Bali has to offer, but for the time being they remain a source of some frustration for Balinese working in tourism. Homegrown tourists may come in for slightly more criticism than the others precisely because they are more familiar to the Balinese, who may thus feel less shy about voicing their opinions about them. Given that many are from Java and mainly Jakarta, there may also be a touch of rivalry in these comments. Trial and error learning is important, but given the need to gain a full understanding of one’s customer base, it would appear that there is a need for more research into the changing Asian character of tourism. A failure to understand the real reasons behind visitors’ actions and behaviour may lead to stereotyping, which is not a good basis for commercial decisions.

The tendency of managers to adopt ‘copycat’ strategies has sometimes added to the problems of adapting to the new markets. In the mid-1990s, for example when the Japanese market was growing seemingly without limit, almost all the star-rated hotels tried to get into this market by adapting their hotel facilities to the needs of Japanese tourists. It was not long, however, before managers starting realising that some Western tourists felt uncomfortable in hotels dominated by Japanese tourists, leading to some of them losing their Western clientele. A foreseeable growth in Middle Eastern visitors, occasioned by the Qatar Airways decision to fly to Bali, has caused some confusion among hoteliers. As with the experience of the Japanese, should they adapt their facilities to suit these new guests through the provision, for example of *halal* food — or should they continue to focus on their European and growing Asian markets? Hotels already used to handling the domestic and Malaysian markets or those such as the Nusa Dua Beach Hotel, which is owned by the
Sultan of Brunei Darrussalam, have no problem in coping with Middle Eastern market as they already equipped with halal restaurants.

As Bali’s tourism market continues to diversify, its hoteliers and other tourism business managers have to grapple with the question of whether it makes economic sense to provide specific services for different market segments or offer something more general that might not suit anybody. There are also worries about the long-term future of services with a specifically Balinese character — such as gamelan lessons — which might not prove to be as popular as before in the increasingly diverse and competitive market of the 21st century.

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References


Chapter 18

The Development of Tourism in French Colonial Vietnam, 1918–1940

Erich DeWald

Introduction

The period between the two World Wars was a turning point for the travel cultures of Vietnam. It was not simply the advent of new technologies that precipitated this watershed, though innovations in transportation and communication certainly enabled people — European and Asian alike — to travel differently than they had before. Political and economic changes in colonial Vietnamese society were also influential, as the changing fortunes of different social groups, such as the urban Vietnamese middle classes, gave new means and incentives to travel. Many new businesses emerged both to satisfy the demands of this growing number of travellers and to stimulate further expansion in the travel marketplace. This expanding commerce also helped to transform the world of travel, as entrepreneurs consciously sought to encourage the growth of a phenomenon not seen before in Vietnam, a phenomenon called ‘tourism’. This tourism was something new, it was something decidedly modern, and it was politically as well as economically beneficial.

The emergence of tourism between 1918 and 1940 both occasioned and reflected profound changes in the means and mentalities of travel. It emerged in a colonial Vietnamese society divided between Asians and Europeans, the poor and the rich, the traditional and the modern. These divisions fundamentally shaped Vietnamese society, and the tourism marketplace along with it: their influence can be seen in the political machinations of those principally involved in tourism, in the business of building the infrastructure for tourism and in the development of tourist sites. On the one hand, the travel marketplace adapted to new distinctions among travellers by expanding and by accommodating everyone according to their means and tastes. In another sense, however, these distinctions mirrored the prejudices of colonial society; the development of tourism also reflected the entrenchment of those prejudices, privileging the European, the rich and the modern.
Interested Parties

The historians of imperial France, Morlat (2001) and Furlough (2002) have written convincingly about the emergence of a Paris-centred imperial tourism lobby. This lobby, composed of metropolitan\(^1\) shipping companies (the *Messageries Maritimes* and the *Chargeurs Réunis*) and French tourism advocacy groups such as the *Touring-Club de France*, joined with the hotel industry in Indochina to form the first official tourism bodies. Inspired by developments in tourism in France and in other countries in Western Europe and North America, this grouping advocated the development of tourism in colonial Vietnam partly for their own business ends. An expanded imperial tourism scene would surely lead to greater profits, especially at a time when the metropolitan economy remained beset by problems. This lobby also vociferously advocated tourism’s development for what they saw as its promise both as a propaganda tool for France’s imperial mission in Indochina and as a catalyst for further economic development in the colony.

Leaders of the colonial administration also campaigned on behalf of tourism, believing as well in its tantalising potential. As early as 1917, the Governor General of Indochina, Albert Sarraut, had given his support to tourism’s development, and later, as Minister of Colonies, he incorporated this new sector into his plan for French empire (Sarraut, 1917, 1923). This plan outlined how tourism could assist in the French civilising mission in Indochina. First, it could be useful as an international propaganda tool, countering criticism of what some saw as the excesses of French rule in South-East Asia. Second, tourism could facilitate the economic growth of the colony by attracting wealthy tourists. As Governor General Henri Merlin reiterated in 1923:

> the tourist who visits the Far East is particularly interesting to attract and retain, not only because of the money he spends but also because he doubles as a capitalist capable of being interested in the [colony’s] economic development (Gouverneur Général de l’Indochine, 1923).

The metropolitan tourism lobby was in agreement with these governing officials. The tourists most worthy of their attention were international — especially Anglo-Saxon — tourists. Not only were they considered the most capable of helping achieve the public relations and development results that tourism promised, they were also most likely to transform the tourism trade into a growing and profitable affair. Attracting these people to Indochina — and providing them with a satisfying experience once there — was the abiding concern. The tourism advocate Rondet-Saint (1916) had already diagnosed the problem; Indochina’s transportation, its hotels and its tourist attractions failed to meet expectations. They were not modern enough for the international tourist. According to Blaquière (1925), editor of the official tourism magazine, *Tourisme: Revue des Etudes Indochinoises de l’Automobilisme et du Tourisme*, the modern tourist demanded and even deserved comfort, ease and luxury. Officials and metropolitan business interests agreed: the tourism trade in

\(^1\)‘Metropolitan France’ at the time referred to the presumed centre of the French empire: that is France and its Mediterranean departments as opposed to the colonies, protectorates and territories located outside Europe.
Indochina had to attain these international standards if the potential for tourism was to be realised.

A consensus was thus achieved, one that concentrated on the development of an internationally orientated tourism marketplace. In 1923, a Central Tourism Office was formed. This body represented the voices of the metropolitan business lobby, as Furlough described, and it was headed by the Governor General himself. The Office advocated not only that international-standard amenities be constructed but also that these amenities required state assistance. Building a modern tourism trade demanded capital investment, which the metropolitan business lobby, still constrained by the lingering effects of the First World War (1914–1918), simply could not provide. Furthermore, state intervention in tourism would, of necessity, be long term, as it would take time to generate profitable tourism enterprises. Initial investment would have to be met with continued subsidy until the market could support large, modern tourism amenities such as luxury hotels and transportation (Raynal, 1923). Within the public meetings of the Central Tourism Committee, debates occurred about the amount of money the state channelled towards tourism or about the terms of contracts between the state and developers; the necessity of state intervention, however, went unquestioned (Contrat passé, 1920–1923; Cahier des charges, 1932).

Under this strategic consensus lay another, perhaps implicit, consensus that emerged through the official collaboration of the state tourism authority with metropolitan business interests. The work of constructing and managing the new international tourism facilities in Indochina fell primarily upon those who had joined forces with the colonial administration to form the colony’s tourism strategy. In other words, the metropolitan tourism lobby and their colonial offspring (the railways, automobile transportation companies, hotel firms) took the lion’s share of state assistance. This assistance comprised preferential contracts, long-term, low-interest loans and continued operational subsidy, all of which amounted to a considerable advantage in winning custom and expanding operations. The privileges offered these European-controlled enterprises reflected the racially bifurcated commercial scene in French Indochina, one where state policy combined with entrenched business practice to assist European business and hinder Asian enterprise and commercial development.

In Vietnam, many individuals entered the tourism trade without the direct or indirect support of the colonial tourism lobby. Some of them, like the hunting specialist A. Plas, were Europeans who succeeded in attracting international clientele without any direct state support. Most smaller ventures, however, did not find such success, offering transportation, accommodation and catering to travellers in direct competition with the larger enterprises supported by the state. These smaller enterprises did not possess the resources to compete effectively for the custom of international tourists. What is more, the prevailing wisdom about tourism’s cosmopolitanism and its modernity excluded most of these enterprises from the market for international tourists. First, such small enterprises were considered unable to run a business modern enough to meet the high standards of such international tourists (Blaquière, 1924; Rondet-Saint, 1916). Second, the priority was attracting and retaining the interest of international tourists, and achieving the broader goals of tourism — propaganda and economic development — took precedence over allowing small businesses to develop.

This left many businesses, especially Asian-run ones, to concentrate on the custom of other travellers, especially domestic tourists. As early as 1925, the committee of the
semi-official Syndicat d’Initiative Indochinois (Tourism Promotion Board) observed the potential for growth in domestic tourism markets (Minute de la séance, 1925). The Board, however, continued to focus on the promise of the international tourism market, despite the continued and inescapable emergence of a strong domestic tourism scene. This left considerable room for smaller businesses to cater to domestic tourists. The number of such businesses publicising their services through advertising in Vietnamese and French newspapers and magazines gradually rose, reflecting not only the development of the publishing and advertising in Vietnam but also the broader growth of the domestic tourism market. Few, at first, offered what could be called inclusive services such as package tours, instead only offering single-item services (e.g. car hire or train ticket sales) and leaving the tourist to complete their travel needs. By the late 1930s, however, businesses such as the Saigon-based tour operator HôVan Lang marketed inclusive tours to Hue and Hanoi, offering the same tours several times a year from 1938 (Đi Huế, Hà Nội, Hải Phòng, Hongay, Vinh Hạ Long, 1938; Du lịch, 1939). Businesses such as Lang’s received no direct and very little indirect support from the state tourism lobby, yet they all succeeded in profiting from developments in the tourism market.

Tourism Infrastructure

Whether big or small, European or Asian, state-financed or private, all the enterprises that entered the tourism marketplace operated within a handful of business sectors, chief among them being transportation and accommodation. Goscha (1996) has briefly detailed the means of transport that enabled the movement of travellers into, around and out of French Indochina. The French imperial shipping lines, principally the Messageries Maritimes and the Chargeurs Réunis, brought the majority of visitors to Vietnam, but they were complemented by other international shipping firms such as the Dutch Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPN) and the States Steamship Company. International tour operators such as the Touring-Club de France, Thomas Cook and the San Francisco-based Raymond & Whitcomb often managed package tours arriving on these steamships. By the mid-1930s, regular weekly air services with Air Asie and Imperial Airways supplemented these surface connections. In addition to these air and sea links, there existed many smaller Asian owned and operated sea craft which doubtless brought business travellers and perhaps some leisure tourists to Vietnam.

Some movement within Vietnam also remained water-borne; the larger ports of Saigon, Đà Nẵng and Hải Phòng offered services to many smaller coastal ports. It was the rail and road companies, however, that provided the bulk of internal transportation for tourists. The railway, the Transindochnois, and the state-financed railway companies offered discounted and promotional tickets for leisure travellers in the 1930s, of which Vietnamese and European holidaymakers took advantage. Discounts were also on offer for Vietnamese tourists travelling between the urban destinations of Hanoi, Hue and Saigon and also those going to Đà Lạt from Saigon (Rapport sur le tourisme, 1935).

While the railway was heavily utilised, the roads were also highly popular and arguably more desirable. The colonial state invested great resources (not least indigenous labour)
in a vast network of macadamised and unsealed roads that crisscrossed Indochina. In Vietnam, this project continued throughout the 1930s as secondary roads were built throughout the central highlands. At the same time that the railways suffered from a loss of public interest, travel by road acquired an image of modernity and freedom (del Testa, 2001; 2005). Numerous car companies provided regular (if not always salubrious) services along the road network. Some companies offered hire cars for tourists, while others simply provided regular coach services. The largest and most notorious of these companies, the Société de Transport Automobile du Centre-Annam (STACA), was a large, state-financed operation that provided scheduled car services along the length of central Vietnam. The STACA was an exception; in general, the transport companies were small outfits with only a handful of automobiles and few resources which were predominantly owned by Vietnamese, Chinese and south Asian businessmen. One such company was owned by Pham Van Phi. With a handful of coaches, Phi’s business operated in central Vietnam on a route between Vinh and Đông Hà. Initially subsidised, Phi eventually lost his state support when the STACA lobbied — successfully — to have the subsidy transferred from Phi to the STACA (Réclamation de STACA, 1923). Arguably hindering the development of a competitive transportation market, such practices most certainly marginalised small Asian enterprises.

The hotel business was a similarly bifurcated area of activity, again reflecting the prevailing divisions that affected tourism. There was, however, one significant difference. While small transportation enterprises, especially those owned and operated by Asians, were politically marginalised, would-be Asian hotelkeepers were culturally excluded by an implicit corollary of the state’s tourism agenda which said, in effect, that hotels needed to meet the standards of modern tourism. The implication was that these standards — watchwords were ‘clean’, ‘comfortable’ and ‘easy’ — could only consistently be delivered by European (preferably French) hotelkeepers and management (Cahier des charges, 1932; Jennings, 2003). This prejudice was confirmed by guidebooks and published travel accounts in Vietnamese, French and English that always recommended Asian-run hotels as the accommodation of last resort (for example Bùi, 1922; Cadière, 1921; Madrolle, 1930). This prejudice certainly made survival in the hotel trade difficult for Asian hotelkeepers, as the frequent changes in the hotel listings in these guidebooks suggest. Such difficulties were not, however, unknown even to the managers of state-financed hotels and guesthouses. Not only did ‘modern’ accommodation require both significant capital and cash flow, but revenues during the tourist season were also scarcely substantial enough to cover the costs of maintenance during the low season (Procès-verbal du comité, 1932). According to the managers of state-financed hotels at Đà Lạt, these reasons explained their failure to fulfil the contracts between themselves and the state; they also justified their frequent demands for more subsidy or extended repayment terms for state loans. As Jennings (2003) has described, one of these hotels, the grand Langbian Palace at Đà Lạt, exemplifies the history of state-financed hotel businesses in its financial and management difficulties. Intended to showcase Đà Lạt as an international hill station offering the most modern of comforts, its cost and perennial losses led several contractors to break the terms of their agreement with the colonial government, and one company intimately connected to the tourism lobby (the highly capitalised Société anonyme des Grands Hôtels


indochinois) even went bankrupt largely as a result of the mismanagement and grandiosity of this hotel.

The services offered both by some other state-financed hotel businesses and many private accommodation enterprises contrasted markedly with the Langbian scandal. While their hotels were far from modest, Morin Frères et Compagnie operated several conspicuously stylish and modern hotels in central Vietnam. While they did receive state subsidies, the Morins continually made a profit and relied less and less on state aid (Direction des Affaires économiques et administratives, 1932). In addition, small-scale entrepreneurs — many of them Vietnamese and Chinese — offered modest accommodation for travellers, and numerous other guesthouses provided more basic places to sleep and eat. Some fared better than others; they all, however, relied heavily on a domestic tourism market that continued to expand in a marketplace that was officially focused on the promotion of a loss-making international tourism sector.

Taken together, the provision of transport and accommodation for tourists offered significant services in a bifurcated and state-directed market. Active state participation was driven by a particular vision of what tourism should be, whom it should attract and how it should provide services. This vision, in turn, demanded the construction of an expensive and risky tourism infrastructure. Finally, achieving the state’s tourism infrastructure demanded that the infrastructure be owned and managed by Europeans in order to attract a modern, international and predominantly Western clientele. This racial prejudice dominated decision-making in the hotel trade and cast a blight on the transportation sector where French interests maintained their position to the detriment of Asian entrepreneurs.

Tourism Sites

The competition, however weak, between different tourism operators who were both European and Asian, both modern and not, occurred in a tourist landscape which would be familiar to the 21st century tourist in Vietnam. Transport companies and hotelkeepers big and small competed for business at the same destinations, many of which first attracted significant numbers of tourists during the two decades after 1918 (see Figure 18.1). The potential of many sites for natural or historical tourism had already been identified before 1918; it is in the years after this, however, that many attractions were first actively developed and realised as resources.

In the case of historical or heritage tourism, many of the destinations of interest to tourists had long received substantial numbers of visitors. Places such as the Perfume Pagoda (Chùa Hương) in Hà Tây province, the Hùng Vương temple (Đền Hùng Vương) in Phú Thọ province, the La Vang cathedral in Quảng Trị province, the Phong Nha grottos in Quảng Bình province and the imperial tombs and citadel at Hue — all increasingly popular tourist destinations at the time — had been and continued to be active sites of ritual and ceremony. The continued use of these sites by the faithful complicated efforts by the colonial lobby to realise their tourism potential. Before the 1920s, for example access to many areas of the imperial tombs and the imperial citadel at Hue was restricted to high-ranking Vietnamese officials and foreign dignitaries who had obtained permission either directly from the imperial government at Hue or through its intermediary, the office of the French
résident supérieur (Nguyễn, 1929). During official ceremonies, women — Vietnamese and foreign — were entirely excluded from the sites (Delétie, 1925; Phạm, 1917).

Authorisation to visit imperial sites was, generally speaking, quite easily obtained, but the procedure was deemed too ‘inconvenient’ for the modern tourist (Les travaux de l’Office, 1938), and the French administration thus brought its influence to bear. First, the résident supérieur assumed responsibility for granting admission to the sites to all foreign visitors, male and female. It also accelerated the process so that tourists could gain access on the day of their arrival. The imperial government continued to exercise control over access to the heritage sites of Hue for Vietnamese visitors, but, even here, the transformation of private, restricted spaces into public arenas for the tourist continued apace. Starting in

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2The five territories of French Indochina — Annam, Cambodia, Cochinchina, Laos and Tonkin — each had a local head of the colonial administration answerable to the Governor General of Indochina. In central Vietnam (Annam) the résident supérieur was the title of the head of the French administration.
1932, the triennial court ceremony of imperial investiture, the Nam Giao, began to be performed twice, on consecutive days. The first performance was attended only by male members of the Vietnamese imperial and French colonial governments (Les fêtes de Nam-Giao, 1933), while the second was a much less restricted affair, offered almost in its entirety for observers of both sexes. The Messageries Maritimes even promoted the event with a special ‘Nam Giao’ cruise for tourists from France, while Vietnamese tour operators in both Saigon and Hanoi offered packages that proved popular with Vietnamese tourists. These package holidays would not have been conceivable without the efforts of the colonial government to transform sites of ceremony and ritual into sites for historical or heritage tourism. Resistance to this colonial policy existed, as the re-performance of the Nam Giao ceremony suggests. The first performance remained closed, and the second was offered as a compromise to those who sought to turn the imperial ceremony into a tourist spectacle. Yet, without the efforts of the local French administration, no compromise would have been struck, and, thus, no spectacle would have been offered for tourists, either Vietnamese or foreign.

As elsewhere in the tropical world (Kennedy, 1996; Reed, 1976), the search for temperate respite from the tropical climate propelled the development of nature tourism. Sites for this were concentrated in coastal resorts (stations balnéaires) and hill stations (stations d’altitude) where nature-based pursuits could be coupled with recuperation and relaxation. In some instances, destinations attracted tourists because of their reputation as natural wonders (Hạ Long Bay) or their flora and fauna (hunting in the lowlands of south Vietnam). But, by and large, nature tourism centred on the sea and the highlands, and the interwar years saw considerable development efforts. In central Vietnam alone, these years witnessed the development of three hill stations at Đà Lạt, Bà Nà and Bạch Mã and at least six sea resorts at Sầm Sơn, Cửa Lò, Đồ Sơn, Cửa Tùng, Thuận An and Nha Trang. All these had either been investigated and confirmed as satisfactory sites before 1914, or their development was already underway before the beginning of the state tourism agenda after First World War. In each case, it was only during the 1920s that each destination took on a life of its own. The majority of these sites was too removed from international transportation or too small to attract much international tourism. Đà Lạt alone among the hill stations was planned as an international tourism rivalling Baguio in the Philippines and Buitenzorg in Java.

Despite the paucity of international tourists, the focus of all these sites — hill station and sea resort alike — was the development of hygienic, modern and Western enclaves in Vietnam. Thus, the racial divisions of colonial society that undergirded the state’s tourism strategy also structured the development strategy of these attractions. What Jennings noted in relation to the history of Đà Lạt is also true at these other sites of nature-based tourism. At Bà Nà, a hill station less than 100 km from Hue, the development of the site was focused on Europeans, and the commercial agents behind the development were also European. Morin Frères built a 22-room hotel here in 1921, and in the mid-1920s the land of the hill station was subdivided, villas were built, and other amenities such as a telegraph station, a swimming pool and a food market were constructed (Bana: la station d’altitude de l’Annam, 1925; Le Tourisme en Annam, 1938; Gaide, 1925). The growth of Bà Nà required the permanent presence of Vietnamese and ethnic minority labourers; it also attracted Vietnamese tourists seeking to participate in the new ‘mountain cure’.
Others considered Bà Nà inadequate. It was inconvenient to reach, and building a road to the summit was too costly. Its position and elevation (between 1300 and 1400 m above sea-level) was insufficient to ensure the consistent temperate climate needed for the ‘mountain cure’. Its small size did not allow for an indigenous village for domestic labourers and middle-class tourists to be built far enough away from the European quarter to ensure the latter’s salubriousness. These criticisms came largely from partisans of another hill station, Bàch Mã, less than 50 km from Bà Nà. Larger, higher and more accessible, Bàch Mã also saw rapid growth in the 1930s, with significant subsidy from the local government in Hue. Significantly, the first two public land allocations saw much property purchased by officials of the imperial court, to the annoyance of some would-be European residents (Bach-ma contre Bana, La Patrie annamite, 1936), who deplored the fact that upper-class Vietnamese had succeeded in buying property at a modern, domestic tourism site, effectively excluding some Europeans from owning land there. This event indicated a movement becoming inescapable even to the colonial tourism lobby: domestic tourism among the Vietnamese was a growth market.

Tourism in Context

Despite the focus of the colonial state and metropolitan interests on developing a lucrative international tourism trade in order to bolster the image and reserves of French Indochina, travel networks in Vietnam were growing during the interwar years well beyond the bounds of this international, Western-centred tourism. During these years domestic leisure travel increasingly became a reality as much for resident Europeans of modest means as for middle-class Vietnamese. These two groups frequented many of the same attractions and made use of the same infrastructure as international tourists. The potential benefits of international tourism remained the focus of an official consensus between colonial administrators and metropolitan interests, with the resulting strategy both representing and reinforcing profound racial divisions in colonial society. These divisions can be seen in the privileges granted to European tourism operators, in the assumptions about the capacity of Asian entrepreneurs to attain modern, international standards and in the unimportance accorded the domestic tourism market.

By the late 1930s, however, the growth of the domestic market led to questions not only about the international focus of the state’s agenda but also about heavy-handed state intervention in achieving that focus (Le tourisme intérieur, 1935, 1938). Tourism operators, both state-supported and not, continued their efforts to respond to the growing market. In the case of private (mostly Asian-run) businesses, the continued consensus among the colonial lobby to ensure their own primacy in international tourism encouraged a continued reliance on domestic travel. Thus, tourism developed in the years between the two World Wars in two directions: the perceived exigencies of colonial development propelled the state’s international tourism agenda, while domestic tourism grew in its shadow.

It was the advent of Second World War that, ironically, led the colonial state actively to advocate the growth of domestic tourism. As the flow of international tourists dwindled after 1940 and the war put paid to any plans for achieving economic growth through tourism, the wartime government of occupied France — the Vichy regime — continued to
pursue tourism in Indochina for didactic reasons: the loftier goal of popularising the state’s ideology of ‘Work, Family, Nation’. In spite of the austere economic conditions, the colonial state continued to fund hill station holidays for state employees, for example because of this perceived ideological benefit.

Nor were such wartime tourism projects an anomaly. During both the First (1946–1954) and the Second (1955–1975) Indochina Wars, Vietnam’s governments, especially in the south, continued to develop tourism. The focus of efforts was again on international tourism and on projecting an image of south Vietnam as a likely destination for peaceful, modern travel. Tourism was only possible because of substantial state funding, however; the development of a profitable private tourism industry was not a possibility. Nor was tourism considered a catalyst for further economic growth. It was only later, after the end of the wars in Indochina and after the beginning of renovation in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1986, that tourism was once again lauded as a motor for development.

Since then — as also discussed by Suntikul et al. earlier in this volume — the state has played a very active role in the tourism industry in Vietnam, dictating a tourism agenda that has aimed both to use international tourism for developmental goals and to attempt to control wider discussions about recent Vietnamese history. While the twin motivations for developing tourism — propaganda and economic development — certainly propel most states’ tourism strategies, the history of tourism’s initial growth in Vietnam during the French colonial period has undeniably influenced current official policies on tourism. It is to be hoped that further studies will shed more light on the relationships between key players and institutions in colonial and postcolonial tourism, and further demonstrate how the development of early tourism laid the foundations for the modern patterns of the industry.

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Chapter 19

Culture, Authenticity and Sport: A Study of Event Motivations at the Ulaanbaatar Naadam Festival, Mongolia

Karen Thompson and Catherine M. Matheson

Introduction

The Naadam festival is the main focus of Mongolia’s annual event calendar and one of the key attractions for visitors in the country’s peak tourist season. While the festival is principally a sporting event, a more complex series of motivations governs attendance for locals and overseas visitors alike. The sporting disciplines which are the focal point of the festival have their roots in long-standing cultural and spiritual traditions; thus, for Mongolians, sporting and cultural motivations for attending Naadam are closely associated. At the same time, Naadam is presented as an opportunity for overseas visitors to experience an authentic local festival. For these visitors, cultural motivation appears to be a more significant factor than the sporting events themselves. Indeed, the fact that the event is increasingly seen as an attraction for international tourists has led to some aspects of the event being adapted and commodified for tourism. Whether or not these modifications affect the sporting events themselves, though, is open to discussion.

Drawing on the results of an empirical study, this chapter examines the case of the Ulaanbaatar Naadam within the framework of the literature on cultural authenticity and with reference to the contribution of sporting events and competitions to the latter. Differences between overseas and domestic markets attending the event are investigated and conclusions are drawn on the role of cultural authenticity in motivating visitors to attend the Naadam festival.
In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the volume of cultural festivals and events taking place worldwide, following growing recognition of their value in enhancing a destination’s image and touristic appeal, improving leisure opportunities, contributing to local and regional economies and enhancing local pride and culture. Such events, as settings where hosts and guest can intermingle, are also effective in providing opportunities for enhancing relationships between the two groups. Furthermore, as noted by Long and Perdue (1990), the promotion of indigenous peoples and customs, which is stimulated by cultural festivals and events, contributes to sustainable destination development strategies; an approach which may be particularly relevant and effective for developing world destinations.

In Mongolia, Erin Gurvan Naadam (‘The Festival of the Three Manly Sports’) — usually just called ‘Naadam’ — has become a cornerstone of the cultural tourism product. The event is believed to date back at least two centuries, its origins being deeply embedded in the nomadic skills of war, defence and hunting — in other words celebrating the prowess of the male (Kabzińska-Stawarz, 1987). However, the festival and its constituent sporting activities have also been linked to long-standing spiritual rites celebrating and giving thanks for health, wealth and prosperity (Pegg, 2001). Naadam is the highlight of the Mongolian sporting calendar and showcases the three traditional ‘games of men’: wrestling, horse racing and archery. A series of Naadam festivals is held throughout Mongolia, in every province and county. The Ulaanbaatar Naadam is by far the largest of these, taking place in the national Naadam stadium, which holds around 35,000 people. The Ulaanbaatar Naadam takes place in mid-July on the anniversary of the foundation of the Mongolian state, which is a national holiday and coincides with the peak visitor season.

The degree to which any festival or event is successful in attracting visitors and providing them with a satisfactory experience depends on adequate knowledge of the underlying motivations for attending the festival, and consideration of the extent to which benefits sought are satisfied by the event itself. Thus, the analysis of visitor motivations for attending festivals such as Naadam as a basis for segmentation is an important prerequisite for the development of an effective marketing strategy (Kim, Uysal, & Chen, 2002). Moreover, an understanding of visitor motivations contributes to the planning and positioning of festivals and events (Crompton & McKay, 1997) and to the identification of the strengths and opportunities of different market segments (Lee & Lee, 2001). The Naadam festival attracts a domestic audience from across Mongolia and increasingly from overseas. Inbound tour operators include the Ulaanbaatar Naadam in their itineraries, marketing it as a unique and authentic cultural experience. Independent visitors to Mongolia are also well represented within the festival audience. However, the presence of these distinct groups raises questions about the range of motivations underpinning the attendance of the various market segments at the Naadam festival.

Culture as a Motivator for Event Attendance

A growing body of literature has emerged around the study of events motivation. The contextual base for such studies has ranged from, for example, the single event festival case study (Chang, 2006; Mohr, Backman, Gahan, & Backman, 1993), World Cultural
Expo (Lee, 2000; Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004) to comparative analysis between events (Nicholson & Pearce, 2001). The single event case study is dominant within empirical work. Li and Petrick (2006) suggest that a majority of the studies pertaining to festival and event motivation have employed travel motivation frameworks which have been theoretically based on the escape-seeking dichotomy and push–pull model. Event attendance motives are multiple, and include cultural exploration, family togetherness, recovery of equilibrium, novelty, external group socialisation, known group socialisation, gregariousness and festival participation and learning (Chang, 2006; Crompton & McKay, 1997; Lee, 2000). In addition to the above and taking into consideration the characteristics of the Ulaanbaatar Naadam as a key sporting event, the growing body of literature on motivation for attending sporting competitions should also be acknowledged. Kim and Chalip (2004), in particular, have cast some light on motivations associated with fan interest (identifying with specific competitors) and the aesthetic appreciation of sport. Arguably, however, an understanding of and interest in the sporting events taking place is a prerequisite for the latter of these motivations.

It is useful at this point to consider underlying motivations for attending the Naadam festival within the context of the above literature on events motivation. There can be little doubt that the standard of the sporting events and, in particular, the talents of the wrestlers attract a sizeable domestic audience from throughout Mongolia to observe the best competitors from all over the country. There is an enormous amount of prestige attached to winning the sports competitions and the champion wrestler is regarded as a national hero. However, the traditions underlying these sports are arguably equally important in attracting visitors to Naadam. Sportsmen compete in traditional costumes and the weight of history, nostalgia and theatre envelops the sporting events. In the wrestling competition, for example, heralds accompany the competitors on to the field and praise their sporting talents in song before some of the rounds. Important traditions are equally attached to the horse-racing competitions, at the finish of which spectators crowd close to the horses to bathe in the dust of the Steppe and the sweat of the winning horses, which traditionally bring luck; time-honoured victory songs are sung to the winning horses and libation rituals are performed. The opportunity to observe and participate in these historic, indigenous traditions is clearly an attraction for visitors from overseas, but may also be a valuable way of reaffirming Mongolian identity and culture for the native audience, some of whom travel great distances to attend. However, the roles of culture and sport as prevailing motivators for attendance at the Naadam festival require further investigation.

Culture, Authenticity and Event Motivation

The tourist desire to experience the authentic, in terms of cultural products and ways of life, is particularly significant to event motivation. A number of commentators have sought to address the theme of authenticity within events (Xie, 2004; Raybould, Digance, & McCullough, 2000). In comparison to the tourism domain this is but an emerging theme. However, since MacCannell’s (1973, 1976) theorisation of the quest for authenticity, it has run like an obligato within tourism studies. MacCannell argued that the tourists’ alienation from modernity resulted in their quest for the authentic and real cultural experience.
Drawing upon Goffman’s (1959) description of ‘front and back regions’ in social establishments, MacCannell sought to outline structural divisions within the touristic experience. Tourist settings consisted of a continuum of ‘front’ to ‘backstage’ regions that comprised six stages, wherein the first was the ‘front’ region that tourists endeavoured to get behind and the sixth was the ‘backstage’ region of social space which motivated the touristic consciousness. However, it has been posited that the tourism commodification process destroys the authenticity of local cultural products and un-mediated human relations that the tourist desires, resulting in the ‘staged authentic’ (Cohen, 1988).

Getz and Cheyne (2002, p. 142) contend that ‘events provide tangible access to culture in ways that many built attractions cannot, especially through direct host-guest interaction. Accordingly, some tourists will seek out events in which cross-cultural contacts are high. Also, attending some events will entail the feeling of a ‘must see’, or ‘once-in-a-lifetime authentic experience’. Given that authenticity is said to motivate the touristic consciousness and also that cultural events are often bounded within the cultural traditions of place and can thereby represent authentic ways of life, this has implications for an understanding of the interlocking relationship between tourism, authenticity and events. Specifically, it can contribute to the development of market segmentation approaches and the required strategies to develop repeat visitation for events.

Various studies have highlighted the role of authenticity within events motivation. Raybould et al.’s (2000) study on the Woodford Folk Festival (Queensland, Australia) identified the quest to experience the authentic and unique experience as the most highly ranked motivation dimension for attending the festival. This finding was unaffected by demographic and trip variables. However, searching for authentic experiences and escaping from other milieus was of greatest importance to frequent visitors to the festival. The authors suggest that the success of the festival potentially threatens the very authenticity which has motivated repeat visitors. In doing so, the authors echo MacCannell’s (1973, 1976) claims relating to the issues of tourism commodification and the impact upon authenticity. A further study of the Spoleto Festival in Italy by Formica and Uysal (1998) revealed the relationship between culture and history to be the key attraction for the festival, highlighting the significance of the perceived cultural authenticity of the event. In addition, Chang’s (2006) study of the Rukai aboriginal cultural festival employed cluster analysis to identify visitor groupings: ‘Aboriginal cultural learner’, ‘change routine life travellers’ and ‘active culture explorers’. Chang argued that for tourists within the groupings ‘Aboriginal cultural learners’ and ‘active culture explorers’, promotional efforts should emphasis the authenticity and uniqueness of aboriginal culture, as such groups were likely to be interested in experiencing backstage aboriginal customs. These studies demonstrate not only that authenticity can be a motivating factor for visitors, but also that, by emphasising it within tourism marketing strategies, it can assist in the enhancement of market segmentation approaches and, moreover, contribute to the development of repeat visits to events.

Within the body of literature on sports and tourism, there have also been attempts to link the concepts of sport and culture as attractions for the tourist. It has been argued that sport can be considered a cultural attraction, not only because cultural programmes take place in association with large sporting events (Hinch & Higham, 2004), but also because sports identities reflect the indigenous culture of a place (MacCannell & Edwards, 2000).
As a result, attendance at or participation in local sporting events may be a means for the tourist to enter MacCannell’s backstage region of social space at the destination (Hinch & Higham, 2005). Thus, for those visitors attending sports events, a destination’s culture arguably becomes more accessible, in part because sport often acts as a symbol of a destination’s culture, and also because the uncertainty of the outcome of sports events and competitions affords such events a greater level of authenticity (Hinch & Higham, 2001). This link between culture and sport has been reinforced by Delpy Neirotti, Bosetti, and Teed (2001), whose study of motivations for attending the 1996 Olympic Games found that the cultural experience and the historical significance of the event were important factors in attracting people to the Games.

Consequently, a number of factors impinge upon event motivation. In addition to differences in motivation which are linked to the nature of the event itself, variation is also created by the characteristics of the events visitor. A number of studies have demonstrated differences between overseas and domestic event visitors. Lee’s (2000) study of a Cultural Expo found statistically significant differences between domestic and overseas visitors in terms of five motivation factors: cultural exploration, novelty, event attraction, external and known group socialisation. Such statistically significant differences indicate heterogeneity within event motivations. Funk and Bruun’s (2007) study of the Gold Coast Airport Marathon was based on sports tourists who travelled internationally to participate in the event and thus offers a different insight into an understanding of event motivations from the perspective of participant, rather than spectator. Results indicated that the cultural background of participants had a significant impact relating to particular dimensions (i.e., cultural aspects, knowledge learning and cultural experience). Participants from dissimilar cultures to Australia emphasised the importance of learning specific culture aspects and knowledge learning; generally, participants from dissimilar backgrounds rated experiencing cultural aspects higher than participants from similar backgrounds.

The above discussion provides a useful framework within which to investigate motivations for attending the Naadam festival, given its dual nature as a sporting and cultural event and the different geographical markets within its audience. The rest of the chapter sets out to explore the degree to which culture and sport related motivations were present among those attending the event, and also the extent to which the two types of motivation are interlinked and how they differ between domestic and overseas visitors. The extent to which the quest for cultural authenticity was fulfilled for each group was investigated.

Methods

An empirical investigation into motivations for attending the Ulaanbaatar Naadam was undertaken by a team of researchers from University of Strathclyde, UK and Orkhon University, Ulaanbaatar, using a mixed methods approach. Drawing on the literature reviewed above as an underpinning framework, an interview-completed questionnaire was designed which was administered to visitors attending the Ulaanbaatar Naadam in July 2005. Motivation for attending the event was measured by a scale of 27 attributes thought to contribute to overall motivation. The Cronbach’s Alpha value for the scale of 0.89 suggests that there is internal consistency within the scale (De Vaus, 1996). For each of the
attributes in the scale, subjects were asked to rate their level of agreement/disagreement with each statement on a seven-point Likert-type scale. Further sections of the questionnaire requested details of respondents’ stay in Ulaanbaatar and their levels of satisfaction with certain aspects of the Naadam Festival. Several open-ended questions gathered textual data on the experiences of those attending the festival, including their particular likes and dislikes. The response rate for these questions was enhanced by the fact that the questionnaires were completed by interviewers. The final section of the questionnaire gathered demographic information on respondents.

Undertaking a pilot study was unrealistic, given the short duration of the event, however the questionnaire was subjected to a test of face validity with the cooperation of a number of inbound tour operators, festival organisers and tourism experts in Mongolia. The principal survey site was the main Naadam stadium, with interviews also undertaken in the archery stadium and at the horse-racing venue. International visitors were targeted by researchers with English as their first language while a team of Mongolian-speaking researchers collected data from domestic visitors. In total, a sample of 539 useable questionnaires was obtained using non-random convenience sampling, of which 34 per cent were international visitors and 66 per cent Mongolian nationals.

**Findings**

In order to establish the importance of cultural and sporting motivators in attendance at Naadam, average ratings on the motivation variables were examined for all respondents. Variables related to culture, in general, scored higher than the sports-related variables, with the top two variables relating specifically to Mongolian culture. The findings suggest that culture is the predominant underlying motivation for attending Naadam, and is in line with findings of previous research on cultural festivals. It also reflects the findings of Delpy Neirotti et al. (2001) that the cultural experience of sports events is an important motivation for attending. The uniqueness of the cultural product at the Naadam festival is likely to strengthen the importance of culture as a motivator for attendance.

In order to investigate differences between overseas and domestic visitors on the motivation variables, a series of t-tests was run on the variables. A number of statistically significant differences were found which cast further light on the roles of culture and sport in stimulating attendance at the event.

Of the three highest rated variables relating to cultural motivation, scores on the third only (‘I enjoy cultural experiences’) were related to the geographical origin of the visitors. There was no difference between the ratings of Mongolian and overseas visitors on the other two variables, relating specifically to Mongolian culture. At the same time, statistically significant differences were shown to exist on the variables relating to sports motivators (Table 19.1). All without exception were rated significantly higher by domestic visitors attending the festival, thus reaffirming the importance of the sports competitions as the raison d’être of the festival and an important motivator for Mongolians to attend. By contrast, it is clear from the findings that experiencing and learning about Mongolian culture are as important to the indigenous population as they are to the tourists.
Table 19.1: Motivations of overseas visitors (OSV) and Mongolians attending Naadam Festival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation attribute</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I wish to learn more about Mongolian culture</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>−0.168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to experience Mongolian culture</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>−1.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy cultural experiences</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>−4.720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I admire the talents of the sports competitors</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>6.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy experiencing culture in its unique, historical setting</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>−1.723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like my family to learn more about Mongolian culture</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>7.422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy sports events</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>6.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to experience local customs and cultures</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>−5.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in local events</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>−3.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a keen sports fan</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>5.283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am supporting certain competitors</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>16.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know people who are competing in the sporting events</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>15.874</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other aspects of cultural motivation, however, can be differentiated between the two visitor groups, namely those relating to more generic cultural motivations, such as an interest in local events and cultural experiences. In summary, the data in Table 19.1 appears to show that variables drawn from the literature on attendance at sporting events (Kim & Chalip, 2004) are considerably more important for the local population than for tourists. The indigenous cultural dimension of Naadam, however, is appreciated by both overseas and domestic visitors and acts as major motivating factor for both groups.

In order to investigate the link between the variables relating to sport and culture as motivators for attending Naadam, correlation coefficients were calculated showing the strength of the relationships between the variables in Table 19.1. Correlations were calculated separately for the two geographical markets within the sample in order to gain an overview of any differences between Mongolian respondents and those from overseas. While correlations were strongest within the group of sports related variables, correlations significant at the 0.01 level, albeit of lesser magnitude, were found to exist between all sports and culture variables for the Mongolian sample. Such findings indicate that the sporting competitions which take place during Naadam may represent a fundamental link with Mongolian culture and tradition and a means for Mongolians to affirm their national identity. This link between culture and sport for the Mongolian market merits further exploration.
By contrast, for the sample of overseas visitors, the picture was rather different. Not all of the correlations between sports and culture variables were found to be significant, and those which were significant show only a very weak relationship between the variables. However, between the variables within the culture and sports sets respectively, correlations appear marginally higher than was the case for Mongolian visitors. The implication is that there is a greater division between groups within the overseas market with regard to those attending for cultural reasons, and those motivated by the sporting aspects of the festival. Meanwhile, for Mongolian visitors, the two types of motivation are more closely related, a fact which perhaps provides evidence for Hinch and Higham’s (2001, 2005) assertion that sports events serve to enhance the authenticity of an attraction or event, and also arguably substantiates the authenticity of the Naadam festival.

In addition to the above examination of event motivations, perceptions of the event — and specifically the differences between domestic and overseas visitor event likes and dislikes — were also examined. Table 19.2 illustrates the key attributes of the event which visitors like and highlights the differences between the groups. Domestic visitors identified the primary attributes of the event as the specific sporting events (especially horse-racing and wrestling). Indeed, the specific sporting events accounted for over 80 per cent of the key elements for the event. That this was the case can be attributed to the fact the event is bounded within Mongolian culture and thereby offers its local community an opportunity to celebrate and affirm their local culture.

By contrast, although the sporting events were a key consideration for the overseas visitor (39 per cent) they did not have an equivalent level of importance. Given that such sporting events are bounded within the local cultural tradition, they may not have the same resonance for the overseas visitor. Rather, the Mongolian cultural experience, in terms of the performance of Mongolian culture and tradition, were important. Thus, the authenticity and uniqueness of the event were valued by the overseas visitor; social aspects were also valued more highly than those by the domestic visitor.

The implication of the importance attached to the culture, authenticity and sociability aspects is that the cultural and authentic experience — both event product and experience — is sought after by the overseas visitor. In itself the Naadam is not a ‘staged’ representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic visitors</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Overseas visitors</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wrestling</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>Sporting and other events</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse racing</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>Mongolian cultural experience</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archery</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Social experience</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening ceremony</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Uniqueness and authenticity of the event</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sporting events</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition and event</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social experience</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event organisation and amenities</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of culture that offers its participants a ‘staged authentic’ event, but instead proffers the visitor, both domestic and overseas, an insight into the authentic Mongolian culture and the backstage region of social space. This relates to the fact the event is not an ‘invented tradition’ (Hobsbawm, 1983) for the tourist market, but rather has survived for over 200 years in traditional form. The cultural authenticity of the festival is further augmented by the incorporation of aspects of Mongolian tradition, for example, traditional costume and victory songs.

With regard to facets of the Naadam which visitors disliked, there were key differences between domestic and overseas visitors (Table 19.3). The former group identified the physical and environmental aspects (chaos and crowding, rubbish) and social features (presence of alcoholics, crime and visitor behaviour) as elements which they particularly disliked. Interestingly, some people disliked individual sporting events. This appears to conflict with the high proportion of domestic visitors who identified the sporting events as features which they most liked, and indicates the presence of a minority whose attendance was motivated by factors other than sport, such as the event’s significance within Mongolian cultural identity. Just over a tenth of domestic visitors expressed no dislikes.

The overseas group identified the event organisation and health and safety issues as being key aspects of concern. The Mongolian climate and the crowds were also identified. It is noteworthy that just under a tenth of overseas visitors commented on the presence of other tourists as a dislike. While this is a minority issue, it indicates that the tourism commodification process has impacted upon the experience.

These factors highlight a number of over-arching themes of the event and its commercialisation. Individual factors such as crowding and, as noted by overseas visitors, the presence of other tourists, highlight the Naadam’s commercialisation. The physical, social and environmental issues can largely be addressed within the event’s production; indeed, failure to address these could have an adverse impact upon the longevity of the event and, in effect, limit the visitors’ experience of authentic Mongolian culture which is clearly so significant to domestic and overseas visitors alike.

Table 19.3: Event visitor dislikes — domestic and international.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic visitors</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Overseas visitors</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubbish and pollution</td>
<td>17.54</td>
<td>Event organisation</td>
<td>23.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event organisation and amenities</td>
<td>15.89</td>
<td>Health and safety</td>
<td>15.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaos and crowding</td>
<td>14.56</td>
<td>Heat</td>
<td>14.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting events</td>
<td>12.58</td>
<td>Crowds</td>
<td>13.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>11.25</td>
<td>Specific events</td>
<td>10.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime and visitor behaviour</td>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>Tourists</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholics</td>
<td>7.94</td>
<td>Commercialisation</td>
<td>5.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>8.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialisation</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

In summary, the findings provide useful insights into the reasons why domestic and overseas visitors attend the Naadam festival, as well as into key aspects such as preferences and dislikes. The research also provides an insight into the traditions and representations of Mongolian culture and into the importance attached to the cultural authenticity of the event by domestic and overseas visitors alike. In doing so, it provides an avenue for the development of a market segmentation approach based on the requirements and motivations of both sets of visitors. For Mongolians, the importance of both culture and sport and the relationship between these reflect the importance of Naadam and its sporting events as a representation of Mongolian identity and a celebration of indigenous culture. For overseas visitors, the sporting competitions equally present an opportunity to experience Mongolian culture and traditions, and the festival is valued more from this perspective than for its merit as an élite national sporting event. However, the research should be viewed as exploratory. There is clearly scope for further, more detailed investigation of the authenticity of the event from the visitor perspective and the degree to which commodification and touristification is influencing the satisfaction levels of both Mongolian and overseas visitors.

References


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Chapter 20

Religious Tourism: Exploring a New Form of Sacred Journey in North India

Kiran Shinde

Introduction

“Deccan to ferry pilgrims to Vaishnodevi”

[Deccan Aviation, a private company, to fly passenger helicopters to a pilgrimage centre in the Himalayas] (Economic Times, 27/09/02, Bangalore)

“Thomas on the pilgrim trail”

[Thomas Cook, the international tour operator, enters the pilgrimage market in India with 3-star travel and lodging facilities] (Times of India, 15/05/01, Mumbai)

“NIC to take a ‘Holy’ dip at Kumbh Mela”

[National Insurance Company designs insurance policy for pilgrims] (The Hindu, 13/01/01, Bangalore)

“Insurance cover for devotees” [at Sabrimala] (Economic Times, 25/01/01, Bangalore)

Headlines such as the above, appearing in Indian newspapers, are indicative of the changing nature of pilgrimage travel in India. Only a few years ago, at the turn of the millennium, an appropriate term to describe what was occurring at some sacred sites in India did not appear to exist, but today an Internet search gives more than fifty websites
which provide package deals for a pilgrimage or religious tour along some of the popular pilgrimage circuits in India. There is increasing recognition of the fact that pilgrimage to sacred sites — or more commonly pilgrimage centres — is a mainstay of domestic tourism in India (Gladstone, 2005; Singh, 2001). A media report states that more than 100 million Indians embark on pilgrimages each year (Times of India, 2001). Even though such travel is increasingly showing characteristics typical of mass tourism, it is still described within the context of pilgrimage; yet this conventional outlook is problematic if meaningful policies are to be designed to address growth and change in domestic tourism in India.

There is no doubt that the magnitude of visitation to pilgrimage centres in India has increased multifold since the advent of motorised transport and improved accessibility (Bhardwaj, 1973; Singh, 2002). More and more people are now visiting pilgrimage centres on buses and taking advantage of package tours. Alongside this increase in volume, qualitative changes are visible in modern pilgrimage travel both on the part of visitors and the overall organisation of the industry (Gladstone, 2005); the modern version displays more ‘tourism-like’ characteristics. A large proportion of visitors to sacred sites have an additional motive of ‘getting away’ on holidays (Gladstone, 2005); they visit sacred sites on holiday irrespective of whether or not it coincides with a religious festival or event. Short-term trips by middle- and upper-middle-income groups now contribute a substantial share of travel to sacred sites. Easily observed during such trips is the limited engagement with pilgrimage rituals and widespread consumerist behaviour typical of tourists (Gladstone, 2005; Singh, 2004). Similar observations are made for contemporary Mexican pilgrimages (Tyrakowski, 1994). It is difficult to label such travel simply as ‘tourism’, however, because it has a strong religious component; visitors are motivated by religious purposes, the destination is a pilgrimage (religious) centre and rituals are important, as are the religious specialists who perform them for the pilgrims. This makes use of the term ‘religious tourism’ more appropriate to describe such contemporary pilgrimage travel, which is motivated, partly or wholly, by religious motives (Rinschede, 1992; Tomasi, 2002).

In this chapter, one form of pilgrimage in the sacred complex of Braj, in north India, and its extension into religious tourism will be discussed. In comparing the contemporary and traditional versions, the key elements of pilgrimage: mainly the motivation, destination and journey are used. The changes from its traditional form prompt us to revisit the classical and romantic representation of an Indian pilgrimage that has dominated the literature for a long time. It is argued that the realities of contemporary pilgrimage travel in Braj amply illustrate the appropriateness of calling such a movement ‘religious tourism’. Hence, this chapter has a threefold purpose: to uncover the changes that have occurred in the traditional pilgrimage, to situate the contemporary expression of pilgrimage travel in India within the concept of religious tourism, and to add to the corpus of empirical studies on religious tourism from Asian countries. The second section provides an overview of debates surrounding definition of religious tourism. The third section briefly describes a typical Indian pilgrimage followed by a detailed description of the traditional pilgrimage in Braj. A contemporary pilgrimage is discussed in the next section, followed by an analysis of key changes in the two versions within the concept of religious tourism.
Pilgrimage, Tourism and Religious Tourism

Travel to sacred places may be motivated by a number of reasons, ranging from deeply religious to plain curiosity. Such travel is generally placed within the purely religious domain of pilgrimage or within the profane and hedonistic pursuits of tourism. While the focus in pilgrimage is on the association with some sacred and numinous supernatural power and the ability to get closer to it by means of religious practices, tourism is mainly about ‘getting away’ to experience a change. However, these two forms of travel are interconnected. According to Rinschede (1992), modern tourism began with the ‘great religious tour’ organised by Thomas Cook in the mid-19th century. Some scholars take this argument further and describe tourism itself as ‘spiritual journey’ or a ‘sacred journey’ because it exhibits the ‘spiritual quest’ inherent in pilgrimage (Graburn, 2001). But there are others who maintain its difference from religious or traditional pilgrimages. This has generated a lot of debate on similarities and differences between pilgrimage and tourism. Timothy and Olsen (2006) provide a comprehensive review of this debate, and therefore instead of repeating it here it would be wiser simply to recognise that these are two different forms of travel that increasingly overlap in the modern context. A recent article concludes

...tourism and pilgrimage share many features — the requirements of free time, social sanction and income, as well as the process of transfer from ordinary/profane to non-ordinary/sacred time and place ... distinctions remain in the context of quest, between the ‘true’ pilgrim following his or her faith and the secular pilgrim seeking meaning or knowledge. (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005, p. 164)

In modern societies, many people travel to sacred sites with a purpose of achieving both religious and recreational needs, which poses great challenges to define such movement as either pilgrimage or tourism. A practical approach is to address this problematic by including it within tourism ‘because contemporary pilgrimages involve such huge numbers of people that they can only be organised in the same manner as mass tourism. Large numbers of pilgrims pass through travel agencies, accommodation facilities, catering services and commercial businesses; they are, that is to say, part of the tourist industry’ (Tomasi, 2002, p. 21). Gladstone (2005) prefers to describe it as the ‘informal sector domestic tourism’ as it is a major contributor to the domestic tourism industry in developing countries. However, travel to sacred sites, at least in developing countries, has an exclusive ‘religious’ component and therefore defies its categorisation as tourism alone. Almost as a compromise, scholars have found use of composite words such as ‘religious tourism’ and ‘pilgrimage tourism’ more reasonable and less controversial.

Religious tourism is a specific type of tourism ‘whose participants are motivated either in part or exclusively for religious reasons’ (Rinschede, 1992). Tomasi refines this generic definition by suggesting that ‘religious tourism is not tourism tout court; rather it is a form of tourism motivated, partly or wholly, by religious motives and closely or loosely connected with holiday-making or with journeys undertaken for social, cultural or political reasons over short or long distances’ (Tomasi, 2002, p. 19). In an excellent review of
some of the models of religious tourism, Santos (2003) shows that it falls within the spectrum of pilgrimage and tourism, corresponding to a continuum along a sacred-profane axis in one form or the other. It is a European concept that resulted from the decline in religious practice, the growing popularity of travel by car or bus, secularisation of societies and discussions by European clergy coping with problems and prospects posed by visitors (Santos, 2003). However, according to Tyrakowski (1994), a move from traditional pilgrimages towards holiday (vacation) tourism is determined by strong traditions and an inner conscience and therefore is better understood as ‘pilgrimage tourism’. In whichever way such composite terms are used, they signify the complex nature of contemporary travel to sacred sites.

To elucidate this theoretical concept in more practical terms, the contemporary pilgrimage movement in Braj will be analysed in terms of the basic elements of motivation [religious], destination [sacred site] and journey [traditionally arduous and filled with penitence].

Sacred Journeys: the Indian Context

Traditional pilgrimage in India, the ‘tīrtha yātra’, is a religiously motivated journey (yatra) to a crossing or river ford (tirtha) or, more commonly, a sacred site, where crossing over from this world to the other world is easily possible. More than 1800 such sites are acknowledged as ‘tīrthas’ in Hindu religious tradition in India (Bhardwaj, 1973). People visit pilgrimage centres for two broad categories of reason: for spiritual quest, and in the hope that worldly problems might be solved by appealing directly for divine intervention (Morinis, 1984). The pilgrim is driven by a strong religious or spiritual motivation and accomplishes a long journey on foot that reinforces a sense of temporarily setting aside worldly issues. Once at the sacred site (temples or sacred objects), the pilgrim performs pilgrimage rituals with the help of pilgrimage priests (or religious functionaries). Most important is the darshana (act of seeing and being seen) of the deity and the saints, and seeking the blessings. This basic structure of pilgrimage is explained with the help of a ‘sacred complex’ model developed by Vidyarthi (1961) which uses analytical categories of sacred geography, sacred performances and sacred specialists. This model and its parts have been subsequently used to analyse different aspects of pilgrimages in the long tradition of pilgrimage studies in India.

Pilgrimage also represents the oldest form of religious tourism in India as it encouraged local benefits, people’s participation, and the spiritual and social enhancement of the guests and host (Singh & Singh, 1999). Similar claims have been made by Rinschede (1992) in a European context. However, its transition into mass tourism is not very widely recognised except for a few studies that have shown its similarities with leisure travel and its impacts to be similar to those of mass tourism (Kaur, 1982; Singh, 2002). Some of the trends in contemporary pilgrimages are already mentioned in the introduction. It is sufficient here to say that there are good reasons to believe that the modern expression of pilgrimage in India is emerging along the lines of standard, leisure tourism. This is further illustrated in the following empirical study of pilgrimage to the sacred complex of Braj.
Pilgrimage in Braj

The sacred complex of Braj represents a cultural region that includes hundreds of sacred sites associated with the mythology of Krishna, the human incarnation of Vishnu (Bajpai, 1954). The geographical expanse of modern Braj is seen as spreading on both sides of the Yamuna river across the districts of Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, Hodal in Haryana and Bharatpur in Rajasthan. The region has at its centre the twin cities of Mathura and Vrindavan, located 150 km south of Delhi (the national capital) and about 50 km north-west of Agra (site of the Taj Mahal). Mathura is renowned as the birthplace of Krishna, and Vrindavan is popular as Krishna’s ‘playground’. In terms of pilgrimage, it is Vrindavan which acts as the religious centre of Braj. The pilgrimage circuit of Braj was formally established in the late 16th century by Vaishnava saints. The circuit has a perimeter of about 84 kos (300 km) and covers an area of about 2500 km², stretching 10 km to the east and south of Mathura and nearly 50 to the west and north.

The pilgrimage to Braj can be identified under two broad categories. The first type, *Braj yatra*, is the traditional long circuitous journey around the Braj region. The second type refers to a quick, short-term visit to specific sacred centres in Braj including Mathura, Vrindavan, Govardhan and Gokul. The focus here is on the former type of pilgrimage. Changes in short-term visits are discussed in Shinde (2007).

The Traditional *Braj Yatra*

*Braj yatra* is a complete circumambulation of the sacred territory of the Braj region. The first systematic description of the *yatras* was compiled by a poet-saint, Narayana Bhatt, in AD 1553 in his book, *Braj Bhakti Vilasa* (BBV) (Growse, 1883). It enumerates and lists almost all natural elements including forests, sacred ponds, lakes, woods, and bowers in Braj and attributes to them a special significance in the Krishna legend. It lays out a detailed procedure and itinerary for performance of the pilgrimage and gives detailed instructions on the worship of each of these places. Earlier, there was a difference between ‘*Braj yatra*’ that toured the villages of Braj and ‘*Ban yatra*’ (journey through the forests) that wandered mainly through the forests, thickets, ponds and lakes. But such a distinction between the two is not made today (Entwistle, 1987); the circumambulation is popularly known as *Braj yatra* or the *caursi kos parikrama* (circumambulation of the entire 84 kos perimeter of Braj). Figure 20.1 shows the traditional pilgrimage route of *Braj yatra*.

Since it was first undertaken in the 16th century, the *yatras* has followed a fixed order as regards its itinerary, route and rituals. It is generally undertaken in monsoon months when the natural beauty of Braj is at its best. The itinerary of the *yatras* includes visits to designated places in BBV over a span of 23–40 days, depending on the different Vaishnava sects undertaking the *yatras* (Entwistle, 1987). Especially significant on this route are the *parikrama* (major sacred centres) of Mathura, Vrindavan, Govardhan, Gokul, Nandgaon.

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1 *Kos* is a vernacular unit of measuring distance, 1 kos = approximately 3.5 km.

2 In Braj, four main Vaishnava sects (*sampradaya*) exist, namely, Gaudiya, Vallabha, Nimbark and Ramanandi, and each has specific ways of Krishna worship and set pilgrimage rituals.
and Barsana. As a part of the *yatram*, cultural performances, *raas* (cultural dramas depicting episodes of Krishna’s life), and religious story-telling sessions are organised in honour of Krishna at halting places. Two versions of *Braj yatra* exist in terms of scale; one is the *badi yatra* or *badi parikrama*, a movement of more than 5000–7000 pilgrims, and the other is an exclusive yatra organised by sectarian gurus for small groups of their followers. Both are similar in all respects except for the scale and composition of participants.

The most important motivating factor for *Braj yatra* is the desire of pilgrims ‘to re-create in their imagination the life of the god to whom they are devoted or whose stories appeal to them ... to hear the stories retold at the sites where miraculous events took place’ and ‘to see material evidence and representations of the gods and great devotees’ (Entwistle, 1987, p. 103). By wandering in Braj, pilgrims believe that they will get a glimpse of Krishna. A quote from one of Haberman’s informants is illustrative.

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Figure 20.1: Pilgrimage route of the traditional Braj Yatra.  
*Source:* Map prepared by the author from the Survey of India toposheets.
They want to see with their own eyes what they have read or heard about in the *Bhagwat Purana*, to see the *lila* places for themselves. This increases their belief. Temples are made by men, but the things we see on *Ban yatra*, such as footprints in stone, are natural, so that anyone can believe things done in Braj. Seeing these signs in stone, anyone can believe in the supernatural things that happened in Braj and can begin to see Krishna here. ‘*Darshan*’ or ‘seeing’ is a central act in the *Ban yatra*. (Haberman, 1994, p. 83)

Pilgrims journey through the sacred landscape of Braj to experience its serenity and to realise the presence of Krishna in all His manifestations. They achieve supreme bliss and happiness when they immerse themselves in devotion of Krishna. However, this divinity can only be experienced by surrendering one’s physical body to the experience. Haberman gives a personal experience of the *yatra* in which he participated in 1988 and writes about Braj as ‘a physical terrain to be encountered with one’s body’. He remarks

> The pilgrims of Braj get down and dirty; they worship not in the immaculate temple but in open landscapes, dark forest, flowing rivers, dusty plains, muddy fields, still ponds, and rocky mountains. Since the body is the vehicle of such experience, I could not have written about the pilgrimage in the way I have if I had not put my own body on the line. (Haberman, 1994, p. 15)

Apart from such spiritual experiences, the *yatra* offers the participants opportunities to take away certain cultural practices (*samskāras*) by staying with like-minded people and religious gurus, and it reiterates the importance of sacredness upon a Hindu mind.

The institution of *Braj yatra* is unique in that there is no formal organisation of the entire pilgrimage. It is believed that it takes place according to Krishna’s wish. But practically, there is some sort of organisation in the *yatra* which many scholars have discussed at great length (see Bajpai, 1954; Entwistle, 1987; Haberman, 1994). For the present purpose, it is important to point to key features of such organisation. The day-to-day organisation is done by a team of pilgrimage priests, ‘*paṇḍās*,’ under the guidance and leadership of religious gurus generally referred to by the regal title of ‘Maharajji’. Typically, upon their arrival (in Vrindavan, Gokul or Mathura from where the yatra usually begins), pilgrims are received by *paṇḍās* and are guided to the Maharajji, where they are handed a detailed itinerary (which also spells out the ‘dos and don’ts of the *yatra*). After taking a vow (*sankalp*) to complete the yatra under the guidance of the Maharajji, they commence their yatra. During it, the Maharajji recites stories at different places and expounds on their association with certain episodes of Krishna’s life. Sometimes the Maharajji also directs pilgrims to perform rituals. For example, at Chirghat, the entire episode of Krishna stealing the clothes of Radha and her friends (*gopīs*) and hiding in the branches of the kadamb tree as they bathed in the Yamuna is narrated. A typical ritual follows the narration; pilgrims tie a piece of cloth (which they usually bring with them) on one of the branches

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3 *Paṇḍā* is a common term used for traditional religious specialist who helps the pilgrim in performing rituals in pilgrimage. *Ji* is usually suffixed after Maharaj as a form of respectful address.
of the Kadamb tree that the Maharajji points to as a gesture of taking on the role of a gopi (milkmaid) in an effort to appease Krishna. At many camps, there are rās-īlā performances generally sponsored by some wealthy devotees through the Maharajji. Rās-īlā is a representation and an enactment of the drama ‘on the very spot with which the original event is traditionally connected’ (Growse, 1883, p. 80).

In essence, Braj yatra is a cultural procession celebrating all the sites of the Braj pilgrimage circuit. However, numbers of badi-yatras, who follow these elaborate rituals, have reduced substantially in last few years and a newer version is emerging.

A Contemporary Braj Yatra

A contemporary Braj yatra is very different from the traditional model described above. This section describes some highlights of the Braj yatra in which the author participated in March 2005. This yatra was organised by a Maharajji from Vrindavan and included more than 2000 people who came from different cities in India. It was completed in 7 days by travelling in 150 cars and 10 buses. Each day, the yatra began in the morning from an ashram in Vrindavan and returned back after touring three or four sacred places of the circuit. The following paragraphs discuss some aspects that are different from the traditional Braj yatra.

The yatra was substantially modified from the traditional circuit in terms of timing of visit and the detailed itinerary. It did not follow the regular monsoon times when the natural setting aids visualisation of the intimate connections between the landscape and plays of Krishna. Nor did it adhere to the traditional order or sequence. Instead, the circular route was broken into smaller circuits of movement around clusters of three or four sacred places. Much of the journey was reduced to a linear, point-to-point travel from one temple to another, conveniently accessible by drivable roads (especially the Delhi Agra Highway). There were no night halts except at Vrindavan, which served as a base camp. Of the 73 sacred places on the modern Braj circuit noted by Entwistle (1987), only 25 were visited including five forests and three kunds; the rest were all temples. Circumambulation of major sacred centres (parikrama) was omitted from the itinerary, while very little time was available to visit all the temples in any particular centre, so much so that the holy centre of Mathura (the birthplace of Krishna) was dropped from the itinerary because it was nearly impossible to park in the narrow streets that lead to temples and ghats on the banks of Yamuna. The quality and amount of time spent at sacred places was much less than the time taken for vehicles to steer though the chaos of the huge motorcade moving in and out of narrow streets and small villages.

The religious and cultural significance of the pilgrimage was greatly undermined by the motorised yatra. Many participants missed on the narratives of the places they visited. Story-telling sessions were limited and accessible only to those participants whose cars were able to keep pace with the Maharajji’s caravan. Here, the role of car drivers

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4This is already fewer than the number of places mentioned in the itinerary of Braj yatra by Growse (1883) in the late 19th century. He mentioned around 132 places including 5 hills, 11 rocks, 4 lakes, 84 ponds, 12 wells, 12 bans or woods and the 24 uphans or groves.
Exploring a New Form of Sacred Journey in North India

...as knowledgeable local people) was significant; they informed participants about the sacred importance of places and the association with episodes of Krishna’s life. However, such narratives are different from those of a guru or a religious specialist. The Maharajji did try to summarise the day’s visit during evening sessions organised at the ashram but that hardly helped participants. A majority of participants were not able to perform any rituals due to overcrowding in temples and the need to keep pace with the group, and there were very few opportunities to realise the connection between the ritual and its spiritual meaning. There were a few participants, mainly ardent devotees and women, who got down into the sacred water-tanks and the river and religiously performed the necessary rituals at every temple, but by and large, the cultural processes that help in reinforcing the ‘sacred’ were substantially abridged both in terms of quantity and quality due to the imposition of the nature of travel.

The joy of pilgrimage was attainable for a few participants only. There were moments of exaltation when overwhelmed pilgrims broke into ecstatic trance. But the behaviour of a majority of participants, many of whom came from cities, defied the notion of pilgrimage as a spiritual pursuit away from the worldly concerns. Right from the beginning, many pilgrims were quite vocal about their demands for a comfortable *Braj yatra*. They kept pestering the organisers to give them the best possible rooms with all facilities, to the extent that a few families shifted to nearby hotels/ashrams and a few even hired private cars for themselves. Many were concerned about the physical state of some villages where the temples are located and were not happy about the unclean and unhygienic conditions they had to witness. One of them yelled, ‘What kind of hell has Maharajji brought us to (yeh kahan narak mein le aye humko maharajji)?’ At the end of each day, many were so tired by the car travel that they retired immediately to their rooms and did not even come for the Maharajji’s story-telling sessions. Equally glaring was the insensitive behaviour of the drivers, who were barely concerned about the emotions of their pilgrim passengers. Their rowdy behaviour was demonstrated in racing their cars through streets, blowing horns, playing loud and lewd music and confronting people on the roadside and bragging about their payments.

The organisation of the *yatra* was apparently professional, as with package tours. The idea of the ‘*Braj yatra* by car’ was well marketed in many cities almost 6 months ahead by the Maharajji and his followers. The Maharajji had promised to make arrangements for lodging, boarding and travel. Upon arrival, participants had to register at the ‘reception desk’ in the designated ashram (the ‘venue’) in Vrindavan from where they were allotted a room to stay and a seat in a car for everyday travel. Food was sponsored by a few wealthy devotees; breakfast and dinner were served at the ashram in buffet style and a packed lunch was brought for the entourage every day. For transport, the cars and minibuses were contracted from local tour operators. A core group of 12 people close to the Maharajji organised and supervised all the arrangements and assisted him in taking managerial decisions.

Though the Maharajji maintained that ‘Krishna will take care of all such organisation’, in reality, this was to be financed with the offerings that devotees would make while on the *yatra*. This commercial angle was clear in the repeated requests from the Maharajji and his organisers for more donations by pilgrims on every conceivable occasion. One pilgrim with whom the author spoke estimated the budget of such a massive programme to be...
around €30,000, and pointed out that the organisers were not able to generate this amount from participants in spite of the offerings that were being collected. Continued requests for additional offerings were a natural result. This was more glaring when the Maharajji cancelled the tour on the last day, covering it up nicely under the religious pretext of having acquired enough merit simply by setting foot in Vrindavan and that the *yatras* was accomplished as a ‘religious practice’. The same reasoning was used for omitting other sacred places during the *yatras*.

**From Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism**

In this section, some observations that mark the transition of the traditional *Braj yatra* into religious tourism are explained by using the key elements of motivation, destination and journey. The meaning of pilgrimage is derived from the experience of travelling itself. The motivation to see all the places in Braj was very strong amongst the participants, but they wanted to see as many places as they could in the given short span of time. They were excited by the opportunity but not many were aware of the longer traditional *Braj yatra* of forests and lakes. The religious commitment and intensity of motivation specific to the Braj pilgrimage was not easily discernible in most participants. Local residents in Vrindavan also reiterate such opinions about the visitors and in common parlance refer to them as ‘religious tourists’. It was not only the participants but also the entire organisation of the *yatras* that contributed to making it more of a tourism activity.

The changes from the traditional pattern of the *Braj yatra* with regard to scale, frequency and the journey were glaring. Even the timing of the *yatras* seems to have lost its significance (it is generally organised in the monsoon months of August and September). The journey, instead of the circular journey, is now a linear travel to different sacred places from a base station, which in most cases is Vrindavan. There are no night-halts and religious/cultural performances are limited. Neither the traditional, religiously important itinerary nor the presence of religious functionaries matter much. Destinations are selected on the basis of accessibility by a drivable road, availability of parking and ease of manoeuvring vehicles. Many informants lament that the car-*yatras* is now more or less the standard model of *Braj yatra* followed by religious gurus in Vrindavan. As many as 30–35 such *yatras* had been organised in 2004. The one that I participated in was to date the largest, and the Maharajji kept driving this point home to most pilgrims to show his authority and organisational capacity.

In compressing the *Braj yatra* into 7–8 days, it is reduced merely to a ‘sight-seeing package tour’ in which the economics of the *yatras* are the most important element. *Braj Darshan*, an official tour provided by public transport operators in which pilgrims are taken only to the important temples in Vrindavan, Govardhan, Barsana and Nandgaon in one day, reinforces the idea of ‘temple-seeing package tour’. Such an approach to the *yatras* reduces a completely ontological experience of the sacred landscape into a mere circulation limited to few sacred spots.

*Braj yatra* is ‘sacred sightseeing’ in which the numinous quality of the landscape is experienced by travelling the land itself and appreciating the stories associated with it (Haberma, 1994). However, such an experience can be invoked only when the right
emotions (bhav), motivation, self-restraint and sensitive behaviour are related to the bodily experience. The car-yatra, however, did not help in raising such sensitivity. The travel by car, limited to ‘driving through the landscape’ and seeing ‘spots’ did not permit the contact of the physical body with the landscape. In travelling from one temple to another (and ending up right in front of the temple, as close as the vehicles could get), there is hardly any time for a pause, for a meaningful interaction with the landscape. The ‘physical body’ of the pilgrim, the main instrument for a spiritual experience, was replaced by a ‘mechanical motor car’. The lush green landscape, the scent of flowers, the mystical feel of woodlands and bowers — all this natural beauty would still have some appeal if the yatra was performed during the monsoon season, but the touch and the experience of the body in the landscape would be missing. The self-restraint, the endurance of journeying, the time to think and to immerse oneself in spirituality, all seems to be fading. Nonetheless, for some devout people or pilgrims, even such a short visit was overwhelming enough to induce a trance at some point during the yatra. But for most, it was a just a visit to another temple of Krishna.

The expansion of pilgrimage travel and changes in visitation patterns have generated many opportunities for tourism enterprises in the religious centre of Vrindavan from where most of the yatras are organised. In addition, the considerable increase in direct short-term visitation and frequent trips to Vrindavan has given impetus to this trend (Shinde, 2007). Between 2001 and 2006 more than 50 tour operators have established their agencies and more than 100 eating-places (and many more informal food vendors) have opened their enterprises in the vicinity of the most popular temples, which indicates growing tourism activity. Such services, according to Gladstone (2005) support ‘informal sector domestic tourism’ (the case of Vrindavan is cited in particular). Professional attributes typical of tourism enterprises is also appearing. The professional role of the religious guru can be equated to a tour organiser or travel agent who mediates between pilgrims, their expectations and the destinations. Some gurus are known to stage religious performances outside the religious calendar of events while many others organise ‘exclusive’ Braj yatras that transport people in air-conditioned cars and beautifully decorated bullock carts, providing Swiss tents and delicious meals for their comfort. As one Maharajji in Vrindavan put it, ‘there is nothing like serving a rich client, you give them good service — they will bestow a fortune on you’.

Conclusion

The Braj yatra, by definition, is a ‘sacred sight-seeing tour’, but in recent times, touristic dimensions in contemporary yatra have become pronounced and explicitly represent characteristics of mass tourism. However, this does not mean that the traditional version has disappeared; merely that it has been dwarfed by the increasing characteristics of tourism. It follows the modern trend where ‘the journey has been abolished ... there is only the point of departure and that of arrival’ (Ferrarotti cited in Tomasi, 2002, p. 20). The religious dimension, however, is still very strong and this poses difficulty in distinguishing it as either pilgrimage or tourism. People visit such places for their religious importance and to fulfil religious needs under the guidance of religious actors. If the ‘religious’ (Krishna temples as destinations) were to be taken out from Braj, for instance, we can only wonder whether people would still wander in the otherwise barren landscape.
These few observations made of the key elements of motivation, destination and journey in contemporary pilgrimage travel demonstrate the presence of both religious and recreational features, with the latter in greater evidence. The hardships and physical pain of ‘walking the route’ are things of the past and distinct consumerist behaviour among visitors is commonplace. De-romanticising the traditional Braj yatra, this chapter has argued that journeys to sacred sites are better articulated as ‘religious tourism’ as they tend to exhibit leisure-oriented travel with a focus on ‘a trip to the destination’ rather than ‘performing the journey’. Though such a pattern of travel which includes both recreation and religious needs is the mainstay of domestic tourism in India, it needs to be closely examined in the context of religious tourism if meaningful policies are to be made to ensure adequate management and mitigation of negative impacts on sacred sites.

References


Chapter 21

Wetland Tourism in Hong Kong: From Birdwatcher to Mass Ecotourist

Sidney C.H. Cheung

Introduction

Among the characteristics of Hong Kong, a fast pace of life, dense population, finance-oriented lifestyles, good restaurants and international shopping arcades spring to mind. Yet behind the metropolitan image of buzzing city lives and a business-oriented concrete jungle, there lie rich natural resources in the northern part of the New Territories (Dudgeon & Corlett, 1994; Lee, 1999). Geographically, over 70 per cent of Hong Kong’s total area is open land and about 40 per cent consists of country parks; due to the mountainous landscape, only a quarter of the land in Hong Kong has been developed, with three-quarters remaining in its natural state. Thus, within a relatively short travel time, both urban and natural landscapes can be enjoyed.

During the last decade, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government, aware of these abundant resources, began to mention environmental conservation and sustainable tourism development as important aspects of future government policy (HKSARG, 1999). In fact, Hong Kong’s coastal resources have been treasured since the 1950s when birdwatching activities began in the marshes, and they have subsequently developed to play an important role in the region’s provision of leisure facilities.

In this chapter, two types of wetland visitor will be used to illustrate the evolving interest in environmental conservation and the development of nature-based tourism in Hong Kong: the international birdwatchers who emerged in the mid-1950s, and the domestic ‘mass ecotourists’ who became more prominent after a new park contributed to enhancing awareness of wetland conservation in 2006.

Historically speaking, the earlier visitors were birdwatchers from all over the world; these international tourists travel globally, network in the global context, and have a decent knowledge of their destinations including the landscape, plants, birds and seasonal
characteristics. With the establishment of the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) in 1957, birdwatching was gradually introduced to the general public, even though it still carried a colonial image with most of its non-local Western members since the majority of the members were Westerners (with a preponderance of British people). With the opening of the Hong Kong Wetland Park (HKWP) in 2006, the obvious demand for such facilities, as reflected in the high attendance figures, indicates the growing public awareness of wildlife conservation. The following section will examine the development of tourism — especially nature-based tourism — in Hong Kong.

**Tourism Development in Hong Kong**

The prosperity of Hong Kong is paralleled by the active and rapid development of its tourism industry. In 2006, Hong Kong received 25.25 million tourist visits (including visitors from the PRC), generating HK$117.3 billion (US$15 billion) in income and making the tourism industry the second largest generator of foreign currency. However, with the rapid development of tourism in Macau and South China, Hong Kong’s inbound tourism has faced considerable competition from these neighbouring destinations, while local residents are also tempted to leave the country on vacation. This means that Hong Kong is faced with a dual challenge: it needs to attract international tourists to stay longer, to shop more and to do more sightseeing, and it also has to provide local attractions for domestic tourists so that residents can enjoy weekend breaks and day-trips at home instead of travelling to Macau or Shenzhen.

Despite the dominant metropolitan image of Hong Kong, the HKSAR government has devised different strategies to encourage nature-based tourism, one of which is through the sustainable utilisation of the hitherto neglected rich natural resources. The potential of these for tourism finally received attention in the 1990s, and the success of the HKWP provides the opportunity to review the growth of domestic nature-based tourism and changes regarding wildlife conservation and education.

In 1994, Cater remarked that the 1990s were predicted to become the decade of eco-tourism, and that ‘the travel industry is becoming sensitised to mounting global concern about the social costs and environmental damage created by too much tourism’ (Cater, 1994, p. 4). Many countries began to develop this option as a new direction in tourism. In the last decade or so there has been considerable discussion over the definition of ecotourism, and in a later work, Cater (2007) has pointed out that it is very much a contested construct, with non-Western interpretations at variance with the predominant Western interpretation, which is predicated on the use of wilderness as the central feature of most ecotourism activities. With limited natural resources and carrying capacity, tourism activities in Hong Kong’s wetland areas should, strictly speaking, only be considered nature-based tourism rather than ecotourism, which is expected to make an intentional contribution to biodiversity conservation, partly through education, and to be community-based in terms of management participation. Here, nature-based tourism development among Hong Kong people and its relevance for wildlife conservation will be reviewed, but the mass tourists who form an important market segment for some of the region’s facilities will also be referred to in this chapter as ‘mass ecotourists’, in line with

The first aspect to consider is the establishment of tourism-related organisations and their growth. The Hong Kong Tourist Association (HKTA) was a statutory body established by the government in 1957 which was reconstituted as the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) in 2001. The primary responsibilities of HKTB are to form the image of Hong Kong and market it as an international tourist destination. Thus, cultural heritage and nature-based tourism activities have recently been given considerable prominence in international tourism promotional efforts. In 1995, a campaign called ‘Wonders Never Cease’ was launched, with programmes focusing on cultural heritage in the New Territories, providing experiences of pre-colonial, rural Chinese and ‘unchanged’ lifestyles for foreign visitors. The programme included heritage tours and included the establishment of the Ping Shan Heritage Trail in 1993. This drew attention to the traditional, rural side of Hong Kong as well as the modern cosmopolitan side (Cheung, 1999). With increasing demand, two more heritage trails were created, namely the Central and Western Heritage Trail and the Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail.

In addition to cultural heritage, HKTB also emphasised the ‘green’ side of Hong Kong. After the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from British jurisdiction to the PRC, Hong Kong’s tourism industry started to decline. A new campaign entitled ‘We are Hong Kong, City of Life’ was launched in May 1998 to try and address this, and emphasised a diversity of tourist experiences including the region’s diverse ecological and natural environment. Nature-based travel and leisure activities promoted dolphin-watching, birdwatching, butterfly-watching, recreational and educational centres, nature trails, coastal walks and hiking in country parks.

A further development was that at the turn of century, the HKSAR government announced its vision of transforming Hong Kong into a ‘green’ metropolitan city, where the quality of the living environment would be enhanced. Since then, a massive amount of discussion and related policies has been generated around the topics of environmental conservation and sustainable development. In addition to this changed focus at policy level, organisations involved in the travel industry have noted the changed nature of tourism demand since environmental awareness and cultural conservation initiatives have impacted on the general public. Tourism focusing on wetlands was one of the many directions in which nature-based tourism began to develop.

Promoting Nature-Based Tourism in Hong Kong

Several nature-oriented tourism projects have been implemented since the late 1990s as part of the promotion of ‘green tourism’. One of the more high profile activities was held in November 1999, organised by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), as one of the Millennium celebratory events. AFCD was established in the 1960s to support agricultural and fishery industries at a time when Hong Kong was shifting from traditional modes of production to light and machinery-based industry. Now, in addition to agriculture and fisheries, AFCD is responsible for managing all country parks: its responsibilities include hiking trail maintenance, tourist
information services and educational objectives. It organised the ‘Hiking Festival 2000’, lasting from November 1999 to January 2000, which included a programme of trail walks and guided ecotours; the aim was to encourage citizens to use countryside resources wisely and to promote hiking as an environmental friendly, healthy and pleasurable but challenging outdoor activity.

Though the target participants for this activity were mainly local citizens, HKTA used the opportunity to introduce Hong Kong’s beautiful scenery and natural environment to the international market as a new attraction. Realising the demand from Japanese tourists for scenic spots with beautiful landscapes and an escape to the natural environment, HKTA ran a familiarisation trip for Japanese tour operators in 1999, and in conjunction with AFCD produced promotional materials in Japanese about Hong Kong’s scenery. They also promoted Hong Kong’s natural beauty to other countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia.

At around the same time, the government proposed several locations for ecotourism development, including a new marine park and a sustainable ecotourism centre in the Soko Islands (south of Lantau Island) where the valuable marine habitat would be conserved and limited recreation could be carried out; Sai Kung district (in the southeast New Territories) as another recreational centre where the existing country parks and nearby outdoor facilities would be further utilised; and a new aqua-recreation spot in the High Island Reservoir (HKSARG, 1999). The proposals effectively involved turning Lantau Island and Sai Kung District into centres of recreational and leisure activities compatible with the principle of nature conservation, and made clear the interests of the HKSAR government in joining the universal trend towards nature-based tourism.

However, the question must be posed as to what nature-based tourism actually means in the context of Hong Kong. Is it confined to international tourists coming to enjoy the green side of Hong Kong? Or does it aim to enhance environmental awareness among Hong Kong residents in general (and domestic tourists in particular) in order to fulfil educational and conservation purposes? First of all, as ecotourism sprang partly from an awareness of the negative environmental impacts of conventional, high-volume tourism, and nature-based tourism more broadly arose from increasing environmental awareness, nature conservation should be the main focus of the development of either. In fact, though, both forms seem more to be based simply on making use of the natural scenery and environment as an attraction for city dwellers keen on a temporary escape to a cleaner, more natural environment.

The Emergence of Wetland Tourism in Hong Kong

It was mentioned above that nature-based tourism is considered a potential strategy to support Hong Kong’s inbound tourism industry and help it compete with neighbouring cities such as Shenzhen and Macau, and to reduce outbound tourism by increasing leisure facilities for Hong Kong residents. With a view to finding out whether Hong Kong has the potential for combining wetland tourism, environmental education and wildlife conservation and as a way of examining the evolution of nature-based tourism in Hong Kong, aspects of the Mai Po Marshes Nature Reserve and Wildlife Education Centre, the
HKBWS and the HKWP will now be discussed. First, some general remarks about the conflicts generated by using natural resources for ecotourism will be made.

Particularly in the early days of ecotourism development, many projects focussed on conserving natural resources but neglected the culture and livelihood needs of the people living there. This was soon recognised as an inadequate way of using natural resources, and in the context of ecotourism in Australia, New Zealand and several South Pacific nations, Hall (1994) remind us that local inhabitants should not be regarded as separate from the landscape but as an essential part of the physical environment. In examining the pioneering example of ecotourism under the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) in Nepal, Gurung and de Coursey (1994) also note that ‘without adequate understanding, such areas were declared National Parks with the sole intention of protecting the wildlife and forest while forgetting the needs of the people. Certainly this approach achieved one set of goals, the protection of flora and fauna, but it also created unforeseen socio-economic problems’ (Gurung & de Coursey, 1994, p. 180). ACAP was one of the first programmes where local villagers not only participated but were also part of the management process and made decisions together with project officials; this degree of participation is now considered essential to the success of ecotourism.

In contrast, in the case of wetland conservation in the Mai Po Marshes Nature Reserve in Hong Kong, the overall management scheme is basically controlled by the Hong Kong programme of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-HK). Reverting to an earlier model of tourism in protected areas, the traditions and lifestyles of the local communities were not considered a substantial dimension in nature-based tourism development at first, although as time goes on this stance is softening towards a more inclusive model, as will be shown below.

**Mai Po Marshes Nature Reserve and Wildlife Education Centre**

The Mai Po Marshes, in the northwestern corner of Hong Kong, is of international significance in ecological terms because over 50,000 water-fowl (the record is 68,000) visit during the northern hemisphere winter, including 12 globally endangered species, and it is an important stopover place for migratory birds on their biannual journeys between the northern and southern hemispheres. The Mai Po Marshes were designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1976, and in 1984 WWF-HK assumed responsibility for management of the reserve and started up the Mai Po Marshes Wildlife Education Centre. The area was declared a nature reserve, and 1500 hectares of the marshes and the neighbouring Inner Deep Bay area were designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention in 1995.1

Each year, over 40,000 school students and members of the general public visit the wetland. Entrance is permitted only to those who apply for guided tours in advance or

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1The Convention on Wetlands, signed in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, is an intergovernmental treaty which provides for national action and international cooperation on the conservation of wetlands and their resources (http://www.ramsar.org).
to individuals with special permits. Guided tours are available for the general public during weekends and public holidays on payment of a tour fee, while guided school tours are fully sponsored by the Hong Kong Government Education Department and are offered free of charge on weekdays. The demand for such visits is great, and the tours are often booked up several months in advance. To enhance the promotion of education and public awareness of wildlife and the natural environment, part-time interpreters — usually graduates or undergraduates from one of Hong Kong’s universities — are trained and hired as guides for public tours. In addition, volunteer groups of WWF-HK members are organised twice a month to work with field staff on particular projects at weekends.

The management of the area involves several parties. Overall, the managing body is WWF-HK, which manages the area in close cooperation with the governmental body, AFCD. Its responsibility within the Ramsar site is overall conservation management and enforcement of the regulations, including issuing and checking permits. Local community members also participate in the management of the area and help with operating the traditional shrimp farming and fishponds; these are used both for research and educational purposes. Although these people were not involved in the early stages of establishing the reserve, their increased involvement is an outcome of the reserve’s management by WWF-HK, since the participation agenda is largely driven by NGOs. Significantly, one of the management body’s objectives is ‘to realise the full potential of the Ramsar site for education and raising public awareness with respect to wetland values’, and it proposes to promote and facilitate community involvement in all aspects of management to enhance its effectiveness.

Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS)

The growth and continuing strength of HKBWS is central to understanding nature-based tourism and environmental activities generally in Hong Kong.

The HKBWS was founded in 1957 by British members of the civil service and armed forces who had an interest in wildlife and nature. The Society followed a long British tradition of combining a scientifically orientated hobby with socialising, as bird-lovers were inclined to join together on outings and also published information such as sighting records. Many of the field outings in the early years were to the Mai Po Marshes, and HKBWS funded various developments there, including a boardwalk. Since the late 1970s the Society has diversified into new sites such as Sai Kung, Fanling and Tai Po. In the early 1970s, Cantonese speaking tours were first introduced to cater to Chinese members. The Society publishes a quarterly bulletin and an annual Bird Report and has widened the focus of its activities, now running trips both in Hong Kong and Mainland China for social groups, schools and commercial companies. Almost since its inception, it has played a lobbying role to encourage the HKSAR government’s conservation efforts, and has also kept a close eye on the illegal wildlife trade in Hong Kong. Its advocacy role has become increasingly important over the years, and its close cooperation with WWF-HK in ensuring that the Mai Po Marshes were recognised as an important wetland habitat led to their designation as a nature reserve.
Since the late 1990s, the success of HKBWS in penetrating Hong Kong society more widely is reflected in the emergence of a Chinese version of the newsletter and the fact that Chinese membership now reaches up to 80 per cent of the total. A turning point was the Long Valley campaign which began in 1999 to reject damaging developments in an important lowland bird habitat. This received considerable support from environmental groups internationally and from Hong Kong residents (http://www.hkbws.org.hk/lvalley/). Through this, HKBWS became more widely known locally and internationally; this brought membership growth, funding opportunities, the change of institutional status into a charitable group and hiring of the first paid staff. Now, HKBWS has over 700 members, two full-time and one part-time staff, and up to a hundred active volunteers taking responsibility for policy advocacy and community and education projects. HKBWS has made good use of its website as an influential channel for reporting environmental infringements and as a source of news for environmental journalists and government officials.

Hong Kong Wetland Park

The HKWP is located immediately to the north of Tin Shui Wai New Town, in the northwestern part of the New Territories. Tin Shui Wai was developed from rice-fields and fishponds into a major residential area in the 1980s, and is now densely populated. To complement the residential development and as an environmental mitigation measure, a reclaimed area of wetland was opened in 2006 as the HKWP, at a cost of HK$520 million. The 60-hectare park is managed as a buffer zone to the adjacent Mai Po Marshes Nature Reserve, with which it shares ecological similarities, and includes a 10,000 square metre indoor visitor centre. It is thus a good example of the heavily managed landscapes which Sofield and Li (2007) note as being the focus of ‘ecotourism’ in China.

Interest in wetland tourism has grown in recent years for domestic and international visitors alike. To support preservation of the wetlands in the Mai Po Marshes Nature Reserve, rising numbers of visitors needed to be informed of the significance of environmental conservation by disseminating conservation ideas through outdoor activities. It was partly to meet this aim that HKWP was created, with the intention of combining the three functions of ‘promoting green tourism, education on environmental protection and wetland conservation’ (HKSARG, 2006). With its display of artefacts, a photo exhibition on the process of wetland conservation, interactive models demonstrating the ecosystem and a theatre corner showing films of worldwide wetland characteristics, HKWP was immediately successful in attracting local residents, reaching its annual target of 500,000 entries in less than six months. In fact on the second day it was open, ‘5500 visitors flocked to the park, causing chaotic scenes outside the gates ... visitors continued to pour into the park, and the closing was delayed by one hour to 6 pm to deal with the unexpected throng’ (Asprey, 2006). 95 per cent of visitors were local people, with most joining tour groups (Cheung, 2006).

There were some concerns that HKWP might compete with the neighbouring Mai Po Marshes, but the reserve’s manager stated that ‘visitor numbers have dropped a bit, but it
is not detrimental as there are still birdwatchers coming to the reserve’. He added that group visits were fully booked for October and November as migratory birds started to return (Cheung, 2006). It seems likely, therefore, that as an assistant director of AFCD commented, ‘the secret of the park’s success is that it taps into an unfulfilled need for largely city dwellers to get up close and personal with nature’ (Yeung, 2006).

Discussion

This chapter has described the development of wetland tourism in Hong Kong from its early beginnings with the founding of the HKBWS in 1957. The principal factor to note is its reflection of a growing awareness of environmental and wildlife conservation among Hong Kong residents. The increasingly Chinese membership of the HKBWS illustrates the rising indigenous interest in birdwatching, and the support for the Long Valley preservation campaign demonstrated growing concern for the environment. The study of wetland tourism from birdwatchers to ‘mass ecotourists’ has shown that there are far more Hong Kong people interested in conservation than previously, especially parents with older children and teenagers.

The management and policy implications of this trend are that in order to promote appropriate environmental concepts through tourism activities, Hong Kong needs more facilities for conservation education among all age-groups, and research centres for monitoring the environmental sustainability of tourism. Through this, the growing interest in conservation can be enhanced and harnessed to provide support for retaining the remaining areas of natural habitat in Hong Kong. It also shows that environmental mitigation schemes — such as the HKWP — can be successful in supporting biodiversity while catering to the growing need of an urban population for nature-based leisure facilities.

It was stated in the introduction that the Hong Kong government is attempting to diversify its tourism product to appeal both to international and to domestic tourists in order to increase revenues and other benefits from the sector. The extent to which the HKWP will draw long-haul (non-Asian) tourists is questionable, since its heavily managed and artificial environment does not fit with the Western construct of ecotourism, which largely centres on the notion of a natural and wild environment. However, since the vast majority of visitors to Hong Kong are from the Chinese diaspora, it seems likely that the park will appeal to these groups in their search for nature-based — but managed — attractions. Given its demonstrated popularity with domestic tourists, it also seems likely that it will go some way towards meeting the objective of encouraging people to remain in Hong Kong to spend their disposable leisure income, rather than travelling abroad. At the same time, Western birdwatchers are likely to continue to be attracted by the possibilities for spotting resident and migratory bird species at the Mai Po Marshes.

These preliminary ideas can serve as a direction for both environmental education and tourism development elsewhere in Hong Kong, as well as in other parts of South China. It is highly likely that as Chinese society evolves, more people will become interested in the environment; it is also likely that other habitats in addition to wetlands can be managed and utilised in a similar way. Although Hong Kong’s nature-based tourism is still at an early stage and there are a number of uncertainties as to how environmental conservation
and tourism development here will develop, this understanding should help to inform land-use and tourism planning throughout the region.

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References

PART 3

DESTINATIONS, INDUSTRY AND THE FORCES OF CHANGE

Janet Cochrane and Harold Goodwin

Introduction

It is a truism to say that tourism takes place in other peoples’ places. When people travel they rarely think of the effects they are having on their destination, and until recently tourism companies took no responsibility for any changes. Instead, they look towards destination managers, especially the host government, to regulate for any issues. Since the 1990s, however, it is increasingly recognised that responsibility for the changes caused by individual and collective actions lies with the perpetrator. In 2000, when the UK Association of Independent Tour Operators adopted a policy of Responsible Tourism, they accepted that their members ‘have a responsibility to respect other people’s places and ways of life’ (AITO, 2007). The industry has since gone further, moving from the rather passive intention of respecting other people’s places to the more active goal of creating ‘better places for people to live in and for people to visit’. This was made explicit in the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism (Fabricius & Goodwin, 2002), drawn up during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. More recently still, a raft of publications and training courses in environmental management and fair trade in tourism recognises that the management of tourism in destinations must reflect local issues and the aspirations of both the visitors and the visited.

Many of the chapters in this section examine these issues and aspirations, and remind us that tourism has to be managed in the specific context of the geography and culture where it takes place; achieving this is a part of responsible destination management. They also reflect the struggle between different societal partners to benefit from tourism — sometimes at the expense of achieving the ideal ‘responsible’ approach — and complement the preceding two sections in examining further the role of tourism stakeholders. Most of the chapters discuss the changes arising from tourism, including several case studies of its impacts on other peoples’ places. In some cases they do this at a very human level. White’s exploration of sex-workers and tourism at Kovalam Beach, in India, reveals the complexity of the issues related to this sensitive area and challenges some of the assumptions — and prejudices — of academics and practitioners, while Brickell’s chapter
on household inequality in Cambodia examines the choices and attitudes of individual men and women to illustrate the changes caused to gender roles and expectations as a result of the employment opportunities brought by tourism.

Other chapters also frame their analysis in the context of change, recognising that tourism both contributes to and responds to social and cultural evolution. For instance Porananond and Robinson, writing about the Songkran Festival in Chiang Mai, argue that the festival plays an important part in the sharing of cultures and traditions and in facilitating exchanges between social groups, and describe how the festival’s traditions have evolved over several decades in response to the tourism agenda.

Tourism is increasingly recognised as an engine of transformation in social, economic and political systems at national and local level throughout Asia. When a destination reaches the ‘development’ stage of its life-cycle, incoming operators, accommodation providers, tourism boards and governments are all likely to participate in shaping and managing it, although they may not do so in a coordinated fashion and may fail to provide an enabling policy and regulatory framework, and because of this may be unable to control unwanted changes. In principle it is local government bodies — the local council, national park administration or heritage site management agency — which have the primary opportunity and responsibility to increase the positive impacts and reduce the negative impacts of tourism, yet all too often they are in thrall to the private sector and do not exercise the necessary environmental and social management. On the other hand, Gray’s chapter on Puerto Princesa, in the Philippines, reports what can be achieved by a determined city administration with a dynamic mayor who has prioritised the development of green tourism and pursues policies which involve several sectors of society.

Contrasting ways of dealing with destination management are presented in the case of Bhutan, as described by Ritchie, and by Fallon for Indonesia. In Bhutan, the challenge is for the government to find ways of maintaining the country’s cultural integrity and the quality of its environment as pressure mounts to allow more tourists into the country. As Ritchie points out, maintaining the unique system of royalty and fixed tariffs is beset with difficulty, not least because tour operators discount prices and undermine government policy. Fallon uses a discussion of tourism from China to Indonesia (principally Bali) to examine evolving approaches by the industry to inbound Chinese tourists. Early disappointment about lower-than-expected volumes has generated efforts by Indonesian operators to formalise and standardise arrangements as they feel their way into the new opportunities represented by this huge market, but Fallon argues that adaptation has not gone far enough; instead of repeating the standard offer of shopping, gambling and superficial aspects of culture, the industry could refocus its strategies to attract more sophisticated sectors.

While in Bhutan the government has successfully — so far — minimised the drawbacks of tourism through limiting the number of visitors, in some places tourism has become a much stronger agent of change. While White and Brickell discuss the socio-cultural changes wrought through the interaction of tourists directly with the local population, Feighery (in the case of Xi’an) and Bovair (Tibet) demonstrate how aspects of local culture are presented and manipulated on behalf of tourists according to a presumption of what they want to see. Feighery further argues that the landscape of Lianhu is a contested space, in which the dominant Han Chinese modernisation agenda clashes
with the traditional culture of the minority Hui people. Although certain aspects of Hui culture (particularly their cuisine) are part of the local tourism offer, it is the Tang dynasty heritage which is mainly promoted, because this is seen by the Han Chinese as one of the most advanced periods of Chinese history. In both Tibet and Lianhu, the use of public space has more to do with Han Chinese culture and the perceived needs of tourists than with the needs of the local people.

Many of the issues discussed in these chapters are relevant wherever tourism provokes (or intensifies) the pressures of modernisation and globalisation. Sometimes there are attempts to preserve destinations from the inevitable changes caused by these pressures in order to maintain their perceived attractiveness for tourism. This often results in artificiality and conflicting perceptions of what constitutes the ‘authentic’. As Bovair recounts, ‘traditional’ games performed against the backdrop of a ‘folk village’ are the acceptable face of staged authenticity for foreign visitors, whereas the karaoke-type bars where Tibetan songs and dances are performed in a modern setting are popular with local people but decried by foreigners as the unacceptable face of actual authenticity.

Bovair’s chapter also brings out another significant aspect of change: the influence of tourists and tour operators in shaping destination image. Source market tour operators participate in forming images and determining who arrives. Particularly in the case of newer destinations, local stakeholders — and particularly host communities — rarely have a decision-making role. Sometimes destinations are even unaware of the way in which they are presented overseas, and the images used may conflict with how people view themselves. By labelling Tibetans as ‘noble savages’ and Tibet as a lost Shangri-La, the Chinese and the West damage present-day Tibetan culture and remove the agency of local people to shape their own future. Local communities are not always merely the passive recipients of exogenous influence, however: the strong leadership exerted by the local mayor in Gray’s chapter on the Philippines and the proactive stance taken by the academic sector in Indrianto’s exploration of urban tourism in Indonesia demonstrate, again, how individual and collective action can enhance tourism’s beneficial impacts.

Indrianto’s case study, which focuses on the built heritage of the city of Surabaya, also illustrates the challenges of preserving culture in the face of change. Industrialisation has meant that many buildings dating from the colonial era are redundant or expensive to maintain, and Indrianto describes attempts to create a new economic use for them through tourism — or at least to generate the political will to preserve them through raising their profile.

The heritage trails developed in Surabaya are an example of how the industry is diversifying to take advantage of an increasingly sophisticated market, of which key traits are the search for self-actualisation through increased knowledge of the world and enhanced awareness of the self’s position in relation to others. The growing trend for exploring physical, mental and spiritual health is part of this quest. In their chapter on health and wellness tourism, Laing and Weiler show how businesses and destinations are reconfiguring themselves to engage with people’s desire to return to a more natural existence in an increasingly artificial world. This drive, too, is part of a sustainable response to tourism, and indicates how changing demand is enabling destinations to maximise their competitive advantage.
Understanding the impacts of tourism and the processes of change should give tourism managers greater opportunity to steer these changes in a positive direction so as to distribute economic and environmental benefits as widely as possible; whether they take this opportunity remains to be seen.

References

Chapter 22

Tourism in the Kingdom of Bhutan: A Unique Approach

Megan Ritchie

Introduction

This chapter seeks to describe the unique organisation and operation of tourism in the Kingdom of Bhutan. It begins with a background description of Bhutan and the short history of tourism therein. Major attractions and types of tourism within the Kingdom are briefly described. The paper then goes on to discuss the tourism system within Bhutan including the unique tariff structure, the supply-side nature of the industry and the challenges such a system poses. The chapter concludes with brief remarks concerning the impending changes to the organisation of tourism in Bhutan and the effect that these, and other changes, may have upon the future development of tourism in the country.

Background

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small, land-locked country nestled in the Himalayas, wedged between the world’s two most populous nations: India to the south, east and west, and China (the Tibet Autonomous Region) to the north. It is approximately 300 km long and only 150 km wide, yet travelling from west to east requires a minimum of three days’ car journey (south to north requires at least 2 weeks of walking). Elevation rises from just 100 m in the south to the mighty 7541 m peak of Gangkhar Peunsum in the north. The geographical landscape alters dramatically as one proceeds north into the Himalayas; from the tropical south through temperate pine forests and snow-capped alpine regions up to the glacial, remote north.

The inhabitants of the country call it Druk Yul — ‘Land of the Thunder Dragon’ — and refer to themselves as Drukpa. It is regarded as a developing country, with a population of
just 670,000, some 31 per cent of whom lives beneath the United Nation’s defined poverty line. Fiscal development is a recent phenomenon — until the mid-1960s Bhutan was a non-monetised economy, operating in isolation from the rest of the world. The last 40 years have seen major change, with the 4th King having embarked upon a far-reaching development strategy aimed at encouraging economic growth and improving the living standards of his people while preserving the Kingdom’s unique environmental and cultural landscape. As a result, the economy has shown strong growth since the 1970s and life expectancy rates have effectively doubled.

For all the change that has occurred, Bhutan essentially remains a very traditional society; residents continue to wear national dress every day, Buddhism dominates every facet of daily life, and some 79 per cent of the population continues to lead an agriculturally based existence (UNDP, 2006). Bhutan is both modern and traditional. The capital city, Thimphu, is awash with mobile phones and pirated DVD movies, yet the fields surrounding the city continue to be ploughed by oxen. Television was introduced as recently as 1999 (making Bhutan the last country in the world to establish its own television broadcasting station), and while most homes in the capital have a set installed, many of the more rural areas of the country continue to struggle with intermittent electricity and lack of a safe water supply.

Tourism has emerged as one of the country’s foremost industries, and as such is being given ever-increasing attention from the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB). The RGoB works with a system of 5-year plans, and the current one — the ninth — clearly identifies tourism as one of the industries capable of contributing to poverty alleviation and an industry where the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is possible.

The maintenance of tradition, coupled with a spectacular natural landscape and the kudos of being the only remaining Himalayan Buddhist Kingdom in the world, has seen demand for Bhutan as a destination increase dramatically in the past 10 years. Arrival numbers, while diminutive on a global scale (17,300 in 2006), have increased by almost 300 per cent in the past 4 years (Figure 22.1). It is the Government’s expectation that a strong

![Figure 22.1: International arrivals to Bhutan 1996–2006.](image-url)
and well-established tourism industry will not only project a positive image of the country, but will also generate employment for youth, earn much-required foreign exchange revenues, contribute to the conservation of the Kingdom’s environment, and assist in the preservation of culture (DoT, 2006). Tourism has now firmly established itself as one of the more viable industries in Bhutan and is currently the highest earner of hard currency. The number of direct tourism sector employees is estimated to be 3000 (this does not include indirect employees in other sectors) and it is estimated to contribute 4.5 per cent to GDP (Royal Monetary Authority, 2005).

Integral to all development in Bhutan, including tourism, is the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), as articulated by the 4th King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck. A basic understanding of the concept of GNH is necessary as it pervades almost every facet of policy development in Bhutan. The underlying principle is that development has many more dimensions than those that can be easily measured by GDP. GNH suggests that development should be understood as a process that seeks to maximise happiness, rather something aimed solely at increasing economic prosperity. The concept places the individual at the centre of all development efforts and recognises that individuals have material, spiritual and emotional needs. It asserts that spiritual development cannot, and should not, be defined exclusively by the increased consumption of goods and services (Planning Commission Secretariat, 1999).

Tourism’s Short History in Bhutan

The first official tourists entered Bhutan as recently as 1974, the coronation year of the 4th King. Some 287 tourists entered as official paying guests, travelling overland via India. Prior to this, visitors from outside were extremely rare and were allowed access only by invitation of the royal family. Such visitors tended to be of the ‘explorer’ type, following in the footsteps of the few who entered as early as the 1800s. The original group of paying tourists in 1974 spent US$130 per day for an all-inclusive package of transport, accommodation, excursions, guide services and meals. Interestingly, this all-inclusive system has essentially continued through to today and, aside from a rate increase in 1989, little in the structure of how tours take place in the country has actually changed. The result has been a gradual and planned opening up of tourism in what was regarded as a relatively closed country.

In 1982, 8 years after the arrival of the first official tourists, the Bhutan Tourism Corporation (BTC) was formed. The BTC was an entirely government-owned and operated enterprise that took care of all tourism operations — visas, travel permits, itineraries, bookings, tours, guides, transport, etc. The following year saw the opening of the first (and only) international airport, in the town of Paro. The airport remains the only operational one in the country, chiefly due to the difficulty of finding other suitable locations amid the mountainous terrain. In 1989 the original all-inclusive rate of US$130 was raised to US$200, where it still stands today.

In 1991 the private sector entered the arena with the privatisation of the BTC. The group became BTCL — Bhutan Tourism Corporation Limited. An additional 33 private tour operator licences were also issued, many of them to former BTC employees. In the same year, a government body in charge of regulating tourism, the Tourism Authority of Bhutan (TAB), was formed; this became the Department of Tourism (DoT) in 1999.
TAB was placed within the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and its role was to guide, monitor and regulate the expanding tourism industry. Eight years after the initial privatisation efforts, Bhutanese entrepreneurs requested a broadening of opportunities and the release of further licences. Today there are some 300 licensed tour operators in Bhutan, representing an increase of more than 300 per cent in the past 3 years.

From the outset, Bhutanese authorities made a conscious and deliberate decision to attract high-spending tourists only. In contrast to neighbouring Nepal and India, Bhutan has never been interested in the low-spending sector of the backpacker. Without exception, every document relating to tourism in Bhutan mentions the concept of ‘low volume, high value’ tourism (DoT, 2006). The Bhutanese believe such tourism is more in keeping with the idea of development that is compatible with the wider objectives of GNH, and with protection of the natural and cultural environments.

**Organisation of Tourism in Bhutan**

To this day, Bhutan’s approach to international tourism remains highly unusual and unique. Relative to the approaches of other countries, tourism in Bhutan has been — and remains — tightly controlled. The two core features of the sector are the unique quality of its attractions and the all-inclusive tariff system; these will be explained in this section.

Tourist activities and attractions in Bhutan fall into two broad categories, as defined by the DoT: trekking tourism and cultural tourism. Despite the fact that Bhutan sits in the middle of the Himalayas, trekking tourism constitutes just 4.5 per cent of all arrivals (though this rises to 14.5 per cent if those who undertake treks as short as one day are included) (Dorji, 2007). The reason for this is simple — among Himalayan nations, Bhutan rates as the single most expensive in which to trek. In neighbouring Nepal, trekking tours are sold for approximately US$60 per day, making it substantially cheaper than the Bhutanese all-inclusive option of US$200 per day. That said, there is still quite some cachet in being able to say that one has ‘trekked in Bhutan’, and the trekkers Bhutan tends to attract are in fact highly experienced travellers and trekkers (Dorji, 2007).

For this group — particularly those with special interests such as birdwatching and botany — the country holds considerable attractions. The natural landscape and ecosystems of Bhutan remain largely intact, with 72 per cent of the country still under forest cover (including 26 per cent gazetted as protected areas). The National Assembly has enacted law which prescribes that a minimum 60 per cent of the country must be maintained as forest (Wangchuk, 2005). The Kingdom is recognised globally as a haven for biodiversity and has been declared a ‘biological hot-spot’ by WWF. It is home to some of the world’s most endangered species, including tigers, snow leopards, elephants, red pandas, golden langurs, blue sheep, takin and a bird population of at least 770 recorded species; in some areas, it has one of the highest species density of birds in the world (Wangchuk, 2005; FAO, 1999). However, mountaineering in Bhutan is illegal. The Bhutanese believe the mountains to be sacred deities and climbing them is seen as disrespectful. Of the peaks that tower to over 7000 m, some 20 remain unclimbed; the 7541 m Gangkhar Peunsum is the highest virgin (unclimbed) peak in the world.
The term ‘cultural tourism’ is used in Bhutan to describe all activities and attractions that do not fall into the ‘trekking’ category. Buddhism (the Vajrayana Mahayana strain) is at the core of almost all cultural identity in Bhutan and constitutes the single largest ‘attraction’ (Figure 22.2).

The countryside is dotted with 2000 monasteries, 10,000 stupas or chortens and countless Mani walls and prayer flags. They appear in all terrains and are often perched in the most precarious of locations. Great Dzongs (fortresses) dominate the landscape. The most sought-after cultural experience by tourists is the Tshechu, a rich form of Bhutanese oral history and tradition where values and beliefs are passed from one generation to the next. The Tschechus take the form of unique community festivals held within the walls of the Dzongs and which usually continue for three to four days. The festivals are held in every district in honour of Guru Rinpoche, the saint attributed with bringing Buddhism to Bhutan in the 8th century; they are held on auspicious days and in certain months only, and are the most important event in the social calendar of most Bhutanese. Locals dress in their finest kira and gho,¹ don heirloom jewellery and pack enormous quantities of food in picnic style. The Tshechus involve highly stylised

¹Kira and Gho are the national dress of Bhutan; kira for women and gho for men. Both are hand woven in traditional patterns, with the everyday variety usually woven from cotton and the more elaborate from silk and cotton. The kira is a floor-length dress, composed of a rectangular length of fabric wrapped around the body and secured at the shoulders by an ornate chain, and at the waist by a tight belt. A blouse (wonju) is worn underneath and a cropped jacket (toego) over the top. The gho is a long robe, hoisted to knee length and held in place with a tightly cinched belt at the waist. The large pouch formed at the front was traditionally used to carry a bowl or tool, but today is used for a variety of items, including newspapers, laptops, phones — and even babies. The kira and gho worn for Tshechus are especially ornate and may have taken more than six months to weave. Such pieces become family heirlooms and are passed from one generation to the next.
masked dances performed by monks and community members and full of ritual and vibrant colour (Figure 22.3). The Bhutanese believe that viewing the most important dance at the Tschechu — the ‘Dance of the Rakshas and the Judgement of the Dead’ — at least once in a lifetime is essential to the attainment of enlightenment. The Paro and Thimphu Tschechus, held in March/April and September, respectively, are the primary draw for tourists, with arrivals to the Kingdom peaking at these times.

The country’s population is composed of three major ethnic groups — the Sharchops in the east, the Ngalops in the west and centre and the Lhothsampa in the south. Within these three groups are numerous sub-groups — Bumthaps in the centre, Brokpas in the east, Layaps in the north and many others. The Kingdom has 19 spoken languages and many more dialects, each having evolved separately due to the scattering of population and enforced isolation of sub-groups due to the mountainous topography. These factors have generated a rich and culturally diverse ‘tourism product’ to be exploited.
The system of government and the royal family also form part of the culture and attraction of Bhutan. Until recently Bhutan was ruled by the 4th King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who succeeded his father in 1972 at the age of 16. In 1988 he was married to four sisters, each of whom became a Queen. In 2006 he abdicated in favour of his son, the 5th King, Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, who will be crowned in 2008. That same year will mark 100 years of the royal dynasty in Bhutan and several events and celebrations have been planned to honour the occasion. Tour operators began marketing the Centenary to potential tourists as soon as the celebrations were announced.2

The second core component of the tourism sector — the all-inclusive tariff — is perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the tourism system within Bhutan. While all-inclusive tariffs have been used by resorts, cruise companies and package tour operators for decades, the idea that an entire country can be regarded as an all-inclusive destination is certainly atypical. As outlined above, the system was introduced with the first group of tourists in 1974 and has served Bhutan well for over three decades, having developed into a distinctive, workable tourism model. That said, while it is a simple concept — each tourist pays US$200 per day for an all-inclusive tour — in practice it is not quite so simple to administer, monitor or control. The system has been the subject of much discussion among overseas agents and operators and the source of some misunderstanding among potential visitors. The most common misunderstanding is that the US$200 is some kind of ‘entrance fee’ into the Kingdom. Likewise, the term ‘Royalty’ (used to describe a tax component of the tariff) is also open to misinterpretation. Many visitors, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds, presume the word refers to an amount of money that goes directly to the royal family; this is, of course, incorrect. The chain of payment and receipt is a somewhat complex one, and is best described step by step.

Typically, the tourists contact their outbound travel agent or tour operator in their home country. They book a specific tour in Bhutan and pay an agreed tour price (which should be no less than the official US$200 per night). The agent then contacts their local ground handling operator in Bhutan who registers the tourists with the DoT through filing several application forms concerning visas, road permits, group size, itinerary, etc. The outbound agent then deducts a 10 per cent commission fee from the standard tariff and makes the payment for the tour directly to the DoT (not to the local operator). The DoT deposits the money at one of the two banks in Bhutan. The local operator checks with the bank that the payment has arrived and then liaises with the DoT to settle accounts.

Several deductions are made by the DoT from the amount paid in by the overseas agent. First, there is a deduction for the ‘Tourism Royalty’ (US$65 per night per person), then a contribution to the Tourism Development Fund (TDF) (US$10 per tourist per visit) and finally a 2 per cent tax on earnings is withheld. Once these deductions have been made, the local operator can request a 50 per cent advance of the balance prior to the arrival of their tourists. The remainder is paid to the operator one week after the departure of the group, and the local operator then pays the local providers of accommodation, food, transport and guiding services. Small variations to the process described above occur when a tourist

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2The actual Centenary should have been in 2007, but this is one of two lona (bad luck) years, so it was moved to 2008.
books directly with a local operator in Bhutan (e.g., over the Internet), though to date the number of tourists using this method is insignificant. Likewise, small variations occur in the exact tariff charged based on the time of year (July and August are designated as low season) and whether any discounts or surcharges are applicable (discounts for young children exist and surcharges are applicable for small groups).

Some further explanation regarding the Royalty and TDF components of the tariff is required. The bulk of the TDF is made up of the US$10 fee per tourist per visit. It was established in 2000 as a mechanism for ensuring that money would be available for the future development of the industry. The fund is managed by a committee composed of the Director General of the DoT and representatives of the Association of Bhutan Tour Operators (ABTO), the DoT and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Past expenditure from the TDF has included developing attractions, membership of international tourism organisations and expenses associated with the running of ABTO, including staff salaries and office costs. Meanwhile the Royalty — US$65 per tourist per day — is collected by the DoT and paid to the RGoB, which uses the money to finance social sectors (health and education are free in the Kingdom). In 2006 the Royalty component amounted to US$8.2 million in direct income to RGoB (DoT, 2006).

The DoT suggests that the tariff processing system has worked efficiently in the past, but that constant vigilance has been required to correct incidences of false accounting (Rogers, 2002). Furthermore, with the dramatic increase in arrivals since 2003, mounting challenges to tourism in relation to the all-inclusive tariff system have emerged. These are principally because the system is entirely supply-side driven and leads to low levels of professionalism, inhibits the development of SMEs and new products, and leads to substantial levels of undercutting. These issues will be examined in the next section.

**Issues Confronting the Current System**

Since its inception, tourism in Bhutan has been completely supply-side driven: in other words, the product-oriented approach is the only style of marketing strategy employed. Local operators have devised itineraries based on what they are willing to deliver, with little regard for market demand. Chiefly due to the uniqueness of the destination, the exclusivity of the ‘I’ve been to Bhutan’ claim and the tariff system, this approach has been largely successful. Tourism in Bhutan is not simply guided by the suppliers (operators) but is dictated by them; they are literally the holders of the ‘keys to the Kingdom’. Tourists cannot contact local hotels or transport companies directly — by paying their all-inclusive tariff, they hand over all decision-making to the registered operator. They cannot drive themselves around but must travel with a guide. Entry to most attractions — temples, monasteries, fortresses — is by authorised pass only, signed in the tourist’s name by the Department of Culture, under the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, and provided by the operator. Local operators decide where tourists go, what they see, where they stay, what they do and even what they eat. Payment of the all-inclusive daily tariff to the local tour operator removes the opportunity for tourists to have direct contact with the suppliers of goods and service to the tourism industry in Bhutan. This, naturally, limits the opportunities for tourists to make informed choices about consumption.
Since local operators effectively operate in a protected economy there is no incentive for high levels of professionalism within the industry, with no matching of the price paid to the quality of services offered or to the category of goods provided. No matter how poor the quality of product or service the local operators deliver (in terms of transport, unskilled guides, accommodation, etc.), they are still authorised to charge US$200 per day. This is one of the reasons for the colossal growth in the number of operators since 2003, with tourism now apparently viewed by some as a ‘get rich quick’ sector. Unscrupulous operators make larger profit margins by providing the cheapest possible levels of service, while being able to charge the same price as those delivering a higher quality — and more costly — service product. Consequently, the DoT receives a substantial number of complaints annually relating to the difference in quality received by different visitors: the tourist who has spent six nights in sub-standard accommodation with no hot water, no electricity and a less-than-spotless room is none too happy to learn at the airport upon departure that the person sitting beside her has, for the same price, enjoyed six nights in 4-star hotels complete with hot and cold running water, a flushing toilet and a highly skilled guide. In 2006, the top suggestion for improvements to Bhutan’s tourism made by departing tourists related to the improvement of hotel standards (Dorji, 2007).

A further challenge to the current all-inclusive system is that it does little to foster the development of new SMEs. Because the tourists pre-pay all their meals, accommodation, transport and activities, there is little space left in their itineraries that might, in the usual market demand-based system, encourage the development of new small business such as restaurants, bars, souvenir outlets, tourist taxis, bike rentals and excursion operators. Given that the development of SMEs is one of RGoB’s expectations from tourism, this challenge is of particular importance.

A further impact of the daily tariff system is that it discourages an extended length of stay. A tourist paying US$200 per day has little incentive to spend a ‘rest day’, simply taking things at a slower pace or mixing with the locals. Likewise, with travel distances in Bhutan taking a long time to cover (mountainous terrain and road conditions mean that the average distance covered in an hour rarely exceeds 30 km), few tourists are willing to spend US$200 per day for the privilege of sitting in a vehicle for 10 hours in order to reach attractions outside of the usual offerings. The well-worn Paro–Thimphu–Punakha triangle — all within 2 hours drive of the capital city, Thimphu — has become the mainstay for the majority of operators. Such itineraries present little challenge in terms of logistical arrangements for the operator, and returns to local communities are limited.

The challenges of increasing length of stay, developing new products and encouraging SMEs are of particular concern to DoT (2006). If tourism is truly to contribute to poverty alleviation, then one of the strategies that needs to be employed is the wider spread of tourism geographically, resulting in an increase of benefits to more communities. For this to occur, new products in different geographical areas need to be developed. Such products will only be successful if operators are willing to support and utilise them. Recent developments in the community-based tourism pilot project in the Nabji-Korphu area have shown that sufficient market demand exists for products outside the current offering, but that the present system is not especially responsive to market demand, in that local operators have complete censorship over the products that tourists have exposure to.
A further area of concern lies in the tendency of tour operators to undercut each other in various ways. It would seem that with a government-controlled agreement for all operators to charge the same amount there would be little opportunity for this, but with the recent vast increases in the number of arrivals and the doubling of licensed tour operators, regulation of the tariff has become almost impossible. Undercutting usually occurs in one of three ways: through the purchase of Druk Air tickets (Druk Air is the only carrier servicing Bhutan), through payments to overseas tour guides accompanying the tour group, or through a process of ‘refunds’ to the overseas agent (Rogers, 2002).

The first of these is somewhat complex. The international operator remits funds to the DoT which supposedly covers payment for both the tariff fee and the air tickets. The payment is then distributed to the relevant bodies, including Druk Air. The international operator, however, having struck a deal with the local operator, remits insufficient funds to cover all payments and the onus then lies on the local operator to cover the shortfall (Rogers, 2002). The second possibility, a direct payment to a staff member of the international agent accompanying the tour group, is self-explanatory. The last method — and the most common — is that the local operator returns money by way of a refund to a third party, which is usually the overseas agent that originally referred the clients. In this way, funds intended as profits for the local operator, which could potentially have been directed at higher standards of service provision or product development, are actually leaking back out of the country (Rogers, 2002).

The root cause of this situation is that international agents use their purchasing power to bargain for discounts with the Bhutanese operators, which — fearful that the agent will simply find another local operator to do business with if they do not comply — agree to sell the tour at a discounted rate. The discount is not then passed on to the tourist buying the itinerary, but is simply absorbed by the international agent as additional profit (Ritchie, 2005). The problem of undercutting, then, is essentially one created by both local tour operators and international agents. There is no doubt that this type of leakage, and the increasing frequency with which it is occurring, is seriously undermining the once successful model (Rogers, 2002).

The Future of Tourism in Bhutan

Bhutan is currently undergoing an unprecedented period of rapid change. In the broader context, the country’s first constitution has been drafted and is being implemented, the monarch is in the process of handing over power to the people via a democratically elected system of government, the country’s first submissions to the World Trade Organisation are being made and 2008 will mark the Centenary of the Kingdom’s royal family. The tourism sector is experiencing industry-specific change at a similar rate. The first ever tourism legislation and policy has been drafted and will go before the National Assembly in 2008. There are plans for the DoT to evolve into an Authority, with more power and a true regulatory mandate. Discussions regarding the possible revision of the tariff, and ultimately the freeing of the market, are under way.

Over the 32 years that the tourism tariff has been operational it has, generally speaking, served the country well, delivering good profits to RGoB and to tour operators. However, the industry has now matured substantially since inception of the tariff, and the policies
developed when the industry was fledgling are perhaps no longer the most effective. It is recognised that the tariff restricts the development of SMEs and limits the incentive to create new tourism products and services. Tourist numbers in Bhutan have been rising at an unprecedented rate and numbers of tour operators within Bhutan have likewise swelled, both of which may signal that the time for change is now opportune. Such change, however, may not be welcomed in all quarters: while some operators state that they would welcome the freedom such a change would bring and would relish the opportunity to compete with fellow-operators on the basis of value, demand, and quality, for others, the protection afforded by the all-inclusive set tariff will not be relinquished willingly.

The coming few years will be exciting ones for Bhutan. Among the raft of changes that a democratically elected parliament and a new constitution will bring, tourism too will undergo further evolution. As with all past decisions relating to tourism, it is expected that such change will be well considered, cautious, and in line with the Kingdom’s overarching aim of GNH.

References


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Chapter 23

Sex Workers and Tourism: A Case Study of Kovalam Beach, India

Tracey White

Introduction

Tourism is a social event that involves the interaction between different societies and cultures, with an exchange of values, opinions and lifestyles. Sex tourism is a highly controversial area within tourism studies and encompasses a wide diversity of activities. Some of these are regarded as socially unacceptable, in particular those that involve child prostitution or commercial sex, while other sex tourism activities are seen as mutually beneficial to the people involved. Thus, it is a somewhat complex affair, on the one hand unacceptable, exploitative and with negative implications, but on the other hand acceptable and with positive connotations.

In relation to developing countries there is a tendency to categorise all sexual activities relating to hosts and guests collectively, terming them ‘sex tourism’. The participants are called ‘sex workers’ or ‘sex providers’, ‘sex seekers’ or ‘sex tourists’. Some aspects of sex, romance and love are marketable areas within tourism, with certain destinations promoted as exotic or romantic (for example the Seychelles and Paris), where people can go to enjoy the romantic atmosphere, rekindle romance or look for new romantic liaisons. Some holiday packages (such as Sandals and Club 18–30 holidays) are promoted through images of romance, love and sex. There are also destinations where commercial sex can be obtained, such as Bangkok and Prague, where tourists can holiday and be sure to fulfil their sexual needs. All these types of holiday are vectors for mainstream activities of sex tourism.

Exploitative sex tourism activities such as prostitution and child prostitution are well documented (for example De Albuquerque, 1999; Jeffreys, 1999; Kempadoo, 1999; O’Connell Davidson, 2004; Rao, 1999; Ryan, 2000; Seabrook, 1996) and were for many years the principal focus of research into sex tourism. Tourists, however, cannot be held solely responsible for such activities: the reality is that these commercial activities generally already existed...
within the local population and sex tourists are simply utilising an existing infrastructure (Bauer & McKercher, 2003).

Holidays are a time when people are able to take on a different identity to the one they express in their everyday life and fulfil dreams, desires and aspirations away from their home environment; for many, this involves a release from the sexual restrictions which they may normally experience. Being away from the home environment and the people with whom we interact every day allows anonymity and the assumption of a different persona. A holiday is a short period during which people may ‘live life to the full’ and not have to consider whether their actions, behaviour and even dress code are socially acceptable. Thus, the holiday environment provides a catalyst for people to engage both mentally and physically in the atmospherics of relaxation, with its underpinning notions of sensuality and sexuality.

This chapter will consider aspects of the phenomenon of ‘sex tourism’, looking at host engagement in terms of sexual activity, and will touch on its social and cultural impacts from the host perspective in relation to a case study of Kovalam Beach, a beach resort in Kerala, South India.

Methodology

The research described in this chapter was an ethnographic study which aimed to understand people’s lives. The methods used were qualitative, rooted in a critical appraisal of respondents’ perceptions and opinions and of real life events. The case study format allowed the critical examination of particular aspects of the social setting through empirical investigation. The study derives from a larger research project which investigated the wider implications of the social and cultural impacts of tourism from a host perspective. The core of the research strategy and design incorporated a field survey conducted in the local community of a mass tourism beach resort in Kovalam, Kerala, which was visited on three separate occasions within a period of 12 months, both during peak season and out of season. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted as they allowed for variation in responses and enabled the interviewer to investigate fully areas of interest and themes. Interviews also allowed freedom for the respondents to talk about issues of interest or concern to them. Observational techniques were also utilised in order to understand the context of people’s everyday lives and determine if there was parity between words and actions.

The research was carried out among a cross-section of social groups living or working within the area of Kovalam beach. The inhabitants of Kovalam Beach consist of a mix of ethnic and religious groups living alongside one another, and although all are of Indian nationality, each group has their own cultural traditions and characteristics. In order to ensure that all population subgroups were included in the research, individuals with a variety of demographic characteristics were included. Random sampling was used, with half the respondents from the beach area and the other half living or working around 200 m behind the beachfront. The sample included key stakeholders, beach boys, waiters, Ayurvedic practitioners, fishermen, shop-owners, rural people and professional people, with a mix of Christians, Hindus and Muslims, men and women, and from a range of age-groups. Four
interviews were conducted with educated professionals living outside the area whose perspectives were largely in conflict with those of the resident community of Kovalam Beach; these facilitated analysis of what is felt to be acceptable behaviour or not within local communities and cultures by giving the perspective of semi-outsiders.

Research into Sex Tourism

Historically, sex tourism has been understood as a leisure activity of men who travel to tourism destinations, often in developing countries, in order to engage in commercial sex with prostitutes or in paedophilia activities (Enloe, 1989). France (1997) believes that the evolution of sex tourism in Asia has gone through four distinct stages:

- Indigenous prostitution where women were subjected to concubinage and bonded prostitution within patriarchal societies.
- Economic colonialism and militarisation, with prostitution a formalized mechanism of dominance and a means of meeting the sexual needs of occupation forces.
- The substitution of international tourists for occupation forces.
- Rapid economic development through sex tourism.

This model creates images of force and subjection which in historical terms can be assumed to have had negative social and cultural consequences. Taking this as a generic framework which reaches to the present, it can be posited that residents of sex tourism destinations are still nowadays faced with similar behaviour and demands from tourists to those of the economic or military colonisers.

Most literature concerning the socio-cultural impacts of tourism does not take into account the individual history of a destination and how it may have been shaped prior to tourism. Dunlop (2001) notes that India has had a long history of invasion by other countries, and that its people have encountered numerous disruptive changes from invasion to colonisation, and through to independence and new political rulers. This is therefore a nation which has repeatedly encountered socio-cultural changes and associated impacts, but people have been able to adapt while retaining their basic cultural foundations. It could therefore be argued that indigenous communities are now able to build upon past experiences of foreign incursions to capitalise on tourism by providing sexual services.

Bauer and McKercher (2003, p. 4) note that ‘tourism, romance, love and sex have been cosy bedfellows for a long time, with complex relationships existing between human intimacy and sexuality during periods of travel’. For many years ‘sex tourism’ was the umbrella under which all sexual relationships between travellers and host populations fell, and it was often used to characterise a perpetuation of gender roles and reinforcement of power relations (Pruitt & LaFont, 1995), particularly with regard to the darker side of sex tourism which included paedophilia activities and relations between male tourists and local female prostitutes.

On the other hand, ‘romance tourism’ is generally seen in a different light. Romance tourism is a controversial area within tourism literature: it is often concerned with relationships between female travellers and local males, each having different motives and seeking particular benefits (Pruitt & LaFont, 1995), and ultimately suggesting sexual
relations. Although termed ‘romance tourism’, women are in fact considered to be traveling in pursuit of sex as well as romance, and local men who engage with these women are often labelled as gigolos, male prostitutes and entrepreneurs (Dahles & Bras, 1999). It therefore appears that there is a philosophical gender divide between men who seek (or sell) sex and are negatively considered to be sex tourists or gigolos, and women who seek sex; in the latter case, romance or love is brought into the arena to portray relationships which are deemed acceptable. O’Connell Davidson (1998) states that this is largely due to much of the literature being analysed through the lens of radical feminism.

De Albuquerque (1999) and O’Connell Davidson (1998) disagree with the concept of romance tourism, believing that ultimately women are seeking casual sexual relationships and any notions of romance are delusions; however, the research they undertook relied on interviews with local males as opposed to female tourists and therefore took a particular perspective. Bauer and McKercher (2003) point out that sex — or the prospect of sexual encounters — can play a central role in the decision to travel and, as mentioned above, certain destinations are associated with sex, romance and love. Sexual relations between two consenting adults may be viewed positively in terms of self-actualisation and sexual fulfilment, but some observers may see it as a negative, exploitative and detrimental experience. Bauer and McKercher (2003) further argue that the nexus between tourism and sexual behaviour extends far beyond the narrow confines of commercial sex, identifying it conceptually as having three dimensions: the role of sex and romance as a motivator for travel; the nature of the encounter; and the role played by tourism as a facilitator of romantic and sexual encounters. Herold, Garcia, and DeMoya (2001) point out that not all relationships are based upon sex or romance, and begin to explore a new concept of ‘companionship tourism’. Meanwhile Belliveau (2006), a self-confessed sex pilgrim, explores the journeys of women who travel to love foreign men, entitling her book ‘Romance on the Road’ and suggesting that romance is a part of an authentic travel experience.

Thus, sex tourism comes in many forms. Viewing it purely as a service for economic gain facilitates the ideology that the providers from host communities are ‘sex workers’, but as Opperman (1999) argues, it is not simply a matter of monetary exchange but should be viewed as multi-dimensional.

Swarbrooke’s (1999) model of sex tourism (Figure 23.1) illustrates the different dimensions of the phenomenon to produce an insight into what he terms modern day sex tourism. However, this model only concerns itself with tourist activity, and in order to fully understand the nature and scope of sex tourism it is essential that the situation is also interpreted in terms of the sex providers. Figure 23.2 attempts to explore this area in relation to Kovalam Beach.

Both diagrams demonstrate that men appear to be both the main sex providers and seekers of sex, although women are playing an increasing role as sex seekers. Neither of these models encompasses those people who travel without any predisposition for sexual activity but who end up engaging in some form of it at the destination, an important area which should not be dismissed, although Figure 23.2 considers sex providers who are ultimately looking for a longer term commitment.

In particular, it is clear that in comparison to women, male hosts are playing an increasingly proactive role as sex providers, often under the label of ‘beach boys’, with many of the young male hosts who are engaging in sexual activities having perfected the art of
seduction. The term ‘beach boy’ is used to denote male youths who work on or around the beachside area selling goods or providing services, and who spend much of their social time in the beachfront locale. In Kovalam Beach, for example, the ‘capturing’ of female tourists is commonly known among local boys as ‘fishing’ or ‘hunting’, with larger

Figure 23.1: The nature and scope of sex tourism.
(Source: Swarbrooke, 1999, p. 76)
'catches' considered to be women with greater economic wealth. The boundary between engaging in normal adolescent behaviour and prostitution for economic gain then becomes blurred. Dahles and Bras (1999) identify beach boys as seeking their livelihood directly from tourists and providing a wide range of services. They are self-employed, small-scale entrepreneurs who often have romantic or sexual behaviour as part of their economic strategy, and could be labelled as 'entrepreneurs in romance'. But the boys alone should not be unfairly labelled, as female tourists are known to target specific males based on their own physical tastes, desires and sexual preferences. Belliveau (2006) considers the way that female sex tourists recount sexual tales of their encounters to fellow travellers in person and increasingly via blogs and other travel websites, providing information on the best places to stay and who to ‘look up’ during a visit.
Kovalam Beach Case Study

Kovalam Beach is an internationally known beach resort situated in the state of Kerala, in southern India, and is the setting for a major tourism industry. Tourism here has followed the classic pattern of the Tourist Area Life-Cycle. During the 1960s the area already welcomed small numbers of independent travellers and hippies and became well known through guidebooks such as The Lonely Planet. The first large-scale commercial tourism development was in 1972, when the Indian Tourism Development Corporation created a five-star beach resort. From this, people began to realise the economic benefits involved with tourism, ad hoc tourism developments became the norm, and Kovalam Beach quickly developed into a long-haul mass tourism destination. People saw opportunities and migrated from areas such as Goa, Tamil Nadu and even as far afield as Kashmir, buying and renting land from locals to build shops and restaurants in order to become service providers for the tourists. Not only was there little consideration of planning or environmental management in these developments, but the people who had migrated to the area appear to have had little concern for the place.

With the growth of mass tourism, hosts and guests began to interact and exchange socio-cultural values, practices and traditions, which inevitably impacted upon the local community. The local beachside population consists predominantly of people who have migrated to the area to take advantage of business opportunities, with locally born people generally living outside the beach area and within the village of Kovalam. Superficially, Kovalam Beach seems an idyllic holiday destination, but the pleasant surface conceals a range of what is seen by some as illicit or culturally unacceptable sexual interactions between hosts and guests. (In discussing the following issues the term ‘local people’ is used to denote the population resident in the beach tourism locality, as opposed to Kovalam as a whole.) One respondent summed it up thus:

*The true community of Kovalam are subdued, they are not business orientated people, just simple people and as such there is no host community but a floating population of people from out of state who provide services. When people go to a new place they cannot be recognised and therefore take risks, they have ample opportunity to do whatever they want to extract maximum money with minimum effort, and many do this through sexual activities, drugs and dealing.*

A comparison can be drawn between these incomers and the sex seekers who are away from their own home environment and, as discussed above, feel themselves to be free of normal social constraints. The difference is the matter of economic gain: the tourists provide a demand which this floating population can supply to their own economic advantage.

Among the tourists visiting Kovalam Beach are independent travellers who may or may not be searching for some form of sexual interaction, mass tourists unaware of any illicit activities, and other mass tourists who engage on a regular basis in sexual activities. Interestingly, the distinction between ‘independent’ and ‘package’ tourists is becoming blurred here (as in other places) as many independent travellers have turned to using package holidays and charter flights at a very low cost, which enables them to visit more frequently. Many of the tourists who engage in forms of sexual interactions on their holiday
return to Kovalam Beach repeatedly, often up to three times a year, as they have formed mutually beneficial relationships or friendships.

Over the years since tourism has developed, local sentiments regarding visitors and the economic benefits associated with them have changed, as the following comments demonstrate:

“Eight to ten years ago there were many tourists, normal tourists like backpackers; they were average people that gave us average business”.

“When the charter planes started to come, that is when the tourism in Kovalam changed. It meant that there was no open market, charter flights meant pre-booked rooms, therefore only the rich hotel owners were getting the money. Guests basically live within the hotel and are provided with all the services and facilities that they need. The hotel owners are greedy”.

“Here charter people equalled tourism, but charter does not bring a benefit through package programmes, everything is sold to the businessmen and not much to the locals”.

The development of mass package holidays at Kovalam has affected local people’s earning capacity, which suggests that people have had to diversify to ensure their economic survival in a heavily competitive market of service providers. One respondent commented that ‘you can get anything you want here, drugs, sex, alcohol’. This diversification of interests has led for some to being a part of the illicit trade providers and more so for men, who are generally the main income provider for families.

Local feelings are generally sympathetic towards the people who provide sexual services to tourists. As one person explained:

“If you have no money in India you have a life like a dog”.
“People help themselves to get a life. The government don’t or won’t help”.
“There are a lot of young boys having sex with older male tourists, it’s no good but these people are poor and they can make money, so it’s okay”.

A fairly small area of activity at Kovalam Beach is that of female prostitution, which is not at all obvious, being conducted covertly and often under the guise of Ayurvedic practices — or as one respondent put it, in the form of ‘Ayurvedic Quacks’. Some Ayurvedic massage parlours are said to be purely a disguise for sexual activities. The majority of women working as prostitutes appear not to be local but migrant workers from different regions: according to Jacob (1998), they tend to be girls from other parts of the state or from Tamil Nadu and even Nepal, although the pimps are mainly from the locale.

Tourism-related paedophilia is growing worldwide, and as developing countries around the world try to put a stop to such activities and introduce legislation to address the issue, paedophiles move on to explore new areas. Kovalam Beach has its regular paedophile visitors and also expatriate paedophiles who have settled there and bought or rented properties, and are living with young boys. Jacob (1998) notes that to purchase a property a non-Indian must buy in partnership with an Indian national, and this type of arrangement is often seen as a good business proposition for local boys and their families. Boys are procured through a variety of means such as family members or a local mediator, who more often than not was abused himself when younger. The family or mediator is paid a fee, and the arrangement involves commission for a host
of other parties such as taxi drivers, landlords and hoteliers, and sometimes even the boys themselves.

Another contributory factor to this situation is that boys from lower socio-economic groups become streetwise from an early age and are always on the lookout for ways to provide for themselves and their families. Some of these relationships are casual liaisons, but often there is long-term involvement, with a paedophile investing money into a family and paying for the boy’s education. Paedophiles’ activities are known to some local people and by the police but the economic gain that can benefit an impoverished society ensures that often a ‘blind eye’ is turned. A local policeman commented:

*We did find sex businesses but they were similar to what happens in Trivandrum. Mostly with boys but some women too.*

By referring to Trivandrum, he was implying that other people (non-tourists) were known to engage in sexual business activities outside of the touristic locus, and that sex tourists were simply utilising an existing infrastructure.

In some cases, paedophiles are known to have a group (or ‘stable’ as it is commonly known) of boys under their supervision to whom they offer unlimited alcohol and drugs as a means of enticement but also to encourage dependency. Often as the boys get older they lose their appeal, and are given a payout and cast aside to fend for themselves. At this stage they often find themselves with a tarnished reputation, an addiction of some kind and unemployable in standard jobs, and therefore have to engage in illicit activities to survive. One course of action open to them is to become sex providers for different tourist segments as beach boys, or even to become a provider of young boys for paedophiles.

Another significant area of sexual activity at Kovalam concerns homosexual tourism. The comments below indicate that gay sexual relationships are seen by local people as unacceptable, exploitative and negative:

*“Tourism has created a gay culture that previously was non-existent and is created by the supply of money for services”.*

*“[There are] bad issues associated with tourism, a gay culture/business system that has arisen as a direct impact of tourism”.*

*“Also gay sex is predominant here: Western men come over here and spend lots of money with boys. This was unknown here before but now wherever you look on this beach you will see either groups of men or single males and they come here for one thing only”.*

*“Old Western men with young Indian boys, it’s a big business, a large sex market, they return time and time again, buying land and houses for their boyfriends, this is changing the society here”.*

*“Gay men looking for 16 year old boys or younger, they rent houses, give jobs to young boys and then use them. This is very, very bad and all for money”.*

Many beach boys engage in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, exchanging sexual favours for money, gifts, meals, alcohol, drugs and to gain status among other local boys. This status is expressed in the form of ‘notches on the bedpost’ (or the local equivalent), but often the ulterior motive is the hope of a visa to a Western country. It is not unusual for these boys to tailor their sexuality according to wherever they can achieve maximum gain, and being known to be bisexual enables them to appeal to
a wider market. These boys are often from poor socio-economic backgrounds with little formal education, but they have a wealth of knowledge of the Western world without being Westernized; their aspiration to a Western lifestyle comes largely from the demonstration effect. Sexual relations for them are generally in the form of one-night stands, a holiday fling or perhaps a longer term relationship, sometimes with little or no emotional involvement. These boys form the largest body of sex providers, and as younger boys grow up in the area they soon realise the benefits to be gained and themselves become involved.

Such relationships are not all predicated purely on monetary exchange; although the transaction of sex for financial gain may occur in the first instance, a genuine friendship or loving relationship may form over time and develop into a long-term relationship based on relative economic equality. To the people involved these are mutually beneficial, open relationships based upon what appear to be unspoken agreements and arrangements. These can be termed ‘friendships’ with some emotional involvement, and fit within Herold et al.’s (2001) concept of companionship tourism. Interestingly, local people made little reference to these types of heterosexual relationships, only to the homosexual activities, which suggests that some male/female tourist relationships are socially acceptable. But by labelling them as sex, romance or love tourism with their underpinning notions of economic power and prostitution in the context of relations between the developing and developed world, they become represented as negative host/guest relationships.

When considering sex tourism, the types of sexual activities involved and the social and cultural impacts, different perspectives in terms of positive and negative implications for the host population are available. These appear to be ambiguous depending upon the actor’s position in society and their caste, class, status, gender, religion and employment. Local professional people who were interviewed, such as policemen, doctors and professors, put forward the view that all sexual activities between hosts and guests outside marriage are illegal, with negative and socially unacceptable impacts in terms of sexual diseases, drug and alcohol addiction, violence and the introduction of mixed race children; many of these impacts are interrelated and have led to a need for medical, police and counselling services. However, these people are not directly employed in tourism, having permanent employment with a guaranteed income and coming from higher socio-economic groups. Their position must therefore be questioned as to whether they view these activities from a perspective of social morality or whether they are simply addressing a Western researcher in a manner which attempts to represent their country positively.

The people living behind the beach area and who are not directly involved in tourism frequently use the term ‘malpractices’ to apply to sex, drugs and alcohol, giving the impression that they are perceived as negative. It is interesting that many place the blame for these activities on their own people as opposed to the tourists, apparently suggesting that local residents lead the guests astray and that had local people not provided these ‘malpractices’, they would not exist.

“The local guides make a lot of problems, they make the tourists dirty, I mean like the supplying of drugs etc’.
“There are certain malpractices created by the locals towards foreigners”.
Yet many of these people earn their income indirectly through tourism via relatives who work within these illicit areas. This implies double standards and suggests that the less involved a person is in tourism at a ground level, the more likely they are to be critical and label impacts as negative. Although the sex industry is linked to tourism, it is not tourism per se which generally gets the blame, but the lack of employment for local people, with sex work giving an opportunity to the unemployed. The local community is fully aware of the negative aspects of sex tourism, but accepts them as involvement allows people to make a living:

“This sex industry has linkages with tourism but I don’t blame tourism. The problem is the lack of employment, and sex work gives an opportunity to the unemployed”.

“There are things that go on here, secret things. These secret things are bad but if it makes the tourists happy we are happy because if those people are happy other people will come. Happy means money”.

On the other hand, people who are engaging as sex providers as a means to an end do not appear to consider the wider implications of the industry. They either have no choice as they have little or no education, they do not have the ability to find other employment due to addiction, or they simply enjoy what they do. Sex tourism constitutes an economic mainstay for many, and has enabled people to earn a living and improve their standard of living and lifestyle. In other words sex tourism has enabled people, as they see it, to change their lives for the better:

“If you want to succeed and make your life better then you have to make changes”.

“Tourism has allowed Kovalam to develop and given people the ability to earn a living in different areas and therefore affords them a better lifestyle”.

In the discussion of sex tourism, people who are engaging in normal social behaviour with the tourists, forming friendships and seeking longer term relationships, must not be overlooked. Often, such relationships are drawn into the power relationships discourse concerning the developed and developing world and identified as sex tourism. Yet if relationships are identified as being mutually beneficial and containing positive outcomes, this ideology and the perspective from which it comes must be questioned. Through these friendships, local people have been able to exchange cultural values and ideas, improve their knowledge and language skills and in some cases experience being a part of another culture. Similarly, tourists have been able to gain experience of local life, culture and family values:

“I can mingle with tourists, I have learnt about different people, their cultures and different nationalities”.

“I have made many friends from all over the world through my work and I have learnt about their lives and culture”.

“Tourists can live and experience a simple life and a different culture. Here, we love children, and tourists can see our family relations and gain experience from that”.

“People are able to communicate and have cultural interaction; cultural exchange improves knowledge, capability and capacity”.
Conclusion

Looking at sex tourism, sex workers and related social and cultural impacts from a host perspective provides a contrasting narrative to much of the existing literature on ‘sex tourism’, which presents an often unequal and exploitative outlook. The sex industry is considered to be one of the negative impacts associated with tourism in Kovalam Beach, however local people are engaging in it through necessity and taking advantage of what tourism brings to them. Undoubtedly sex tourism here can be exploitative and socially unacceptable. However, there are clearly different levels of engagement, some of which are much deeper than the sex tourism literature acknowledges, and if some relationships are seen as acceptable and mutually beneficial, it has to be asked whether they should fall under the present categories defined within the literature.

If we consider Bauer and McKercher’s (2003) dimensions of tourism, it is clear that further investigation needs to be undertaken to develop distinct classifications and typologies of both host and guests who engage in what may be romance or companionship, or perhaps simply carnal sex seekers, but who all currently fit within the narrow classification of ‘sex tourism’. Some of the types of host/guest relationship which have been noted are not dissimilar to relationships within the developed world. Yet, due to the economic divide between developing and developed countries there is a tendency to label these kind of relationships as being economically driven, and therefore aspects of prostitution come into play and people become labelled as sex tourists or sex seekers with the underlying negative connotations which these terms infer. In fact, sexual relations are a normal part of everyday life, and tourism acts as a catalyst which enables different cultures to meet and interact, and as a consequence it is only to be expected that healthy sexual relationships will evolve as part of a spectrum of social intercourse and friendships.

References


Introduction

This chapter presents findings on the tourism-generated employment changes that are impacting on intra-household inequality in Cambodia. Drawing from empirical research conducted in the vicinity of the Angkor World Heritage Site in Siem Reap, it considers the opportunities and challenges that the burgeoning industry presents for the combined goals of enhanced gender equality and poverty alleviation. After elaborating on the rationale and context informing the research, the chapter explores the different experiences of men and women participating in tourist-oriented employment, looking specifically at the encounters of women in bar work and handicraft production alongside men’s involvement in agricultural diversification. The selected case studies reflect a variety of perspectives and experiences recorded in one hundred interviews and twenty discussion groups conducted in the predominantly rural commune of Krobei Riel and the urban commune of Slorkram. The wider effects that employment changes are having on intra-household inequality through the gendered territories of decision-making and divisions of labour are then analysed. Finally, the principal results are summarised, with a discussion of how they might be deployed as a starting point to initiate policy dialogue and engagement.

Rationale and Context

Three main rationales underpin this examination of tourism-generated work and intra-household inequality in Cambodia. First, the socio-economic processes occurring
post-Khmer Rouge, which remain marginalised in academic discourse, are explored. Secondly, the importance of tourism-related development for intra-household inequality is emphasised. The third rationale is to ensure that ‘sustainable’ or ‘pro-poor’ tourism — much touted as a means of poverty alleviation in developing countries — is en-gendered and understood at the micro-level.

The designation of Angkor as a World Heritage Site in 1992 has gradually brought the temple complexes to international attention and transformed Siem Reap into a gateway destination. Angkor’s continued importance for Cambodian identity follows over 40 years of violence and destruction from which Cambodia is now emerging. In April 1975 the Khmer Rouge seized power from the government under Premier Lon Nol and established a radical Maoist regime (Democratic Kampuchea), whose political and social policies between 1975 and 1989 brought turmoil to the country. An estimated 1.7 million Cambodians — almost one quarter of the population — died of starvation, exhaustion, disease and execution (Brown, 2000).

Post-Khmer Rouge, Cambodia’s reopening to the world and the forces of globalisation has brought significant change. The government, for example, has placed great emphasis on the formation of economic policies aimed at attracting foreign investment and assistance. This has resulted in a large quantity of foreign investment in hotel construction, the service sector and the garment industry. The rise in construction has been accompanied by growth in the tourism sector, which now forms an integral part of Cambodia’s development strategy (Ballard, 2003). Tourism has been increasing rapidly in recent years with tourist arrivals in 2004 over 50 per cent up in comparison to 2003, and forecasts suggesting that by 2010, international visitor arrivals will reach 3.2 million (WTO, 2004). Consequently, tourism in Siem Reap has become the main driver of the local economy, although at the national level tourism does not appear to have led to a significant increase in opportunities for employment.

New prospects have emerged for women in Siem Reap with women working in larger numbers than men in hotels and restaurants (Gorman, 1999). In fact, Cambodia’s female labour force participation rates are one of the highest in South-East Asia, with women forming 75 per cent of the labour force in wholesale and retail trade and 66 per cent in manufacturing (ILO, 2001). This translates into an increased tendency for women to engage in a broader range of tasks, which makes the opportunities for young Cambodian men appear to be developing more slowly in comparison (UNIFEM et al., 2004). It is imperative therefore that examination of the social impacts of tourism, which tends to focus almost exclusively on sexual exploitation and trafficking, is extended to encompass broader changes in employment structures not only for women but also for men. In turn, this will open up further pathways to poverty alleviation.

With regard to the second rationale, the ways in which women manage the opportunities brought through tourism need to be analysed in terms of their ability to convert income earning into gender parity and empowerment in families and communities. For example, while it is difficult to fully gauge the impact of tourism on poor people, especially with the lack of reliable data focusing on the economic impact of tourism on developing country destinations (ODI, 2006), it is even more difficult to understand the impact that tourism-related employment changes are having within the micro-politics of the Khmer household. This chapter employs the ‘functioning and capabilities’ approach to poverty developed by Nussbaum and Sen (1993) to explore the opportunities that tourism can bring, not only in terms of market-generated income but also of other ‘basic needs’ required for people to fulfil
their aspirations. Just as community-led sustainable tourism requires an understanding of the political, economic and cultural tensions within communities (Richards & Hall, 2000), as well as the relationship between local communities and their environment, it will be argued that the often competing and conflicting interests within families also need to be the subject of attention. This is a critical consideration given the amount of academic attention now paid to the ‘feminisation of poverty’, the issue of ‘secondary poverty’ affecting women within the home and the attempts to estimate poverty, which have tended to overlook inequalities in the household.

The aforementioned issue feeds into the chapter’s third rationale and into debates at an international scale surrounding the potential that tourism holds for poverty alleviation. Since global tourism is a vast and growing industry already affecting millions of the poor, in 2005 the World Tourism Organization — with backing of the UN and public, private and civil society decision-makers worldwide — identified tourism as one of the most effective tools for alleviating poverty in the world’s poorest countries (ODI, 2006). With these claims, a policy of ‘pro-poor’ tourism has emerged premised on the idea that focusing on macro-economic growth and foreign exchange earnings alone is insufficient and the needs of the poor must be of central concern. Since poverty elimination is placed at the heart of the international development assistance agenda and the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women is now a central Millennium Development Goal (MDG), tourism must account for its varying effects on different men and different women. This is of paramount concern considering Cambodia’s low Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) rank of 97 (out of 120 countries) (UNDP, 2006). Furthermore, since Cambodia’s National Poverty Reduction Strategy 2003–2005 (RGC, 2002) identifies the promotion of gender equity as a critical means of reducing poverty and the expansion of tourism-related work opportunities as key to this, it is crucial that the two issues are addressed in tandem in order to generate broad-based growth.

While the sections that follow explore the experiences of those directly affected by the rapid expansion of tourism in the Angkor region, as a potential means of comparison, ‘The Happiness Family’ waxwork at the Cambodian Cultural Villages theme park in Siem Reap is an useful point of departure (Figure 24.1). It magnifies the pervasiveness of intra-household inequality, which is embodied in the prescribed and subordinate roles that the tourism industry can perpetuate. According to the museum’s description, the waxwork depicts a prosperous nuclear family sitting on modern Western-style furniture relaxing together, with the son studying, the girl playing in her mother’s company and the father speaking on the phone.

The scene is extremely atypical in respect of the usual layout and atmosphere of Khmer homes but while it seems easy to criticise the Cultural Village for its superficiality, its lack of ‘authenticity’ or its apparent irreverence, it is an important and worthwhile point of enquiry as a new space of analysis (Chan-Pech Ollier & Winter, 2006). Among the other thirty wax statues which document the development of Cambodia’s culture, the Khmer family is represented in a gendered way with the man on the telephone controlling the permeable external boundary of the home while the woman looks after the children. The woman in the family is also reproduced as the bearer of tradition through her Khmer style dress (variations of which are extremely common in Cambodian tourist publicity). In contrast, her husband wears a Western-style shirt and tie. As a result, ‘happiness’ is essentially equated to women’s adherence to tradition and cultural ‘authenticity’. In the
following empirical research it will be shown that while for some households the image portrayed (to domestic and international tourists) is a distortion of reality, for others, tourism-generated employment has had little influence on familial divisions of labour and decision-making, marrying more clearly with the waxwork’s portrayal of female servitude.

Tourism-Generated Employment and Impact on Gender Roles

Moving from image to reality, in order to consider the role of tourism as a source of gender transformation through paid work, in this section the experiences of men and women from varying household backgrounds will be considered. As a broad trend, it was found that in contemporary Cambodia the outward manifestations of gender roles are in the process of being reordered in the country’s move towards a market-driven economy.

Female headship has rapidly become the accepted discourse of gender and poverty among international agencies (Kabeer, 2003). Consequently, the first case study looks at the female worker Srei Mom as a metaphor for a growing number of women’s experiences. While it should be noted that the relationship between female-headed households and poverty is by no means consistent, tourism-related migration — which is facilitating change in household organisation — has a number of important implications for gender equality.

Working as a waitress in a local restaurant, Srei Mom earns US$50 per month, lives alone and pays US$15 per month for a room in a ground floor purpose-built block. Srei Mom migrated from Kandal Province in 2003 with a female friend (who subsequently
moved to Phnom Penh). It was the first time she had migrated except at a young age during the Khmer Rouge regime when she was evacuated to Battambang Province for 3 years. Like Srei Mom, most female migrants experience a series of problems on arrival. Her son lives in her homeland with his grandmother and as a result she feels considerable emotional pain living away from him. In contrast to the unified family in Figure 24.1, women’s need to fulfil their growing economic responsibilities in the tourist-related employment of Siem Reap is leading to the spatial separation of family members. Although tourism work is alleviating income poverty, in multidimensional terms Srei Mom’s emotional well-being is compromised by her inability to lead a fulfilling family life. As a coping strategy Srei Mom carries around a photo of her son at all times on her mobile phone and relates this to the following feelings:

_I miss my home very much … every day whether it be sleeping, walking or sitting, I always miss my old house. I miss my son also because I feel more emotionally attached to my son than my parents. I worry about my son because he lost his father when he was young and he hasn’t the comfort from his mother either because I have left him. Sometimes I think I will go crazy thinking about him. When I go anywhere I miss him and every day all I do is for him. I brought only my son’s photograph because it is very important to me. I keep the photo at the bedhead because if I keep it at the head you will know that I love my son. Although I am active, I always carry it on my mobile phone, call him everyday, and sacrifice all I can for him._

(Srei Mom, female, Slorkram, 28 years old, deserted by husband, waitress)

The mobile phone illustrates the capacities of technologies to transform origin–destination relations. For migrant women like Srei Mom who temporarily move to Siem Reap and who leave their children with extended family, the mobile phone offers a powerful form of solace. The use of the phone allows them to stay in contact, functioning as a kind of umbilical cord linking the two in a form of virtual parenting, as Castelain-Meunier (1997) argues in the context of divorced fathers who are separated from their children. Srei Mom attaches great value to the phone because of the isolation she feels in her adopted community, and from her family in Kandal Province.

Srei Mom’s work life is subject to additional difficulties. Working after dark in restaurants and especially bars is often demonised in locals’ accounts and associated with immorality and shame. As Srei Mom informed me

_I work from 5-12 pm and sometimes when it is busy, until 1 am. I want to find a job in the day but I haven’t found one yet. I don’t like this work because I work amongst people who have been drinking and sometimes the guests disdain me and show no respect. In Khmer culture, the girl that works at night is not good, but I have to do this for economic reasons._

The harassing conduct which Srei Mom alludes to is not uncommon in Cambodia where women are often employed in order to attract male customers (Aafjes & Bama, 1996). Srei Mom tolerates such behaviour because of the economic difficulties she faces as a
single woman following her husband’s marriage to another woman. The participation of women in tourist-oriented industries is constrained by the clear associations made within communities between virtuousness and the type of employment one is involved in, especially in rural Siem Reap. This creates a wider hierarchy of, and for, women, in which employment within the home is considered to be more virtuous than employment in the public sphere. This matrix suggests that gender ideology is changing far more slowly than the development and extension of women’s work. As a result, women’s need-driven work infringes on traditional gender norms. Female migration, for example, while not conforming to certain ideals deemed proper for Cambodian women, is a means through which women can pursue economic stability. This financial motivation is arguably a key prerequisite for achieving the ‘security’ and ‘self-respect’, which Chambers (1988) identifies as criteria of poverty reduction. In fact, it was found during the research that the more general widening of women’s workforce participation is primarily related to poverty reduction. The impetus for working is governed by one or many of the following requirements: to pay school fees; to cope financially after the death of a family member (most commonly a father); to increase household income; and to compensate for declining agricultural conditions.

The need to counterbalance weaknesses in male employment as a result of declining agricultural conditions relates to the second key example of tourism-generated change and its relative opportunities for men and women. In Krobei Riel specifically, women’s productive work has become increasingly important in recent years with basket weaving taking on new economic significance as a backward linkage from tourism (Figure 24.2).

Figure 24.2: Weaving baskets for sale as souvenirs.
The growing importance of basket weaving resonates in what Rigg (2005, p. 174) has termed in the context of South-East Asia ‘deagriarianisation’. Tourism has part-facilitated this transition. For example, while the cultivation of salad vegetables and high quality rice has been introduced in Krobei Riel to supply the many local hotels and cater to the needs of tourists, it is extremely limited. Consequently, men are diversifying their livelihoods to non-farm work such as casual labouring in Siem Reap. This need for occupational change and perceived lack of employment opportunities in comparison to women causes men to stress the challenges they face in the arena of work when interviewed. Heng’s experiences exemplify the tempestuous relationship that many men feel towards the national economy. He says:

*For men, our role isn’t changing. It remains the same and sometimes is actually moving backwards rather than developing. It is because of the end of men’s work because the policies of the country are economically poor. In this time, we need to have self-confidence and self-provision ... we cannot depend on other people or the government.* (Heng, male, Krobei Riel, 49 years old, married, motorbike driver)

Heng struggles to earn money and attributes this to the poor state of the national economy and his inability to speak a foreign language, which means he cannot persuade guests to ride on his motorbike. The perception that ‘men’s work’ (deemed to be that related to ‘outdoor work’ and largely connected with farming) is being eroded stems from the large proportion of participants (like Heng) who are former farmers and are either diversifying their employment or migrating to Siem Reap. According to men, tourism-oriented employment does not necessarily represent a new sphere of opportunity (unlike for women) but a fallback position in the face of worsening agricultural conditions and a continued need to fulfil their perceived breadwinner role. In fact, reflecting a lack of ideological change, men like Heng remain strong believers in Khmer tradition which supposedly dictates that men have the ‘first priority’ to be household head. This reverence to tradition is upheld despite men’s acknowledgement of women’s increasing economic power. As Heng explains in the context of his own vulnerability

*Women now wear the trousers, not just sarongs. Now women are stronger than men because they can weave baskets to get money whilst men study. Now the rights of men and women are the same and if we cultivate rice we do it together whereas in the past the man was on the farm, and the wife would stay at home. This means that although people say women are weak and cannot do everything that men can do — often men now cannot do the things expected of him — to provide for the family — so women have to do this on their own. Being dependent on a husband’s income is not enough.*

While Heng assigns rural women greater ‘strength’ in the light of the income gained through basket weaving, the majority of women in Krobei Riel feel disadvantaged in comparison with urban women due to their containment within the home. This perception
arises from the use of the home as a kind of barometer of gender inequality in which progress is measured according to the degree of participation in public life outside the home. It is important, therefore, that the integration of craft production into the rapidly growing domestic and international markets benefits women and does not preclude other employment options and young women’s schooling. Furthermore, Heng’s comment about women’s aptness at doing ‘everything that men can do’ — defying traditional norms of female submissiveness — must be met with caution. Governmental representation of women as ‘Precious Gems’ vital to the economy indeed emphasises the need to change ideological norms. As Ing Kantha Phavi (The Secretary of State for Women’s Affairs) says, ‘if you keep women as white cloth, we cannot use all our human resources to develop this country ... we have to change the image and value of women’s status’ (cited in Kruger, 2004). The ideologies that keep Cambodian women certainly require confrontation, but it can be argued that the focus of the 5-year plan developed in 1999 to improve women’s status somewhat misses the point. As Heng’s interview demonstrates, women are essentially used for financial gain with little equivalent versatility adopted by men; the burden is almost squarely on women to respond to changing circumstances.

In fact, in both communities, men predominantly think the main rationale for women working is almost exclusively to earn money — no deeper meaning is assigned to it. For example, poorer men feel that if they do not want the family situation to deteriorate further, they have very little decision-making power concerning the participation of female family members (not just wives) in waged work outside the home. In these instances, women become ‘wives and mothers with economic responsibilities rather than breadwinners’ (Safa, 1995, p. 48 in the context of the Caribbean), upholding the status quo and men’s perceived role as provider for the family. This persistence of traditional norms curtails women’s apparent greater liberty, with paid work taken on in addition to — rather than in place of — household responsibilities. Women are thus ‘paying the price’ through their enlarged workloads, and in male-headed households there is a lack of recompense in terms of decision-making.

Nationally, women continue to perform more unpaid household duties than men, yet the rate of unpaid family labour for men in Cambodia is supposedly on the rise (UNIFEM et al., 2004). This apparent increase, however, does not match the corresponding growth in women’s paid work outside the home. In male-headed units, men frequently attribute this disparity to the distance between their workplace and home (however close). Furthermore, although some male participants support men’s participation in housework they still engage in routine practices that sustain men’s dominance in the public sphere and assign women to traditional domestic labour. While some men’s explanations for doing housework are based on an ethic of cooperation, with men making personal adaptations for the general good of the household collectivity, accounts also reveal an objective of individual material gain. A number of men were inspired by their friends who told them about the better standards of living achieved through their wives’ paid employment. Although UNIFEM et al. (2004) statistics show that men increasingly help with housework, this typically occurs when the wife is ill, pregnant or absent from the home or when their contribution to the household can be utilised to maintain their status as household head. In the past men typically only engaged in housework related to the external maintenance

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and construction of the house, whereas today their repertoire has in many cases widened.

One unemployed 49-year-old man from urban Siem Reap said that:

*I help my wife, cleaning the clothes and doing the ironing. I want to help as much as I can. I have no way of being head of the family apart from this. This isn’t traditional; I just want to help my wife. It is not my work; it is my wife’s duty. If I am head of the family and I can’t do something in the house, it would feel wrong.* (Thy, male, Slorkram, 49 years old, married, unemployed)

Existing evidence suggests that while it is the woman’s responsibility to manage household finances (Gorman, 1999), her control over resources and decision-making actually remains quite limited (National Institute of Statistics, 2001) even when the husband (like Thy) experiences difficulties in gaining employment. In this research, inequalities in household members’ decision-making capacities are commonplace and closely related to the type of decision being made. Although women are deemed to be household managers their control over the household budget is limited, access to cash not necessarily ensuring control over expenditure. One reason for this is the lesser value accorded to their contribution to the household, thus giving them a weaker bargaining position than men.

Despite women’s increasing participation in tourism-related employment, major economic opportunities are still largely reserved for men. As a result, men largely claim a greater right to what Kabeer (1999, p. 3) has termed ‘strategic life choices’, perceived to be the most valued choices through which people live their lives as they desire. Within Kabeer’s framework, women are consulted by men, but do not necessary participate directly in ‘first order choices’. The woman’s role is to carry out these decisions rather than make them. While women increasingly earn a large share of the household’s income, their control of expenditure can therefore in fact be quite limited. This indicates the difficulty in transforming economic activities into social and cultural resources for the improvement of women’s power within their families and societies, and underscores how necessary it is that the reform agenda also involves male roles. Furthermore since ‘capabilities are not only about what people “choose” but what they are able to achieve they depend partly on personal circumstances and partly social constraints’ (Kabeer, 2003, p. 84), which are arguably directly influenced by the (in)equality of household relationships detailed. As a result, despite tourism’s contribution to the corrosion of the male monopoly on paid work, household duties continue to be performed by women. There has been little revaluation of domestic and child-rearing responsibilities within this altered social situation, with women ‘time poor’, heightening the inequality of labour loads and decision-making in the household.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has considered the tourism-related employment challenges which Cambodian men and women are confronting, and how these reconfigurations are impacting on intra-household inequality. It has been shown that just as poverty is a multidimensional
problem, a heterogeneity of individuals comprise Cambodian society in which changes brought from employment in the tourism industry does not automatically facilitate shifts in men and women’s personal lives. In fact, for men tourism does not necessarily represent positive developmental change, falling largely outside the remit of traditional agricultural-based work.

Moreover, for women, while employment is leading to some widening of their margins for negotiation in the household, gender norms persist in the division of labour and decision-making which constrain moves towards egalitarian relations within households. The continuation of domestic and cultural attitudes towards gender roles in contemporary Cambodian families means that there is limited evidence of a significant improvement in household equality. Tourism has not unseated powerful ideological norms that do little to promote equality and is one part of the wider repertoire of economic changes that must be held accountable.

In terms of policy interventions, despite vitally important linkages being made between tourism and poverty alleviation, the gendered nature and experience of these dual processes has not been elaborated. The importance of looking at gender issues in poverty reduction strategies requires that tourism’s focus on economic growth does not overshadow the need to address the wider and coexisting issue of female well-being. In fact, just as Brohman (1996, p. 60) argues that tourism ‘should be assessed according to how it has been integrated into the broader development goals of existing local communities’, it should also be incorporated into moves towards gender equality. It is therefore imperative that the issue of gender becomes part of the equation when formulating tourism-based initiatives, and that a more holistic notion of sustainable tourism to meet the combined goals of poverty reduction and enhanced gender equality is promoted.

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References


Chapter 25

Modernity and the Evolution of a Festive Tourism Tradition: The Songkran Festival in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Ploysri Porananond and Mike Robinson

Introduction

Festivals play significant roles in society by providing focal points for the sharing of culture(s) and beliefs, and for exchange between social groupings (Turner, 1982, 1988; Getz, 1997; Handelman, 1998). They are important occasions for communities, families and individuals to express in public their identities, life-styles, social relations and senses of belonging. Traditionally, festivals share strong relationships with religious beliefs, moral codes, long-held customs and culturally shared myths (Turner, 1982; Falassi, 1987; Sofield & Li, 1998). Such belief structures are expressed and celebrated with varying degrees of frequency as festivals and events. However, festivals themselves evolve and change over time, as does their relative significance, acceptance and legitimacy in cultural, social and political terms (Robinson, Long, & Picard, 2004; Picard & Robinson, 2006).

Whether religious or secular, traditional or modern, festivals are rich in meanings both for the communities celebrating them and for their wider audiences. However, the meanings communicated through festivity are themselves subject to reconfiguration and reinterpretation as the form and content of a festival moulds itself to dynamics of normative social and cultural change and the processes of modernisation. Festivals, as condensed moments of social meaning, are important indicators of change. Participants, practices and audiences of festivals can reflect both instances of resistance to, and the inescapability of, modernity, and bound to the idea of the modern is the notion of the nation state, not merely as an internally consumed sense of boundedness, but also as a way of participating in the world. Festivals which can communicate a sense of identity and meaning can also project outwards as being symbolic of the national (Van Koningsbruggen, 1997; Guss, 2000).
One of the major trends over recent decades relates to the opening up of what were previously internally consumed festivals to tourist audiences as part of a wider process of the consumption of culture(s) (Long, Robinson, & Picard, 2004). In large parts of the developed world, festivals as important markers of so-called ‘pre-modern’ traditions have become popular cultural tourism attractions (Arnold, 2000). As swift and spectacular ways of experiencing the exoticism of ‘the Other’, tourist itineraries have long been constructed around times of festivity. Invariably, the gaze of tourists — or perhaps more cynically, the income of tourists — has impinged upon the form, function and meaning of festivals within local communities, and has shaped and re-shaped the dialectics between festival participants and festival observers. As Picard and Robinson (2006, p. 26) observe: “the presence of tourists at the periphery of festivity, and also at its centre, interrogates notions of ritual and tradition, shapes new spaces and creates and renews relationships between participants and observers, and between a festival and the conditions of its operation”. However, changes in the way that festivities are enacted are not merely reducible to any simplistic interventionist models relating to tourism/tourists, rather they are bound up in wider social, political and cultural processes and pressures emanating from within communities themselves (Burke, 1997).

This chapter examines the development of the Songkran Festival in Thailand, and particularly in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai. Drawing upon various texts and narratives, it traces the way in which the festival has developed in relation to an increasingly significant tourist audience. In doing so we explore the way concepts of tradition are being consistently re-worked in the more extant context of modernity in Thailand. We address three broad periods of development of the Songkran: from 1950 to the early 1970s; early 1970s to early 1990s; and the early 1990s to the present day. Clearly this historical periodisation of the Songkran is no more than useful shorthand to identify some key themes of development and not an attempt to disentangle obvious continuities.

Traditional Practices of the Songkran Festival

The city of Chiang Mai is in northern Thailand. Though the country’s ‘second city’, it has a relatively small population (approximately 170,000) and an essentially rural character, far different from that of Bangkok. Chiang Mai has long been a popular destination for Thai domestic visitors, partly because of its rurality, but mainly because of its distinctive culture and history stretching back over 700 years as the former capital of the Lanna Kingdom.1 The Songkran is a festival which celebrates the Lanna New Year, and is the most significant of all Lanna festivals. It extends over a fixed period of three days each year (April 13–15). The first day of the Songkran (and the last day of the year) is called Wan Sungkan Long, which means ‘the passing of the year’. Firecrackers are let off to help drive away bad luck and disease, while houses and compounds, clothes and bodies are given a thorough cleansing to drive out inauspicious elements. Then, new clothes are worn

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1The Lanna Kingdom was founded in the 13th century and annexed by Siam in 1892. The Lanna people, an ethnically distinct group, live mainly in the north of present-day Thailand. ‘Lanna’ means ‘land of a million rice fields’.
and ears are decorated with flowers specific to the year. On this first day there is no religious activity (Payomyong, 1996; Rungruangsri, 1997).

The second day of the festival is Wan Nao, which lies between the old and the new year. People are forbidden to say impolite words on this day; otherwise they will meet with misfortune throughout the new year. Preparation takes place for the religious activities of the following day. People go to market and return home to prepare food and tungs, colourful paper flags. In the late afternoon, they go to the nearby river with buckets and fetch sand to make pagodas in temple compounds which will be decorated with the tungs the following morning. Bringing sand to the temple is believed to replace the sand which is carried out inadvertently on the soles of shoes throughout the year.

The third day of the festival is Wan Thaloeng Sok, on which the new year begins; it is also called Wan Phaya Wan, ‘the most important day of the year’. People do not work, practising religious activities in the temple instead. In the morning, food — including a dessert dish of flower-scented rice or khao chae — and tungs are brought to the temple. In the main hall, all the prepared food is gathered to be donated to relatives and friends who have passed away. Tungs are hung on the Kuang tree and used to decorate the sand pagodas (Payomyong, 1996; Manopet, 1996). A religious ceremony called Than Tun follows, this being based on the belief that those who are dead and residing in hell can catch the long tails of the tungs to reach heaven (Manopet, 1996; Porananond, 2000).

On the first day of the new year itself some people prepare Mai Kham, or two-pronged sticks, and place them beneath the Bo tree (the sacred tree of Buddhism) in the temple compound to symbolise the prolonging of Buddhism (Payomyong, 1996). Further activity, called the Dum Hua ceremony, involves paying respect to the monks and the blessing of the Buddha, and takes place in the afternoon when perfumed water mixed with acacia oil is sprinkled over the shoulders of monks and on the Buddha. The Dum Hua also allows young people to ask for forgiveness from the elderly and in return are blessed with the perfumed water (Payomyong, 1996; Rungruangsri, 1997). In the context of the festival, water is highly symbolic and a means to bless and pay homage to the Buddha, the monks and the elderly. For young people, the sprinkling of water on each other’s shoulders using a small bowl is a means of expressing their relationships with each other.

Thus, the Songkran as traditionally practised in Chiang Mai carries both a religious and a secular significance. The festival is rooted in the Buddhist religion and most of its activities are centred on local temples. However, the festival also carries a more secularised social significance as a period of recreation for local people and a break from everyday life. In the past, Songkran was an occasion for communal celebration and an opportunity for young people to meet in public, as well as a time for young people to pay respect to their elders and to ask for forgiveness for any inappropriate things they may have done in the previous year.

An Emerging Tourist Audience for the Songkran in Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai developed as a destination for relatively wealthy domestic tourists, mainly from Bangkok, with the advent of a rail link in 1921. This linkage from the capital to the periphery, and later with networked rail links into neighbouring countries of Malaysia and Cambodia, dramatically increased the profile of the city and region of Chiang Mai.
which was given impetus by two key events. First, in 1926, the then King Vajiravudh (Rama VII) and the Queen visited the city by train, stimulating the élite classes of Bangkok to follow suit, and secondly, in 1927, a well-attended international seminar on tropical diseases was held here.

By 1930 Siam, and particularly Bangkok, was being promoted as a tourist destination to European markets. For domestic tourists, then as now, Chiang Mai was presented as a rather exoticised, bucolic and floral landscape, polarised against the rapid urbanism that was already making its mark on Bangkok. Lanna wooden architecture, cuisine, costume, music and dancing were all quickly commodified for the extended and increasingly mobile middle classes of Bangkok. The rural peasantry and the practices of the Lanna people came to signify a sense of impending rapid change within the country and something which needed to be visited in a rather symbolic way before it was lost in the rapidity of modernisation.

It is within the context of this increasingly visible Lanna culture that the promotion of the Songkran festival as a tourist spectacle began. The festival was first visited by ‘outsiders’ in 1922, via the railroad (Srisawat, 1961; Satrabhaya, 1996). Prince Purachattra, who was a commander of the state railway, actively promoted trips to Chiang Mai from Bangkok (Dangrojana, 2001), and the Governor of Chiang Mai was asked to facilitate these tourists (Asanachinta, 1987). During the festival activities were arranged such as a visit to Doi Suthep Temple, on the mountain next to the city, and the bathing of the Buddha at Phra Singh Temple, in the city. Tourists were encouraged to join with the local people to ‘play with water’ and ‘bring sand to the temples’.

The participation of these early domestic tourists in the activities of the Songkran was extremely limited, but significantly it was ‘active’ participation in the sense that there was, as such, nothing ‘spectacular’ to observe. The everyday ritual practices of the festival, while different from the experiences of the gazing urban élite, would not have carried the same exotic edge as for visitors from outside Siam. While there is limited information on the matter, the Songkran festival in this formative period of domestic tourism was essentially a localised ritual carrying shared meaning for the vast majority of participants and observers alike.

The Songkran During the 1950s and 1960s

During the 1950s and 1960s the Songkran saw the emergence of new practices and events. For the first time, processions became part of the festival; these have remained as focal points ever since. In 1953 a Buddha procession was ‘invented’ by Kraisri Nimmanheminda, a member of Chiang Mai’s middle-class élite and leader of a Buddhist group, for the first day of the festival. This took place for the first time with approximately thirty participants, all of whom were male employees of the local bank, of which Mr. Kraisri was the manager. The men dressed in mor hom, a dark blue cotton outfit which was traditional work clothing for local men. A float of the Buddha was carried to

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2In 1930, a Bangkok based tour operator ‘Aerial Transport Co. of Siam’ boasted that it only took nine days to reach Bangkok from London (Dangrojana, 1997).
Buddha Sathan, on Ta Pae Road near Nawarat Bridge. The only Buddha in the procession was Phra Sae Tang Khamani, known as Phra Kew Khaow (‘Crystal Buddha’), which is housed in Chiang Man Temple, the first temple built in Chiang Mai. It is believed that this Buddha was brought to Chiang Mai in 1296 by King Mangrai, the first ruler of Chiang Mai, and it is honoured for its reputed powers to protect against disaster. A few years later, the Buddha image in the procession was changed to Phra Singh, a locally better-known image.

In 1961 elephants were brought in to lead the procession, ridden by high-ranking officials, and throughout the early 1960s the procession became ever more elaborate. The parades were decorated with colourful flags and animated with traditional dances. The men switched from mor hom to their normal clothing of white cotton shirts. As the parade passed through the city, people set up altars in front of their houses to pay homage to the Buddha as it passed by. A second procession was also ‘invented’ in 1964 by provincial officials: it was called Dum Hua, after the traditional ceremony of paying respect to older people, because its intention was to pay respect to the then governor of Chiang Mai. The participants were mostly local groups such as business people, minority communities such as Indians and Chinese, and government officials, such as provincial officials from other districts.

In addition to these processions, further festival activities were staged across the city. These included Buddha bathing, the making of sand pagodas and the setting up of stalls selling local products at Buddha Sathan. Contests took place between the city temple members in traditional dance, rhyme-singing and drumming. Costume contests took place involving people dressing up as farmers and figures from ancient times. At the Phra Singh Temple, there was also Buddha bathing, stalls selling local products, dancing contests and fireworks, and at the local school there was traditional live music, as well as modern Thai and western music, and a contest for the title of ‘Miss Songkran’. These embellishments, stimulated by the interventions of local entrepreneurs and philanthropists, were readily absorbed alongside the central rituals of the festival. The spaces mobilised during Songkran were increased, the festival took on a more organised public and participatory character, and opportunities for commercial activity increased.

The main tourists to the Songkran at this time were from other parts of Thailand, particularly from Bangkok, who were encouraged to visit by the railways; there were almost no international tourists at that time. The Thai tourists generally both observed and participated in the various activities of the festival but also took the opportunity to buy local products and crafts and to visit the Doi Suthep Temple. The Songkran during this period essentially acted to magnify the heritage and tradition of the Lanna region and helped to build capacity and an expectation for tourists.

The Growth of Songkran Tourism

The 1970s and 1980s marked a period of growth in international tourism to Thailand. During the Vietnam War (1962–1975) Thailand had become a ‘rest and recreation’ space for American soldiers (Mayer, 1988). This introduced new patterns of international tourism to the country, but numbers to Chiang Mai were still limited. In 1970, a group of businessmen from Chiang Mai established the ‘Association of Tourism Promotion in the
North’ in recognition of the region’s potential. However, it was in 1977 when the government agency Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) began actively to promote Chiang Mai as the tourist centre of the north that international tourism here began to flourish. In 1971 the total number of tourists to Chiang Mai was recorded at 101,388, including 60,742 domestic tourists and 40,646 ‘international’ (TAT, 2004), and by the end of the 1980s Chiang Mai was attracting around 2 million tourists per year, with the vast majority of these — over 75 per cent — domestic tourists (TAT, 2004).

The Songkran festival remained a key attraction. The infrastructure developed steadily to cater for influxes of general interest tourists, who came not only for the Songkran in April but also for the Loy Krathong Festival\(^3\) held in November in Chiang Mai (and across the wider region). In addition, there was a growing stream of international backpackers eager to encounter the hill tribes of northern Thailand. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the Songkran underwent a series of makeovers, with various activities being added. In 1976, the Association of Tourism Promotion in the North instigated an event known as ‘Lanna Thai in the Past’ at the Old Chiang Mai Cultural Centre: this involved staging past cultural practices including a procession of women riding bicycles and holding an umbrella. The Buddha and Dum Hua processions remained central to the festival, however, with increasing number of participants and more elaborate costumes. By the 1980s, the procession was led by the Deputy Governor followed by various civil servants and an assortment of associations, clubs, universities and colleges. By 1988, 26 temple groups brought their Buddha to join the Buddha procession, and by the early 1990s the Songkran consisted of over 40 parades of member groups of city temples.

During the 1980s commercial activity increased. In 1987, in recognition of its economic impact, the municipal government began to support the Songkran with a large grant to decorate the float of the Phra Singh Buddha. Not only did this result in a very grand looking procession indeed, but it also allowed the municipal authorities to have more influence on festival activities than in the past. The TAT also began to get involved in the Songkran by funding activities at various sites around Chiang Mai, namely Ta Pha Gate, Buddha Sathan and the Phra Singh Temple.

As the spaces of the Songkran festival expanded around the city, so did some of its ritual practices, notably the act of sprinkling water on others as a form of blessing. This relatively polite and focused ceremony became transformed into a more general and indiscriminate splashing of water, an activity now widely used to define the Songkran festival. In earlier years, water for this purpose was generally extracted from the local Ping River, but a drought in 1980 during the festival meant that people began to use the 700-year-old city Moat instead. In 1988 the Department of Water Works installed public water outlets adjacent to the Moat which operated in the style of a vending machine to supply water during Songkran.

The growth in festive activities and the extension of the festive period, which now started on April 10th rather than the 13th, was accompanied by expansion in tourist numbers. Domestic tourists were arriving by car as well as by rail, and international tourism was given a major boost by the development of Chiang Mai airport; in 1986, 19,000 international visitors passed through Chiang Mai airport, but by 2005 this had jumped to 176,000.

\(^3\) An ancient Tai-Indian festival to give thanks for water. Krathongs are small ‘rafts’ decorated with flowers or candles which are placed into the water to carry away bad luck.
Transforming the ‘Big’ to the ‘Mega’

By the beginning of the 1990s tourism was providing a major source of income for Thailand and for Chiang Mai in particular. Compared to the sprawling expanse of Bangkok, Chiang Mai maintained its relative position as a marker of untouched rural/Lanna charm. The Thai tourist economy has of course undergone a number of ‘ups and downs’ over the past decade or so relating to political and economic instability and health scares; the SARS epidemic of 2002 and the 2002/2003 outbreak of ‘bird flu’ were particularly damaging, but the Songkran festival has continued to evolve. The Dum Hua procession has expanded further and includes more local groupings, including some of the increasingly touristically aware hill tribes from remote districts of Chiang Mai and other provinces. More private businesses have also joined the procession, using the occasion to advertise and market their businesses, and it has become acceptable for companies to sponsor activities of the Songkran. A further procession was added in 2000; the parade of Mai Kharm Bho (literally, the wooden supports for holy bodhi, or pipul, trees in temple courtyards). This involves the production of wooden supports for trees accompanied by cultural performances, and has the twin goals of preserving an aspect of Lanna culture and of involving some of the poorer communities from slum areas of the city.

Over the years, the foci of core Songkran practices have shifted from the River to the Moat area of the City. In the main this is due to extraction of sand from the riverbed for building purposes, which has made the riverbanks too steep for access and the river too deep for ‘play’. But over and above such spatial changes there have also been substantive shifts in the level of engagement with some of the key practices of the festival. Today, there are far fewer people than before undertaking Songkran activities such as the building of sand pagodas, the preparation of tungs and the donation of food. The relatively placid practice of the reciprocal exchange of water from small bowls for blessing has become transformed into water ‘fights’ using large bowls, buckets and pipes, as well as (until they were prohibited) large water ‘guns’; all supported by big water tanks carried on pick-up trucks. Loud music and dancing now accompany a continual throwing of water. In 2006 a huge stage was constructed in front of the main superstore of the city which became a focus for young people, dancing and drinking and delighting in the water thrown from the stage.

This magnification of the use of water during festival time, its transformation from person to person exchange into a large-scale act of ‘play’, has not only encouraged the involvement of the local young people, but has also attracted tourists, both domestic and international. Indeed in several tourism guidebooks the Songkran is referred as the ‘water festival’, with only passing acknowledgement that it is the also the celebration of the new year. Tourist literature warns of the inevitability of getting wet during the festivities, and rarely carries any detailed narrative of the festival as essentially Buddhist or Lanna. International tourists, particularly the dominant large numbers of young backpackers, are now able to participate directly in the festivities rather than merely observe them.

The Songkran festival has been strategically used as a key driver of economic development for Chiang Mai. In 2004 this culminated in the idea of the ‘Mega Songkran’, designed to attract both Thai and foreign tourists. Numerous advertisements for the
‘Mega Songkran’ were shown on every Thai television channel, and further activities were invented and built on to the already extended festival period. A cultural performance representing the five neighbouring countries to Thailand (Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia and Yunnan Province of China, which with Thailand make up the Greater Mekong Subregion) was enacted with water fountains, music and light on a stage in the Ping River, with new processions involving these countries. The Moat and the Nawarat Bridge were decorated with fountains, and there were processions representing the seven provinces of northern Thailand which included a parade by the rarely seen Malbri tribe. Notably, at the end of this procession were parades of tuk-tuks and Vespas advertising the Chiang Mai Night Safari (an attraction billed as a fusion of African and Lanna architecture.

Discussion: Modernity and Mimesis

All festivals undergo some degree of change; the issue is always one of extent. Over the past fifty years or so the Songkran festival has experienced a major process of transformation which relates closely to increased tourism both from the rest of Thailand and from overseas. In part, changes and growth in the festival have reflected the political need for Chiang Mai, as Thailand’s second city, to be recognised as such; a strategy that many regional cities in the world have practised (De Bres & Davis, 2001). While an attractive and still remarkably rural city — characteristics which are strong draws for international tourists, and increasingly for Bangkok residents — Chiang Mai is nonetheless a peripheral place, which arguably makes tourism of heightened importance. The other side of attractive rurality and adventurous peripherality is poverty and isolation, and thus there have been both push factors from the central government and pull factors from the province to boost economic development in this part of the country. The Songkran festival and the wider context of Lanna culture has provided an obvious ‘hook’ for development.

The changes to the Songkran reflect wider processes of modernisation. The early interventions of local élites in the festival were certainly strongly influenced by commercial objectives; festivals generate crowds and crowds generate business opportunities. But new processions (which end up as ‘traditions’) cannot only be seen as commercial; they also allow greater community participation, opportunities for social display, and — particularly for audiences from Bangkok — a sense that although Chiang Mai was aesthetically able to represent Thai tradition (through Lanna culture), it was not backward. The growing attendance by locals as well as visitors and the introduction of events such as the Miss Songkran contest are evidence of a desire to participate in an approximate project of cosmopolitan modernity. The term ‘approximate’ is used to convey a sense by which the population of Chiang Mai, or more precisely the municipal officials and local businessmen, did not seem to wholly overturn the Songkran and disinvest it of its traditions but rather built upon them in an incremental way.

Tourism, initially from Bangkok and later from the rest of the world, was swiftly recognised as a means for Chiang Mai to be able to develop economically. Festivals have always been important sites of trade and exchange in and between communities, so encouraging
tourists to visit during the Songkran has merely provided new and intensified opportunities for commercial exchange. The elongation of the celebrations over the years so that the festival lasts for a week rather than three days, together with the colonisation of ‘new’ spaces across the city for its events, can be seen as direct intervention to increase business spin-offs. Of course, the Songkran festival is not the only attraction for tourists; Chiang Mai is a service centre and gateway for the North of Thailand, and is an attractive place in its own right. It also has an almost complete calendar of festivals of interest to tourists, including the main ones of Loy Krathong (November), and the Flower Festival (February).

The cumulative additions of processions and the integration of essentially modern activities into the festival from the early 1950s demonstrates an early awareness of the need for the city and its people to participate in the wider agenda of the country’s development. Over the years the festival has been deliberately transformed from a relatively low-key but meaningful event to an occasion of spectacle; a statement from a peripheral region and culture that they too are involved in the modernisation of Thailand. The Songkran has provided occasions to showcase local culture and tradition, but in a way that has leveraged a position for further developmental opportunities. Attracting outsiders/tourists, initially from the capital and then from further afield, has been an important part of this process.

The undoubted success of Songkran tourism has been quickly recognised by other municipalities in Thailand to the extent that it has been unashamedly imitated in many locations. But it would be wrong to see the Songkran ‘model’ as purely a commercial exercise. Despite it essentially being very much a cultural festival rooted in the Lanna people, it has been easily transposed in other parts of Thailand and is readily taken up as the focal point of Thai culture. Indeed, an undercurrent of nation-building seems to be accompanying the increasingly elaborate patterns of Songkran development. In Ayutthaya, the former capital of Thailand, the Songkran also features a mix of social and religious rituals — the bathing of Buddha images, the building of sand stupas, etc. — and more recently instigated activities such as the Miss Songkran contest. A grand procession and vigorous water splashing takes place wherever it has been introduced. Variations on this theme can now be seen in places such as Pattaya (where sand pagodas are built on the beach), Nakhon Phanom, Phuket, Phra Pradaeng and Ratchaburi. In Bangkok, the Songkran is celebrated all over the city with processions and events. There is considerable investment by the Bangkok city authorities, with the occasion used to showcase a diverse range of cultural activities. However for young residents and for the city’s many tourists, particularly around the backpacker area of Khaosan Road, water ‘battles’ are the most persistent and visible of activities.

In all of this we should not assume that the meanings implicit in the Songkran festival have been wholly wiped out. For the local population the event still marks the passage from one year to the next, and it remains a time for bestowing thanks and blessings between individuals. The activities around the local temples still take place in Chiang Mai, although the focus is now on the large-scale processions. The core practices of the festival are still clearly identifiable, in particular the building and decorating of sand pagodas and the splashing of water, but these practices have been magnified and elevated to become the event’s defining characteristics. Critically, the audience for the Songkran has
changed significantly. Local onlookers shifted to include more visitors from Bangkok and other parts of Thailand, and then shifted again so that now the Songkran audience is truly multinational. The Songkran is also a festival for young people and its activities are increasingly geared to such an audience, pregnant with marketing opportunities. A young domestic audience and a large number of young backpackers and other tourists have been easily won over by the obvious ludic element of the festivities. The festival permits (with some limited regulation) playing with water, and to a lesser extent sand, and as such is an attractive occasion for free expression. Rather paradoxically, the Songkran would seem to conform to a more carnivalesque event than was ever intended, providing an opening for Thai communities to break momentarily from their normative social order.

It appears that the ‘tradition’ of the contemporary Songkran festival, effectively a product of the 1950s, is secure precisely because it has continually been re-invented in the light of tourist audiences. Tourism, as a mark of modernisation, has enabled the festival to attempt to bring together (and protect) traditional cultural values with a need for economic development, and in a sense has been part of a more fundamental process of allowing Thailand, and Chiang Mai in particular, to participate on the international stage.

References


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Chapter 26

Heritage Tourism in Xi’an: Constructing the Past in Contested Space

William G. Feighery

Introduction

Within the context of heritage tourism development, this chapter focuses on the production and use of space in the Lianhu district of Xi’an, China. The chapter briefly discusses the contemporary evolution of cultural tourism in China before exploring the different ways in which space is produced by the local governing authorities in Lianhu as well as by local residents of the district, whose spatial, social and cultural practices are intimately intertwined. Drawing on Lefebvre’s (1991) theoretical perspectives on the production of space and on his notion of a spatial triad comprising the perceived, the conceived and the lived, the discussion explores socio-spatial relations in Lianhu and the ways in which space within the district is invested with symbolic meaning. It is suggested that recent tourism development initiatives in Lianhu are in conflict with the modes of social organization and forms of cultural practice which form an integral part of the intangible heritage of the local Hui population. Central to these concerns is the commodification of ‘cultural space’ within the district and the implications which this is likely to have for the construction, transmission and mediation of cultural heritage.

Scholars have long argued that space should not be viewed as a universal neutral container in which objects are placed and events occur (Soja, 1989), but should instead be regarded as socially produced and given meaning through human endeavour. In this sense, places are the result of shifting bundles of socio-spatial relations maintained by power relations (Massey, 1993). Viewed from this perspective, any attempt to transform symbolic space is likely to fuel conflict. In urban settings, this may arise as a result of the different interests and competing agendas within the local population, or from pressure on resources brought about as a result of local and external demand, or from the often competing interests of conservation and urban development. In most urban centres tourism is
a component in these arenas of potential conflict. Recently, questions relating to the spatial components of urban tourism, the effects of tourism on local populations, and who benefits — materially and spatially — from tourism development have come to the fore (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996; Fainstein & Judd, 1999; Ashworth, 2000; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Shaw, Bagwell, & Karmowska, 2004). At the core of many of these discussions about urban tourism is the concept of cultural heritage. Such debates are fuelled by an ever-increasing public awareness of the richness of the heritage as well as of its vulnerability.

In addition to physical heritage resources, intangible cultural heritage is increasingly seen as a ‘living bridge’ linking aspects of a population’s cultural history and traditions with their contemporary ‘lifeworld’. UNESCO (2003) defines intangible cultural heritage as ‘the practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage’. For many population groups, intangible cultural heritage is an essential source of identity deeply rooted in the past. Intangible cultural heritage could be explained as a custom, a living art form (such as dance or music) or quality, which is passed down over many years within a nation, social group or family and is thought of as something valuable and important which belongs to all its members. In this sense, intangible cultural heritage is an essential source of a community’s or population’s cultural vitality and an important source of social cohesion. Indeed, a vibrant cultural life is increasingly regarded as an essential element for healthy, sustainable and prosperous communities (Baeker, 2002). Yet the complexities of community life, particularly in terms of cultural identity and ethnicity, often result in dissonance (Ashworth, 2003) and contestation regarding the designation and representation of local heritage and the differential ways in which certain aspects of the community’s cultural resources are privileged or subjugated.

Heritage and Tourism

Heritage (tangible and intangible) represents a process of selection, claim and counterclaim, in which numerous groups and agencies jockey for power and influence in celebrating the past and bolstering the present (Harrison, 2005). Because of its potential to signify, the selection, promotion and management of heritage assumes increasing importance within the socio-cultural, economic and political conditions prevailing in any given territory or setting. In recent decades, heritage has become an important source of revenue for numerous state and municipal administrations across the globe. The burgeoning ‘heritage industry’ is in no small part fuelled by the growth in tourism. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995, p. 371) suggests:

> tourism and heritage are collaborative industries, heritage converting locations into destinations and tourism making them economically viable as exhibits of themselves. Locations become museums of themselves within a tourism economy. They stage their own rebirth as displays of what they once were, sometimes before the body is cold.

In terms of tourism development, intangible cultural heritage is an important element of any destination’s tourism resources. Displaying one’s culture and heritage seems to be
one of the most widespread wishes of populations across the globe. However, this wish often clashes with the fear of losing cultural features or seeing the natural resources of a given area destroyed. The literature on ‘cultural performance’ or ‘display’ suggests that while there are genuine concerns regarding the ‘lifting’ of cultural events out of their local cultural context, there are also opportunities for local populations and social groups to utilize such performances as a vehicle for mediating, and thus contributing towards sustaining, the held intangible cultural resources of their community or group. Thus, cultural heritage management and cultural tourism development should not only involve the conservation of tangible assets, but also a sensitivity towards the intangible aspects of a population’s heritage, such as cultural landscapes, traditions of folklore, storytelling, customs associated with worship, festivals, life-cycle rituals and other expressions of cultural tradition (McKercher & du Cros, 2002).

Ethnic Tourism in China

Because tourism has embraced cultural heritage and yet must serve the country’s goals of modernization and at the same time remain true to socialism, tourism development in China is highly politicized. The state in China has used tourism as a powerful tool to assist in bringing the ethnic minority populations into the ‘mainstream’ by promoting and developing tourism activity based on their cultural heritage (Oakes, 2005; Sofield & Li, 1998). As well as opening provincial regions and natural areas for tourists, the minority nationalities also became colourful attractions for both overseas tourists and Chinese domestic tourists (Graburn, 2001). In China, the urge to achieve economic prosperity has resulted in a trend of transforming ethnic minority cultures into efficient, convenient and profitable tourism resources. This is achieved through the integration of minority ethnic culture with commercial initiatives in the development of tourism products, as well as through the standardization and authorization of minority ethnic culture by the state. The designation of 56 Chinese minzu (‘races’ or ‘nationalities’) has been instrumental in these processes. Another important influence on the commercialization of minority ethnic culture was the reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping which, among other things, instituted the right to be non-Han and upheld various practices as ‘nationality habits and customs’. Thus, tradition became the privileged domain of ‘minority nationalities’ (Gillette, 2000, p. 323).

In China, as elsewhere, intangible cultural heritage constitutes a significant proportion of the country’s tourism resources. As tourism in China continues its rapid growth, the intangible cultural heritage of ethnic minority populations has become one of the major drawcards of Chinese domestic and international tourism. Thus, within the context of China’s drive towards modernization, the disproportionate focus on minority ethnic culture and identity has been legitimized by the economic benefits which will, potentially, accrue from tourism. In China, visitation to ‘ethnic areas’ has brought both positive and negative effects. Positive effects of ‘ethnic’ tourism include increasing income, generating foreign currency, diversifying the local economy, improving local infrastructure, and enhancing intercultural understanding and communication. Negative effects have been identified as the loss of necessary hospitality, the loss of pride and traditional values, the loss of indigenous meanings hidden in traditional cultural forms, the loss of traditional
subsistence skills, and the loss of land and property (Wu, 2000). Paradoxically, tourism in China is believed to have led to both a loss of ethnic culture through the effects of modernization and at the same time an increase in knowledge about its diverse cultures. The development of ‘ethnic’ tourism in China serves the dual purpose of supplying tangible and intangible resources for tourist consumption, while simultaneously driving the agenda for modernization in underdeveloped ‘ethnic minority’ areas. Much of China’s ‘ethnic’ tourism is based on the ‘performance’ of aspects of ethnic minority cultures. For the general public, such cultural events perform historical, social, religious and entertainment functions. For national, provincial and local government, however, the trend is to exploit the economic and political potentials of such events. In doing so, those with governing responsibility have tended to support development initiatives in which local cultural traditions are ‘staged’ within commodified space, rather than facilitating the articulation of local culture traditions as an organic aspect of the visitor experience.

Introduction to Xi’an

Xi’an lies on the southern end of Guan Zhong Plain, Shaanxi Province, in the central part of North West China. The city is extremely rich in history and is regarded by many as the cradle of Chinese civilization. For more than 1000 years, beginning in the 11th century BC, Xi’an was the capital of 13 dynasties including the Western Zhou, Qin, Western Han, Eastern Han, Sui and Tang, and a key staging post on the ancient Silk Road. Originally the city was laid out in blocks, of which there were several hundred. The atmosphere of the city reflects its 3000 years of history which, despite the ravages wrought by the Cultural Revolution, has left an impressive legacy of ancient monuments and remains, including the Terracotta Army (actually located some 28 km east of the city). In addition, the city has a wealth of intangible cultural heritage resources. It occupies a central place in China’s national heritage, as well as in its tourism image: indeed it can be considered the cultural heritage powerhouse of China. The length and breadth of Xian’s historic legacy bestows iconic status on the city in both the domestic and international tourism markets. Today, Xi’an is a rapidly modernizing city with over five million people residing within its ‘urban area’ (China Statistics Press, 2005, p. 56).

The Lianhu District

The Lianhu district of Xi’an covers an area of approximately 2.4 square km in the northwestern part of the ancient city and has a population of just over 59,000 people (China Statistics Press, 2005). The district was the location of the political, economic and

1In this chapter the Lianhu district refers to the whole of the Lianhu administrative area, whereas the Hui quarter is indeterminate. However, despite this unboundedness, residents of the quarter clearly distinguished between those who were ‘people of the quarter’ and those who were not (Gillette, 2000, p. 31).
cultural capital of the Tang dynasty (618–907 AD). The main entrance to the Tang dynasty palace is believed to be located at the south of what is now Lianhu Park, which was originally created during the Ming dynasty on the ruins of Cheng Tian Men (Tang Palace Garden) and was named Lian Hua Chi (Lotus Lake). The park was opened to the public in 1922. The Lianhu district contains many important heritage sites, including Ying Xiang Guan (Taoist Temple, 741), Xi Wu Tai (Buddhist Temple), as well as 10 mosques, including the West Mosque, built in 705 and the Great Mosque (Qingzhen Disa), originally built in 742. There are many other historic sites and ancient streets in the district.

The majority of residents of the Lianhu district belong to an official minority, the Hui minzu, members of which have resided here since the Tang dynasty (Lipman, 1997). Approximately 70 per cent of all residents in Lianhu are Hui Muslims, numbering around 30,000 people (Gillette, 2000). Historically, the Hui lived in single-storey ‘level houses’ (ping fang), built of whitewashed mud and straw. These houses were usually arranged in small blocks to form a square or rectangle, leaving an open space in the centre for a courtyard which was shared by the surrounding occupants, usually blood relatives. Since the 1980s most of these buildings have been replaced by two and three-storey ‘multi-storey houses’ (lou fang). However, these newer multi-storey structures replicate the courtyard arrangement of ping fang, with four buildings surrounding an open, paved courtyard which provides a collective space within which a variety of family and communal events take place. They also resemble ping fang in terms of their residential arrangements, with close family relatives occupying separate floors or adjacent buildings.

Today, despite extensive clearances, the Lianhu district remains, for the most part, a bustling complex of narrow streets in which a variety of vendors service the needs of the local community, as well as visitors. The vast majority of private enterprises in the district are run out of family homes, usually a ground floor room. The district has little in the way of lawns or gardens, although some family courtyards have trees and shrubs. The district is densely populated in comparison with Xi’an as a whole. Both residential and commercial premises are generally in need of upgrading, as is the local infrastructure. Thus, under current conditions the district suffers from rather poor environmental quality. In general, the Lianhu district possesses an informal, ragged appearance that contrasts sharply with the orderly, planned look of most other parts of Xi’an (Gillette, 2000).

Commodification of Cultural Space in Lianhu

Tourism administrators in Xi’an have recently completed the planning stage of a new tourism strategy for the city, and in the coming decade city governors will seek to implement the recommendations of the Tourism Master Plan 2005–2020. One of the main recommendations of the master plan includes the development of a domestic tourism destination image of the city which focuses on Tang Dynasty history and culture. The international destination image for Xi’an will focus on the Terracotta Army. In addition to the deployment of a citywide tourism plan, district level plans are also being developed, including one for the historic district of Lianhu.
The decision to pursue the articulation of Xian’s Tang heritage, as opposed to that of other important periods of Chinese history, stems from a belief that for many Chinese, the Tang dynasty represents one of the most advanced and enlightened periods of Chinese history. Thus, there is strong support in official circles for replicating the splendour of the Tang dynasty (the archaeological remains of which underlies parts of the Lianhu district). This can be viewed as part of the process in China whereby tourism, market commercialism and commodification have collaborated to invent a landscape of nostalgia upon which to build a sense of national identity (Oakes, 2005).

Socio-Spatial Relations in Lianhu

In the Lianhu district the competing interests and claims to cultural space typify the contested nature of space in many urban settings. Here, it is useful to draw on Lefebvre’s (1991) theoretical work on the symbolic economy of space. Lefebvre’s ideas centre on the capitalist production of space. He argues that globalization and modernity result in the colonization of ‘concrete’ space of everyday life by abstract space (visualized space which has no social existence) which is actively involved in the production of social relations and new forms of spatiality. Lefebvre understands space to be multi-faceted, produced and maintained by the relations that govern the interactions of the society that exists within the bounds of the space — space as a social product. Lefebvre (1991, p. 38–39) sets out a triad of socio-spatial relations which include spatial practices, representations of space and representational space. Spatial practice (perceived space) has to do with the uses of spaces and their accompanying social formations; representations of space (conceived space) emerge in the bureaucratic management of urban planners, academics, local government, etc. who seek to control, direct and mediate dominant forms of spatial practice; and representational space (lived space) is concerned with the inhabitants and users of space that is partly imagined, partly inherited and symbolic of the experiences of current and previous inhabitants. Under Lefebvre’s conceptualization, social groups produce their own space which is unique to that particular group. Membership of these social groups is fluid and not mutually exclusive, thereby enabling what Lefebvre (1991, p. 86) terms the ‘interpenetration’ of spaces and the ‘superimposing’ of one layer of space upon or into another.

With regard to the development of tourism in Lianhu, Lefebvre’s spatial triad of the perceived, the conceived and the lived is useful in that it allows a conceptualization of the production and consumption of space as a process of interaction of all three elements which include the physical, the social/cultural and the political/economic management of space. Thus, the framework enables an analysis of space in which representational and material practices continually interact, change and adapt. In Lianhu, the interaction of all three dimensions of Lefebvre’s framework is at play in the dynamics of tourism-related development.

Spatial practices in Lianhu are in large part driven by the central and local government agenda of modernization and development, on the one hand, and by the globalizing influence of world trade, of which international and domestic tourism is part, on the other. The process of tourism development in Lianhu is likely to result in the production of new
spaces of tourism, as well as the reproduction of existing space for tourism which is likely to determine — in part at least — who uses such space, and thus their accompanying social formations.

Representations of space in Lianhu act to support and bolster those spatial practices which are part of the drive towards development and modernization outlined above. In Lianhu representations of space are an outcome of the bureaucratic management of space through city planning policies, urban design, transport planning and tourism planning/development. In relation to tourism planning and development, representations of space also include the narratives constructed to mediate this inner-city district and its environment to a domestic and international audience in ways which support the dominant spatial practices being enacted. All of these bureaucratically administered systems act to control and direct the current and future socio-spatial relations of both local residents and tourists.

The Lianhu district as a representational space plays a key role in the social and cultural lifeworld of the Hui population. Although Lianhu may be unbounded in the imagination of many Hui residents of Xi’an, its symbolic resonance as a focus of identity and community is evident in the everyday lived realities of the local population. In the case of Lianhu, the city wall represents not only a physical boundary between the old city and the newer city suburbs beyond the wall, it also represents a psychological boundary. For many members of the Hui population, residing and working within the old city is part of their cultural inheritance, an historic accumulation which stretches back hundreds of years (see Lipman, 1997). Evidence of this is provided by Gillette (2000) who notes that on the back of the headstones in a newly designated cemetery for the Hui (located outside the city), the exact address of the deceased person is recorded. As Gillette (2000, p. 52) argues:

the act of making public the deceased’s address suggests that residents believe that a person’s identity was related not only to who their kin were but also to where he or she were from. The inscriptions demonstrate their attachment to the quarter, their home.

In the process of developing Lianhu for tourism, the vicinity of some important historic sites have been ‘cleared’ and many local residents have been resettled away from the district. Such initiatives reflect the growing importance in urban tourism development of not only enabling physical access to attractions, but also visual access, thus transforming ‘sites’ into ‘sights’. Relocation to residential accommodation outside the city wall represents not only a physical move, but also a social and cultural rupture. An indication of the estrangement likely to be experienced by those residents of Lianhu who have been relocated outside the district can be gauged from the following comment by one middle-aged female resident of the district:

Only in the quarter could Hui eat without anxiety, attend the mosque with ease, find suitable marriage partners, host proper life cycle rituals, and associate with neighbours who shared their predispositions (Gillette, 2000, p. 52).

For such individuals, residing and interacting with other members of the Hui population of the quarter forms the basis for virtually all aspects of their daily social, economic, cultural
and religious life. Relocation away from these close social alliances and networks is likely to have a major impact for the individuals concerned, as well as for those members of the Hui population who remain in the district.

Lianhu as a representational space is, potentially, one of the district’s primary drawcards for tourism. However, this is also one of the sites of conflict in so much as the representational space of Lianhu, as it emerges from the lifeworld of the local Hui population, is in conflict with the representations of space enacted by the local governing authorities and the spatial practices driven by the globalization agenda, in which tourism is increasingly prominent. As Oakes (2005) notes, representations of space are necessarily ideological, are mobilized in the service of power, and represent an idealized space in which the needs of capital, of the State, and other forms of social power are met. Spatial practices and representations of space through tourism in Lianhu emerge from a powerful coalition of national and local policy linked to the domestic and global economy. These forces are placing increased pressure on the maintenance of representational space in Lianhu by the Hui as the district is transformed into a commodified space for tourism. This is not to say that the Hui population is in opposition to tourism. Indeed the Hui have, over recent years, taken advantage of their ‘minority’ status to attract tourists to the quarter and have, for example, marketed the Great Mosque as a tourist attraction, sold souvenirs and enticed tourists to their restaurants by proclaiming their traditional preparation methods. In this sense the Hui are active subjects, capable of exploiting both tourism and their ethnic identity to their own ends. Thus, potential for conflict in current initiatives stems not from tourism development per se, but from policies and practices of development which are often insensitive to the day-to-day routines of existence, patterns of work, domestic arrangements, and religious rituals and ceremonies of the Hui. It is through such systems and practices that identities are both created and sustained (Meethan, 2001), and therefore changes to social and cultural practice, especially as a result of external influences, will inevitably impact on individuals and the community at large.

While Hui culture is part of the tourism offer in Lianhu, particularly in terms of Hui cuisine, the strong focus on ethnic minority culture witnessed in other parts of China is not evident in Xi’an. There are a variety of reasons for this. Firstly, the importance of Xi’an as the ‘cradle’ of Chinese civilization and the prestige attributed to its Tang dynasty heritage means that a focus on Hui minority ethnic culture is both unnecessary and, for the ruling Han majority, undesirable. For the Han majority in China, the Tang dynasty represents one of the most enlightened and advanced periods of Chinese history, while ‘minority nationalities’ like the Hui are officially designated as ‘backward’ or of ‘low cultural quality’ (Gladney, 1998; Gillette, 2000).

Secondly, the traditional social organization of the Hui conflicts with the kinds of urban planning initiatives which have been pursued in many Chinese cities in recent years. In Xi’an, the Lianhu district has not been subject to the same level of redevelopment that has taken place in other parts of the city. This stems from, on the one hand, the special arrangements and laws which apply to ‘minority nationalities’ such as the Hui, and on the other, an established stereotype among officials that the Hui are irrational and difficult to deal with. Thus, over several decades officials refrained from enforcing government rules and regulations in Lianhu, impeding development while simultaneously reinforcing the
image of the Hui as backward. Gillette (2000) noted several manifestations of the lack of official engagement in Lianhu. For example, in 1998 a major four-lane road that passed in front of the provincial and city government complexes stopped abruptly at the edge of the quarter, degenerating into the tiny alleyways and crowded houses of the quarter. Additionally, services such as water and sewerage were not provided to the same standard as elsewhere in the city. Also, Gillette notes the reluctance by local officials to collect taxes in the quarter.

Thirdly, recent years have witnessed a number of ‘renewal’ plans for Lianhu, and these have included the relocation of large numbers of Hui to locations outside the Lianhu district. Many of these ‘clearances’ have taken place in the vicinity of historic buildings and monuments in an attempt to make them more ‘attractive’ to tourists. Therefore, while there is a strong desire to articulate aspects of Tang and other physical heritage in the Lianhu tourism plan, there is little support in official circles for nurturing or mediating intangible Hui culture as part of the evolving plan. Regeneration plans for Lianhu include the creation of more public space in the district. However, these public spaces may not be regularly utilized by the majority Hui population whose cultural and social organization is focused on close family networks and ‘collective spaces’ such as family courtyards. Thus, the opening up of public space in Lianhu may have more to do with Han Chinese culture, or the perceived desires of tourists, than with that of the majority of the local population.

The stated macro aim of current regeneration policies in the Lianhu district is to raise the economic and social conditions of the local population. However, without effective planning and management which respects and is sensitive to the cultural needs of the local population in Lianhu, ‘success’, in terms of physical and economic regeneration, may create significant social and cultural upheavals for the very communities that should gain most from such development initiatives. Much of the proposed development in Lianhu is in conflict with more recent models for preserving intangible cultural heritage which seek to sustain living traditions by supporting the conditions necessary for cultural reproduction. This means according value to the carriers and transmitters of traditions, as well as to their habitus and habitat (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004, p. 53). Tourism development in Lianhu is likely to alter significantly the modes of social and cultural life enacted by the local population, through increasing visitation to predominantly residential areas, and more profoundly through the demolition, renovation and relocation policies being pursued in order to facilitate such development.

**Discussion**

Urban spaces are almost always contested in terms of their production, use and meaning. In a Lefebvrian sense this contestation is part of a continual process in which spaces are constantly reinvested with symbolic meaning. In Lianhu, the everyday life, or spatial practices, of the Hui population is fundamental to the transmission and mediation of their intangible cultural heritage. The material landscape of Lianhu acts as the stage upon which the disjuncture between the planned (dominant culture) national imperative of ‘modernization’ and the lived (local Hui culture) traditions and social organization within
the district are played out. Within this contested space the competing cultures of the national majority Han and the local majority Hui seek to strengthen and legitimize themselves and their efforts through the development of ‘adaptive spatial practices’ (McCann, 1999). The majority Han appeal to the past — primarily the myth of Tang cultural superiority — to legitimize claims regarding the cultural significance of the district, as well as over changes to its spatial structure. They also draw upon official racial categorizations in order to legitimize public policy in the predominantly Hui Lianhu district. The Hui, on the other hand, utilize space within Lianhu in a collective manner, in order to maintain their cultural traditions. Thus, for the Hui, space may be regarded as more of a socio-cultural resource than merely a physical one. The Hui have also drawn upon their official racial categorization by the government of China as a ‘minority nationality’ in attempting to defend and protect their social and cultural practices.

In Lianhu the pattern of streets and the variety of architectural features are part of the tangible heritage of the district, but it is the social and cultural processes which are played out within this space which constitute its intangible cultural heritage. Radical changes to either one is likely to result in profound changes to the other. Moving the centre of residential life away from the commercial activities of the Hui in the Lianhu district is likely to disrupt traditional modes of commercial activity where family life and commercial life are closely integrated and interdependent. Relocation to areas outside the city wall means that for many Hui people, they will be removed from their traditional economic, social, cultural and religious space within the ancient city. The changes wrought by relocation and re-housing into non-traditional styles of residential accommodation, which may not be in keeping with traditional modes of social organization, are likely to have significant impacts upon their family and community life. Evidence from other areas in China demonstrates that relocation policies wrought by urban regeneration can have devastating consequences for local people. Brahm (2003) notes that such policies have resulted in extremely high levels of stress, as in many cases residents are required to leave the only place they have ever lived.

International experience demonstrates that through community involvement in the planning process, the more negative effects of relocation policies can be mitigated. This can be achieved through minimizing the distance residents are required to move, involving residents in the planning and design of new residential locations, and recognizing the significance of cultural modes and practices in the daily lives of residents. However, in China, as elsewhere, the scope for community participation is limited by the prevailing system of governance. Community participation in the tourism development process in China is muted by a centralized administrative system (national and provincial) and an elite domination of business. However, with China’s entry to the World Trade Organization the country is more willing to accept new development concepts (Li, 2004). Thus, as China’s policy-making and administrative systems continue to be influenced by external forces, there is the potential for more participatory development initiatives. In this respect, tourism development in Lianhu could be enhanced by implementing regeneration strategies designed to keep long-term residents, the majority of whom are Hui, in place within the area, while necessary renovations and improvements to the local infrastructure are planned and carried out with the active involvement of the local community. However, despite China’s recent ‘advances’ in terms of governance, the signs are, as yet, not encouraging.
As du Cros, Beuer, Lo, and Song (2005, p. 192) note, little appears to be happening in China to ensure the direct participation of residents, heritage enthusiasts, tourism operators, farmers and local tradition-bearers in the development of tourism attractions in a way that is beneficial to them and to the heritage assets.

**Conclusion**

In Lianhu there is a tension between developing tourism products and themes and the sustainability of the district’s unique cultural life, which is also a significant element in the attractiveness of the area to tourists. The social and cultural implications of tourism development in Lianhu may not be unique to Xi’an or indeed China. Cities across the globe have struggled with similar issues for many years. At the core of such concerns are (a) the preservation of cultural resources, (b) planned growth and (c) meeting the contemporary needs of local residents. As Xi’an seeks to develop as an international tourism destination, change and ‘displacement’ are likely to become key issues as this ancient capital evolves as a ‘tourist-historic’ city. Changes to the fabric of the city and to the settlement patterns of its population in Lianhu are likely to pose major challenges for city administrators, as well as for those with responsibility for tourism development and management. Designating material and symbolic resources as ‘heritage’ is often the preferred option for governing authorities seeking to develop tourism. Yet, in many ways, the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage in Lianhu depends not on those techniques of animation and mediation employed by museologists and tourism promoters, but on the living transmission of cultural knowledge, values and expression. Intangible cultural heritage must be performed to be transmitted; this is its source of life (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995). Tourism can, and perhaps should, be appropriated by the local Lianhu population in the symbolic construction and transmission of their cultural traditions to future generations. However, under the current administrative arrangements, the intangible living heritage of the Hui in Lianhu risks being displaced (sometimes literally) by governing authorities who prioritize the articulation of tangible heritage for tourism consumption.

**References**


Chapter 27

Journeys to Shangri-La: The Neo-Orientalism of Tibetan Culture

Elizabeth Ann Bovair

Introduction

We may be disillusioned to learn that Tibet is not the place we have dreamed of. Yet to allow Tibet to circulate in a system of fantastic opposites (even when Tibetans are the ‘good Orientals’) is to deny Tibet its history, to exclude it from a real world of which it has always been a part, and to deny Tibetans their agency in the creation of a contested quotidian reality. (Lopez, 1998, p. 11)

Tibet is one of the few remaining places in the world, the mere mention of which for many people evokes notions of peace, tranquillity, and a utopian sense of harmony. It is no wonder that explorers referred to it as the ‘lost nation of Shangri-La’. This cultural exaggeration is often mistaken as an authentic representation of the Tibetan culture. Myths are created, images fabricated, and the true nature of the Tibetan people is lost amidst misperceptions.

Foremost among the stories and images created and received by both native and international tourists are those promoted by the Chinese government. In recent years, the Chinese government has aimed to promote a utopian vision of Tibet in order to bring more Chinese and international tourists to the region. By promoting Tibetan culture, the Chinese government is also attempting to demonstrate to the world that it allows Tibetans freedom of choice in living their cultural traditions and religion. This chapter will seek to analyse how the image of Tibet created in part — and promoted — by the Chinese

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1In this paper, ‘Tibet’ includes both the Tibet Autonomous Region and the ethnically Tibetan areas of Western Qinghai, Amdo, and Sichuan provinces.
government in fact inhibits the Tibetan people from fully realizing their own agency in deciding freely how to define their own culture.

This case of neo-orientalism is important because it can provide insights into how, and more importantly why, the Chinese government is engaging in its particular representation of Tibetan culture. It also provides a historical framework for the reasons — whether they are merely to promote tourism, or perhaps to support other policies as well. The chapter is divided into four parts. The first will consist of a brief explanation of orientalism, the second will explore the historical settings of tourist–Tibet relations, the third will discuss field observations during 2004, and the final part will seek to draw connections between observed cultural representations and the images fed to [inter]national tourist populations.

Orientalism

Before examining how Tibetan culture is neo-orientalized by the Chinese, a brief explanation of the theory of orientalism is needed. The term ‘orientalism’ refers to the negative power structure created by Western powers in order to understand and control foreign cultures, namely those of the Middle East. It is a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in Europeans’ Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, this cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.

(Said, 1978, p. 1)

The Orient, according to this definition, becomes not only the ‘Other’ but also an intricate part of the definition of Western culture itself, through the juxtaposition with the ‘Other’. Although orientalism is seemingly a neutral way to self-define and comprehend other world cultures, it is not (and has not been) without negative connotations. Orientalism, argued Said, fostered feelings of repression, barbarism, and backwardness that robbed the oriental countries of their own agency for self-definition. This essay seeks to address the feelings of repression and backwardness promoted by the neo-orientalization of Tibet.

In Sino–Tibetan relations, Tibet’s agency is distorted through a neo-orientalization of its culture. What makes this neo-orientalization is that it describes a relationship that is not Western–Orient focused, as in Said’s original definition, but rather illustrates an Orient–Orient power relationship, a comparison seldom discussed in modern anthropological literature. The closest phenomenon to neo-orientalism is internal orientalism, which is ‘a relation between imaging and cultural/political domination that takes place interethnically within China’ (Schein, 1997, p. 73). What distinguishes Tibet’s case as neo-orientalism rather than internal orientalism is that the Chinese are neo-orientalizing the Tibetan culture for the specific purpose of economic development, which can be
considered a positive consequence. It is the dualistic nature of neo-orientalism, bringing both positive and negative consequences to the parties involved, which is confusing in the case of Sino–Tibetan relations.

The relationship between Tibet and China is quite complex. Tibet has often opposed many of the values central to the philosophy of the Chinese communist movement. Through its religion, its supposedly feudal former system of government and its eventual resistance to the Chinese, Tibet has repeatedly been at odds with the leadership in Beijing. Because of the dualistic nature of how China has identified Tibet, first by identifying it as a stronghold of feudalistic power during the 1950s that needed to be overthrown, and now as a place of renowned physical beauty and spiritual peace that needs to be protected, it has been able effectively to strip Tibet and its people of their agency, as noted by Louisa Schein:

The suppressions of the Cultural Revolution, then, combined with the perceived emptiness of imported culture from abroad, seem to have left a void at the core of Chinese ethno-nationalism, leading individual and state culture producers to turn to minority cultures as reservoirs of still-extant authenticity... this undertaking romanticized the primitive and the traditions, the distinctive and the colorful, at the same time that it essentialized and crystallized those features of the Other held to be intrinsic and tied to the past. (Schein, 1997, p. 72)

The denial of agency implied as a direct policy outcome in Said’s original critique of orientalism is of concern when studying issues of tourism in Tibet. Gyan Prakash states that in ‘the course of the Western pursuit of truth, [orientalism] crisscrossed with racist power and cultural supremacism, licensed the pillage of Other cultures in the name of disinterested scholarship’ (Prakash, 1995, p. 202). In the case of Tibet, it is a different type of orientalism than originally described because the ‘pillage of Other cultures’ is not in the name of ‘disinterested scholarship’, as Prakash states, but rather a decisive representation of particular aspects of a native culture for the explicit purposes of drawing more revenue into Tibet. This manipulation of a culture for economic gain has political implications throughout the region.

Through the orientalizing of Tibetan culture, China is in fact describing itself vis-à-vis Tibetan culture, which is not wholly a negative comparison; but what is damaging to the native Tibetan culture is its manipulation to suit the economic needs of the Chinese state and the tourism industry. To quote Said again: ‘because of orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action... the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on any occasion when that peculiar entity “the Orient” is in question’ (Said, 1978, p. 1). Thus each time Tibet is mentioned, because of the images attached to the region and promoted by the Chinese government, it can never be independent in the minds of travellers. What is important then to understand is how Tibetan neo-orientalism manifests itself in day-to-day interactions among Tibetan natives and tourists, and gain appreciation for how tourism can explicitly and implicitly affect Tibetan neo-orientalization.
Tourism in Tibet

The neo-orientalist mode of thinking becomes extraordinarily pertinent when tourism adds to the mix. Tourism, in addition to attracting investment and generating income, by its very nature seeks to show off a country or a culture for monetary gain. How then is tourism used as a method of control? Tibet’s culture is manipulated mostly for reasons of bolstering economic wealth through tourism revenues and investment. Yet at the same time, the Chinese government has until recently repressed the Tibetan people’s culture, particularly their right to religious freedom. The perception given to many tourists is a paradoxical one at best: the Chinese are attempting to capitalize upon the very culture which 40 years earlier during the Cultural Revolution, and ever since the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1950, they had sought to destroy. The current Chinese interest appears to be because certain manifestations of the culture offer lucrative economic potential through tourism. Examples of how the government is using Tibetan culture to promote tourism can be seen in the many border regions of Tibet (see also Murakami in this volume). Domestic tourism in China is one of the fastest growing tourism sectors in the world, and premier among the Tibetan areas visited are those within a day’s travel of China’s larger westernmost cities, especially Chengdu.

Located about eight hours (by car) south-east of Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, the region of Kongpo was perhaps the most interesting place observed during the field research. According to people living locally, the region (which is easily accessible to tourists from Mainland China) is specifically targeted by the Chinese government as part of a push to increase tourism to lesser-known areas of Tibet (Best, Bovair, Hayward, Hennenberg, & Kaltman, 2004). As a result, the villages in the region boast paved roads, a new electricity supply, and various scenic viewpoints recently built by the Chinese government.

As well as public sector inputs, Chinese tour companies have also targeted the area. One village in particular, Bang-na, has a ‘folk village’ containing two ‘traditional’ Tibetan houses and an open space with tiered seating stands. According to villagers, approximately 5000 tourists per month visit this small village to watch the local people participate in apparently traditional Tibetan games (Best et al., 2005). In fact, the ‘games’ are often religious rituals which are meant to take place at a specific time of the year or during religious festivals. The clothes worn by the villagers are usually ceremonial in nature and are not normally worn every day (although tourists believe that the clothing is every-day wear). The final irony is that this ‘folk village’ was recently constructed and is actually less authentic than the village in which it was located.

The way the villagers had to ‘dress up’ their culture to make it more appealing seems incredibly out of touch with the reality of the region. Within the folk village, the Chinese government tries to represent ‘authentic’ Tibetan culture and provide the constructed view that Tibetan culture is a live and vibrant entity, whereas in reality the culture of Bang-na is not found in the folk village, but in the outlying dilapidated and drab buildings that surround it; all tourists really need to do is to look at the true village of Bang-na to see normal daily Tibetan life.

If a culture can be objectified and commodified in the way of the folk village in Bang-na, it takes away from that culture’s agency to decide for itself what being Tibetan means. Robert Shepherd, in an article on commodification of culture for the purposes of
This ‘becoming other’, a direct outcome of the objectification and commodification of both culture and ethnicity, is said to explain the contemporary mass consumption of identity merchandise by both touristic outsiders and local insiders whose view of themselves is thereby distorted by the tourist gaze. (Shepherd, 2002, p. 185)

Because the Chinese government has dictated to tourists and to villagers of Bang-na what a ‘traditional’ Tibetan village looks like, it deprives the indigenous inhabitants of the ability to show their livelihood in a more fluid and representative manner. It is not that the Tibetans should not share their traditional and religious culture with visitors to the area; it is more the manner in which the culture is neatly packaged into a ‘folk village’ and sold for an admission price that takes away from the nature of genuine cultural exchange between tourists and the Tibetans.

Another example of the interesting false promotion of Tibetan culture is within the nightlife of Lhasa. A common scene in Lhasa, which confounds the foreigner looking for ‘Tibet’, is the karaoke bars and dance clubs, or nangmas. Most people attending these clubs are not Westerners, but residents of Lhasa. Set in a modern, club-like atmosphere, native Tibetans dressed in their traditional clothes sing ‘national’ songs on stage as giant screens project landscape scenes behind them. The crowd sits around watching the displays of ‘national heritage’, occasionally joining in the song, or getting up to dance. Many foreigners who have visited these bars feel that this is the largest parody of Tibetan culture that exists.

The fact that foreigners decry this type of cultural exposition demonstrates at the very least how little people understand the modern-day complexities of the Tibetan people, which are not neatly contained in folk villages or displays of ‘authentic’ Tibetan ritual. The difference between the folk village and the nightclubs is that the village is created solely for economic gain, while the nightclubs are a natural result of the economic development of Lhasa and its modern culture. The juxtaposition of nangmas and folk villages presents a confounding thought exercise: which is the more authentic representation of Tibet? That of the tourist-expected folk ritual? Or that of the popular fixture of nangmas? Vincanne Adams puts it in another way: ‘what does it mean in terms of defining modernity to have Westerners decry karaoke bars as a sign of the ‘loss’ of Tibet, and at the same time to have some Tibetans frequenting them on a regular basis?’ (Adams, 1996, p. 514). What is important to examine is not which is more authentic, but why the government and tourist industry choose to represent and publicize one over the other as a way of increasing economic development in the region. Understanding the motives for Chinese representation of Tibetan culture can give insights into the power structures present within this relationship.

**Tibet: An Example of Chinese Modernity**

By expanding transportation, electricity, sanitation, and other innovations, the Chinese government hopes to give the Tibetan people a prosperity they have never previously known. In the past 10 years or so China has focused on bolstering Tibet’s tourism industry,
investment, and infrastructure as part of an effort known as the ‘Go West Movement’. Through this, the Party aims to attract more foreign and national investment into Western China, including the Tibet Autonomous Region and areas of western Qinghai, Yunnan, and Sichuan provinces, which are heavily populated by native Tibetans. Originally announced in 1999 and solidified in 2001, the Go West Movement aims to ‘achieve satisfactory development in western parts of the country in five to 10 years and to establish a “new western China” by the middle of this century’ (People’s Daily Online, 2001a). Officials said they planned to implement policies so that ‘at the end of the period, people in the region will enjoy economic prosperity, social stability, ethnic unity, and a beautiful landscape’ (ibid). The important aspect of these projects is the supposedly altruistic way in which the Chinese hope to improve the quality of life for the average Tibetan. However, as with many situations in international development, Tibetans are often not consulted about their wishes for their own future.

Much as the West acted towards China a century ago, doing what was thought best for the ‘backward’ Orientals, China’s Go West Movement is attempting to modernize and even tame Tibet. The implicit notion of China’s plan implies backwardness on the part of the Tibetans, which the Chinese hope to rectify. In the text of the White Paper on Tibet’s March Towards Modernization, the Chinese government outlines its overall policy on Tibet (People’s Daily Online, 2001b). In an excerpt from the White Paper, the government claims that ‘Tibet has bidden farewell to the poor, backward, isolated, and stagnant feudal serf society, and is forging ahead toward a modern people’s democratic society featuring constant progress, civilization and opening-up, and its modernization drive has won world-renowned achievements’ (ibid.).

Tibetans are viewed by many Chinese as barbarians as well as backward, and the cultural implications of the ‘modern’ versus ‘barbaric’ dichotomy in Tibet can again impede the Tibetans’ ability to define their own way of life. Again, it is interesting to note that on the one hand China is celebrating Tibetan culture through cultural tourism, and yet on the other disparaging it as backward and in need of modernization. The development or ‘modernization’ of Tibet is the manifestation of the neo-orientalist nature of the relationship between China and Tibet. This is the greatest threat to the cultural agency of the Tibetan people, for it combines the promotion of culture — an inherently positive social phenomenon — with movements aimed at eroding the cultural integrity of the Tibetans in the name of the Chinese drive for modernization.

The reason that the neo-orientalism of Tibetan culture is such an important issue is because the modernization of Tibet is about to be intensified. The construction of a railway from Qinghai Province to Lhasa has recently finished. The railway connects major cities and traverses some of the harshest terrain on the globe by crossing the Himalayan plateau of Tibet, an area exposed to some of the coldest temperatures and harshest winter weather in the world. Part of the reason why the country has so often been viewed as a near-mythical Shangri-La is because of its relative inaccessibility. The new railway will open it up to a more rapid process of modernization, which is likely to increase the process of neo-orientalism; it will also deprive Tibet of its isolation, which is a central part of the mystique it holds for tourists. However, as more tourists arrive each year, the culture China seeks to promote will exist less and less in the real world and more and more
in museums, folk villages, and books. The agency which determines which Tibetan cultural practices are displayed is ultimately the key to understanding the neo-orientalism of Tibetan culture.

**Cultural Agency: A Right or a Choice?**

For Tibetans, the truth of their cultural identity lies somewhere between the two poles of being either helpless victims or willing accomplices in the manipulation of their culture for economic and political purposes. As Adams says, ‘karaoke [nangmas] may in fact be an indicator of how important it is to not efface modernity but to acquire, participate in, and benefit from modernity rather than be oppressed by it’ (Adams, 1996, p. 537). The fact is that Tibetans welcome economic development; they are consumers of television, cellular phones, and other material goods. They need economic investment in order to survive in a country where they are having less and less influence as Chinese move in to capitalize on the new investment territory. In Bang-na, when asked why they participated in such a blatant false exposition of their native cultures, the overall response was that the village received a sizeable portion of the admission fees, and the money has been used to improve the village infrastructure through the installation of roads, electricity, and other modern amenities. There may be some who argue that since the Tibetans are willing accomplices in the neo-orientalization process, they are not neo-orientalized in the first place.

It is also interesting to study how and why certain parts of the cultural truth of Tibet are stretched, and how tourists help to promote that image. One view is that the neo-orientalization of Tibetan culture is a negative result of human curiosity, as observed by Schein:

*China’s packaging and production of representations of minority ethnicity... was solely a consequence of the state’s attempts to generate foreign currency by actively complying with Western Orientalist desires for the experience of a more plural and colorful China... This is a set of practices that occur within China, and that, in this case, refers to the fascination of more cosmopolitan Chinese with ‘exotic’ minority cultures in an array of polychromatic and titillating forms.* (Schein, 1997, p. 70)

In showing tourists a representation of the authentic culture of Tibet but not the entirety of Tibetan culture, the Chinese are objectifying Tibet and its culture in a way that seeks to improve China’s image with the rest of the international community, and tourists accept that image as true.

It is the hyper-visualization of Tibet’s culture for the promotion of tourism that is so unique (Schein, 1997, p. 90). The Tibetans, through cultural displays, are presented as having as much freedom as anyone else, yet there are continued human rights abuses, especially of those sympathetic to the cause of Tibetan independence. The Chinese government can point to the reconstruction of monasteries and to various developments and claim that they have thus allowed the Tibetan people their freedom, and have in fact
improved the standard of living. During the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s nearly all the monasteries of Tibet were destroyed, with the exception of a few large temples and monasteries in and around Lhasa; yet on travelling in Tibet, the large number of monasteries that dot the landscape is noticeable. Amazingly, most of these monasteries are at most 25–30 years old, because the Chinese government has allowed the rebuilding of multiple monasteries, funded by devotees from affluent areas of the world.

When Tibet-sympathetic travellers arrive in Lhasa and see this coexistence, their preconceived notions about the political situation in Tibet begin to come under question. It is not necessarily that some of the allegations of human rights violations on the part of the Chinese are untrue; however the Chinese claim (and have Tibetan nationals back them up on the China Tibet Information Center’s website) to have brought as many blessings to the country as misfortune. The reconstruction of the monasteries helps to gloss over the fact that there are still many social inequalities present in Tibetan society. To that end, it is worth noting that entire generations of Tibetans have now grown up under Chinese rule, not knowing what it means to be able to practise religion freely or enjoy freedom of speech and many of the other activities associated with a more liberal political system. The newer generations are not even aware that they lack these freedoms, so they see nothing inherently wrong with the current situation within Tibet. Thus, despite their apparent collusion, the Tibetans are in fact subject to a cultural, political, and economic form of subjugation.

The Responsibility of the Tourist

If the view of the average Tibetan citizen towards the neo-orientalism of their culture is one of ambivalence, is there any reason to discuss such themes? Are we, in addressing this situation, in fact adding to the very forces we seek to condemn? It is the responsibility of any visitor to Tibet to understand the truth for him or herself. Moreover, the fact is that Tibetan culture today is not what is normally identified as ‘Tibetan culture’ in the popular Western appreciation of it. The Tibet of today is a nation on the cusp of change, blending more and more with Chinese people and cultural forces in addition to the greater consumerist world. It is not that this Tibet — that of the nangmas — is any less Tibetan than monasteries, villages, and butter tea. What is important to note is that:

*the Chinese presentation of Tibet to the West often had the unsettling effect of portraying indigenous Tibetan culture as a ‘noble savage’ commodity for mass tourist consumption, one that seemed to operate within the context of a distorted Buddhist Disneyland, a pastiche hiding the real horror of a broken civilization.* (Klieger, 1992, p. 124)

It is the labelling of the Tibetan people as ‘noble savages’ and their country as a lost Shangri-la that can be so destructive to the vivacity of present-day Tibetan culture, whether it is the West or the Chinese doing the labelling. The failure to recognize the current reality of Tibet is not only unfair to the Tibetans but also to the tourists as well.
The Chinese government is not the only instigator of neo-orientalism in Tibet. Although it is the main actor in portraying ‘Tibetan culture’, there also has to be an audience to receive these images. Thus, tourists — both from Mainland China and abroad — are complicit in the neo-orientalism of Tibet when they accept the images given to them. Both promotion and acceptance of the images of the seemingly authentic culture slowly eat away at and cheapen the native Tibetans’ agency in determining their own, genuine culture. Although tourism in general can and does provide wonderful cultural insights, bring economic wealth to poor areas, and bridge cultural divides through positive exchanges, it also brings forth and promotes specific images that are oversimplified and in some cases quite false. In the case of Tibet, its culture is displayed through government-sponsored touristic acts as something ‘Other’. The exoticization of Tibet by China inadvertently cheapens its culture and prevents the Tibetans from having the freedom to identify it for themselves and to lead their own lives freely. The true reality of Tibetan culture, a rapidly changing and redefined identity, is then lost amidst the flashes of cameras and glimpses of a culture that existed long ago and no longer exists today.

References


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Chapter 28

From China to Indonesia: Adapting to Changing Markets

Fleur Fallon

Introduction

“The Chinese are coming! The Chinese are coming!” Excitement at the prospect of golden hordes of wealthy Chinese travellers has been echoing around the world with the granting of Approved Destination Status (ADS) by the government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to more than 130 countries. To be approved, a country must be friendly to China and have attractive tourist resources and facilities, with no limitation or discrimination in law against Chinese tourists (Yin, 2003). In 2002, Indonesia became the sixteenth destination to be granted ADS.

The major source markets for Indonesia are ASEAN and Asia-Pacific countries, particularly Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia. Mainland Chinese have been scarcely visible in leisure tourism to Indonesia. And just when the Chinese might have started to choose Indonesia as a holiday destination, they were deterred by a series of exogenous factors such as 9/11 and continuing terrorism threats; bombs in Bali in 2002 and 2005 and in Jakarta in 2003 and 2004; natural disasters such as the 2004 tsunami, earthquakes in Central Java in 2006 and in West Sumatra in 2007; pandemic threats of Avian flu and SARS; and a series of ferry and airline mishaps in 2007.

In addition, there are complex political and historical relationships between Indonesia and China which give rise to several questions:

• How ‘safe’ is it for the Chinese to visit Indonesia?
• What are the key motivating factors for the Chinese to choose overseas destinations?
• How can Indonesia differentiate itself from other ASEAN destinations to attract and to sustain the potentially lucrative Chinese market?
• Which segment (or segments) of the Chinese market does Indonesia want to attract?
To try and answer these, a study was carried out involving Chinese outbound tourists and travel agents in China and Indonesia, with the findings interpreted in the light of the author’s long experience of working and studying in China and Indonesia. It was predicted that Chinese people would either choose their close neighbours as destinations or Europe in preference to Indonesia, particularly because of the historical prejudice against people of Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia.

In this chapter, the primary issues relating to ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, to China outbound tourism and to Indonesian inbound tourism are presented to develop a contextual background. This is followed by a presentation of preliminary research findings that indicate the emergence of a rising market segment in China that can be targeted for special purpose travel in Indonesia. A discussion of the implications of this emerging segment and marketing strategy suggestions conclude the chapter; the study has significant implications for the Indonesian tourism authorities and also for travel agencies in both source and destination countries in terms of strategic management of the Chinese leisure tourism market.

**Methodology**

Key informant interviews and questionnaires were conducted with travel agents authorised to handle PRC outbound leisure travellers in Ningbo and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, and in Bali and the neighbouring Indonesian island of Lombok. A brief questionnaire was sent to Chinese students at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China (UNNC) to identify any who had travelled overseas for leisure purposes in the last five years, or who planned to do so. This resulted in a response from 2 per cent of the students, which correlates closely with the percentage of the total population of China who have travelled abroad. Further detailed questionnaires were distributed and interviews conducted with those who had travelled extensively. In addition, a close monitoring of media reports and other documents has been maintained since ADS was granted to Indonesia in 2002.

**The Chinese in Indonesia**

Indonesia is home to some 7 million ethnic Chinese citizens, comprising 3.5 per cent of the total population. As well as being an ethnic minority they also are a religious minority, being mostly Christians and Buddhists, whereas the majority of Indonesians are Muslim. The Chinese have been in Indonesia for hundreds of years, initially arriving as plantation workers in colonial times and as traders even earlier than this. Following an alleged Communist-backed coup in 1965–66, the Chinese were targeted along with members and sympathisers of the Indonesian Communist Party for imprisonment and massacre. Diplomatic relations between China and Indonesia were not restored until 1990, and

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1UNNC is the first full Sino-foreign university venture in China. At the time of the survey, there were 932 students; 97 per cent of whom were Chinese and mostly from Zhejiang province.
remained tentative until after Suharto, who had headed the Indonesian government since 1967, fell from power in May 1998 (Sukma, 1994).

Although banned from political involvement, an élite few Chinese entrepreneurs built up huge businesses under the close patronage of Suharto. This led to animosity on the part of the general public which came to an ugly head in early 1998 as resentment against an oppressive leader and the increasing gap between rich and poor was expressed in riots and demonstrations. The unrest contributed to Suharto being forced to stand down. During the riots, Chinese homes and shops were targeted for destruction and there were media reports of rapes, murder and beatings (Paris, 1998; Schlachter, 1998).

The Chinese began to feel more optimistic about their future in Indonesia with the election to the presidency in 1999 of Abdurrahman Wahid, who advocated religious and racial harmony and abolished many discriminatory laws, and under his successor in 2001, Megawati Sukarnoputri, whose father Sukarno was the first Indonesian president and had built relationships with the Chinese (Associated Press, 2001). From January 2000, Chinese text and Chinese language publications were again permitted, as well as public celebrations of important festivals, having been banned since the upheaval of the mid-1960s. The Indonesian government launched seven Chinese language newspapers and a TV channel and promoted Chinese language courses in universities, especially for people involved in the tourism industry (Xinhua News Agency, 2001). Two-way trade between Indonesia and China increased by 32 per cent to US$13.48 billion in 2004, making China the fourth largest trading partner for Indonesia, while Indonesia became China’s eighteenth largest trading partner (Qiu, 2005).

Despite these expanding links, people from the PRC still appear to be hesitant about travelling to Indonesia for leisure purposes, as will be shown below.

**Chinese Outbound Tourists**

China is a late-starter in outbound tourism. Since the opening-up and reform policies of China in 1978, tourism commenced with tours to Hong Kong and Macau, and has gradually extended outwards (see also Arlt’s chapter in the second section of this volume). The percentage of the Chinese population travelling overseas grew from 0.3 per cent in 1984 to 2.4 per cent in 2002 (Zhang, Jenkins, & Qu, 2003). Private and leisure travel has quickly accelerated to more than 80 per cent of outbound travel from China (Yu, 2006), up from 60 per cent in 2002 (Yin, 2003). 31.03 million outbound trips were made in 2005 (including to the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau), rising 11 per cent to 34.5 million in 2006 (UNWTO, 2007).

Apart from Hong Kong and Macau, China’s top destinations in 2001 included the nearby countries of Thailand, Japan, the two Koreas, Russia and Singapore as well as the United States and Australia. In 2005, Vietnam and Italy jumped into the top five destinations, and Malaysia to the tenth spot. North Korea, the USA (which does not have ADS) and Australia dropped off the top ten list (Goldman, 2005). Other destinations, such as the Maldives, are also gaining popularity amongst younger Chinese. Indonesia does not rate highly in the priority choice of destinations, although as shown below, there are indications that the momentum is beginning to grow.
Travelling from China on holiday is by no means straightforward. Unless going abroad for business, study or family reasons, first-time private tourists are required to travel in tour groups organised by authorised agencies. For the agencies, there are several steps in the process. The first is to gather the necessary paperwork and submit applications for permission to travel to the Public Security Bureau and the relevant embassy or consulate of the intended destination country. Apart from the passport of the intending client, several more documents are required, including proof of employment or business records, financial records showing a bank deposit of at least US$5180–6470\(^2\) and a letter of guarantee to return. These documents are required as proof of genuine intention to undertake short-term travel and in order to satisfy the destination country authorities as well as the Chinese authorities that the proposed trip is not a vehicle for illegal migration. On approval, which may take 30–60 days, the agent contacts the client to finalise payment.

Once on tour, some agencies insist that the tour leader retains all the passports to prevent people from leaving the tour. If a group member wants to leave the group for individual activities, they must pay US$130 to the tour leader for their passport to be returned to them.

In terms of their choice of destination, apart from a perceived sense of safety and security, Chinese travellers may choose a destination based on brand-label shopping opportunities. Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research suggests that the Chinese are prepared to spend twice as much on luxury items while travelling as they do in China (Hooke, 2005). This is also supported by People’s Daily Online (2005) which reported that each Chinese person spends US$175 on average per day on souvenirs and other items during their trips to developed countries such as Switzerland and Australia. This is a higher daily expenditure than the Japanese, and fuels the excitement of tourism marketers as they attempt to woo the Chinese.

A particular issue affecting the Chinese market is that of the misleadingly termed ‘zero-cost’ tours (also mentioned by Arlt and by Ravinder in this volume). The advertised price for a tour to Thailand may be as low as US$390 including flights, 3-star hotel, meals and attraction tickets. Thai operators may even offer an incentive to the Chinese agent of US$100 per person in the group. However, there is an additional proviso, that ‘everyone must go shopping’, meaning that substantial commissions are generated for the Thai tour guides, and a compulsory charge of US$130–US$195 is levied on each tourist, also to be paid to the guide. Apart from the incentive paid by Thai agents, profit margins are so low for these trips that the Chinese agency may only profit by US$13 per person. Acceptance of these practices is largely an indication of the current inexperience of the Chinese market, and policies are being put in place across the region to try and eliminate the problem.

**Inbound Tourism to Indonesia from China**

International tourist arrivals to Indonesia rose to a peak of 5.2 million in 1997 (BPS, 2005), but since then have barely struggled above 5 million because of the various crises, which

\(^2\)US$1.00 = RMB7.72 in April 2007.
have created an atmosphere of risk and insecurity. Revitalisation of the industry is seen as essential, however, and the current President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, issued a decree in December 2005 instructing high level staff in several government departments to give priority to the planning and development of tourism (Indonesia Digest, 2006).

According to the Department of Culture and Tourism (DepBudPar, 2006), the largest groups of visitors to Indonesia in 2004 came from the Asia-Pacific region, especially Singapore (1.8 million), Japan (580,000), Malaysia (490,000), Australia (410,000), Taiwan (360,000) and South Korea (230,000). The average length of stay from most neighbouring countries is short, for example just 4 days for Singaporeans, whereas longer-haul tourists from Europe stay longer, up to 18 days. On average, visitors from all Asian countries stay in Indonesia for less than 10 days (DepBudPar, 2006). Also in 2004, Indonesia ranked eighth out of nine ASEAN countries in terms of market share, dropping from 13.3 per cent to 11.6 per cent of all visitors to ASEAN countries (Bali Update 7 February 2005).

Although 20 per cent of visitors to ASEAN countries come from Mainland China and despite a mutual agreement signed on culture and tourism as early as 1994, Indonesia attracted just 0.27 per cent of China’s outbound tourists in 2005, with 85,000 arrivals (People’s Daily Online, 2002; DepBudPar, 2006). By contrast, Malaysia received 3 million Chinese visitors in 2004, Singapore received 1.3 million and Thailand 800,000 (Asia Pulse/Antara, 2005). However, this may be about to change with increased marketing efforts by Indonesia in China and the promise of direct flights to Bali (Indonesia Digest, 2007). The foundations have already been laid for growth; while just 1,898 Mainland Chinese arrivals were recorded to Bali in 2001, by 2003 this had reached 7,524 and just three years later, in 2006, had risen further to a more substantial 40,687 (Bali Update 11 February 2007). Table 28.1 shows the dramatic growth in arrivals to Bali from Mainland China in relation to overall international arrivals and for selected source countries between January and April 2001–2007.

In February 2004, Indonesia changed its tourist entry system from issuing a two-month free visa period to leisure travellers from favoured countries to a more restrictive system of giving a maximum of one month on arrival, and on payment of a US$25 fee. China was included in the visa-on-arrival facility from August 2005, but the system is ineffective for most Chinese travellers since prior approval of visas is still required.

As discussed by Hitchcock and Putra elsewhere in this book, the changes within markets are causing concern. The new travellers are staying for shorter periods and spending less in the destination. With an oversupply of accommodation, many starred hotels are running at less than 50 per cent occupancy (Bali Update 26 May 2007). This has implications for Indonesian tourism marketing strategy, which will be discussed following an overview of issues concerning the China-to-Indonesia tourism flow.

**Issues in Tourism Between China and Indonesia**

The recent increases in arrivals from China notwithstanding, Indonesia’s small market share compared to other parts of ASEAN is of concern. The reasons for the initial hesitancy of the Chinese to visit are partly due to the low perception of Indonesia in some quarters (many people confuse Indonesia with India), awareness of anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January–April</th>
<th>International Arrivals (total)</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>S. Korea</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Americas</th>
<th>UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>472,082</td>
<td>22,263</td>
<td>29,161</td>
<td>38,636</td>
<td>43,357</td>
<td>107,254</td>
<td>50,884</td>
<td>24,148</td>
<td>18,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>341,146</td>
<td>12,632</td>
<td>19,510</td>
<td>22,751</td>
<td>39,784</td>
<td>68,084</td>
<td>32,514</td>
<td>21,413</td>
<td>18,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>330,990</td>
<td>4831</td>
<td>22,149</td>
<td>30,779</td>
<td>35,599</td>
<td>98,376</td>
<td>78,882</td>
<td>28,504</td>
<td>23,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>399,284</td>
<td>7004</td>
<td>13,786</td>
<td>21,569</td>
<td>54,648</td>
<td>80,692</td>
<td>73,036</td>
<td>23,058</td>
<td>16,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>254,294</td>
<td>2489</td>
<td>9827</td>
<td>8369</td>
<td>38,876</td>
<td>50,773</td>
<td>28,312</td>
<td>15,330</td>
<td>12,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>401,807</td>
<td>1364</td>
<td>5947</td>
<td>12,400</td>
<td>62,586</td>
<td>81,489</td>
<td>53,763</td>
<td>27,173</td>
<td>30,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>440,974</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>5131</td>
<td>9669</td>
<td>54,448</td>
<td>100,349</td>
<td>69,623</td>
<td>38,759</td>
<td>36,002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and security fears and partly to procedural complications and institutional arrangements, including poor linkages between agents in the two countries.

When tours to Indonesia from China commenced in 2002 after the granting of ADS, they followed itineraries which were restricted in variety and scope but yet rather expensive compared to similar destinations. One Hangzhou travel agency listed an 8-day tour to Hong Kong and Indonesia and another 5-day tour to Bali via Jakarta, both costing around US$964. The price was almost double that of better established tours to Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, where a typical 10-day package cost US$580. One reason for this is that tour operators in Malaysia and Thailand more readily accept the extended payment conditions of their Chinese counterparts or cut fees, sometimes by implementing a ‘zero-cost’ policy. In addition, tour operators in Indonesia claimed that their Chinese counterparts wanted to settle payment only 45-90 days after the tour had taken place, while they wanted cash on arrival, as paid when Indonesian tour groups visit China (Hudoyo, 2002). Both countries experience difficulties with access to credit card facilities and on-line payments.

Growth of the Chinese market has also been impeded by the various crises afflicting the Indonesian industry: the Bali bomb blast in October 2002 occurred while the first group of 100 tourists was actually visiting (Li, 2002). Some difficulty was also experienced with a lack of direct flights, although Garuda Indonesia (the national airline) recommenced direct flights between Jakarta and Beijing in January 2004 after an absence of nearly seven years, and is also flying more regularly to Shanghai and Guangzhou. However, as Bali is the main destination in Indonesia for leisure travellers, having to fly via Jakarta shortens time at the primary destination.

Only 90 inbound travel agencies in Indonesia were initially authorised to handle incoming Chinese tour groups (Yin, 2003), and there are considerable bureaucratic obstacles to surmount in order to become registered. Procedures are regulated by the Indonesia China Tourism Committee (ICTC). As well as being members of the Association of Indonesian Travel Agents (ASITA), agents must submit a proposal for approval to the Indonesian Department of Culture and Tourism, with documentation including audited financial reports and proof of availability of Mandarin-speaking guides. However, some operators managed to conduct business without official approval, there was conflict between agencies as they engaged in price-cutting fights to cash in on the China market (Bali Update 6 March 2006), and there was widespread dissatisfaction with the ICTC, which was criticised as ineffective with a lack of transparency and limited activity.

After calls from the inbound industry to address the situation, the ICTC was restructured in 2006 and reconstituted under the name of Asita China Tourism Committee (ACTC). Agents were invited to re-submit applications for membership and their proposal for handling the China market, again to be approved by the Department of Culture and Tourism. A major concern since then has been to lobby governments in both Indonesia and the PRC so that only ACTC members with the requisite approval can handle the China market. While this could be read as attempts to lock out competition in an open market situation, some form of regulation is generally necessary to provide high standards of service.

Another major hurdle for Indonesia-based agencies is establishing good links with their counterparts in the PRC. For example, in Lombok there is only one agency authorised to handle the China market, and although brochures are printed in Chinese, they have no
direct links with agents in Mainland China. They rely on an overflow from Bali, but given that Chinese package tours are less than 10 days in total, the time for side trips is limited. Furthermore, Balinese operators attempt to keep the business in Bali, citing ‘lack of infrastructure’ as the reason for not organising side trips. Consequently, the Lombok operator had handled only 50 Chinese clients by 2005, while its Balinese partner’s throughput had increased from 100 clients in 2002 to 400 in 2005.

The Growing Diversity of Chinese Outbound Travellers

Despite this weak performance so far, there is undoubtedly a potential market in Mainland China for tourism to Indonesia. It was to ascertain the extent of this that the survey among students at UNNC was carried out.

In the study, 69 per cent of respondents were women aged between 15 and 24 (over 60 per cent of the overall student population at UNNC is female), and not surprisingly, a high proportion — 81 per cent — were single. Between them, the respondents had visited 31 countries. There were 54 ‘hits’ for 12 countries in Asia; 34 for 14 European countries/UK; 2 for 2 Middle Eastern countries; 1 for Russia; 3 for Australia; 1 for Canada and none for the USA. A trip may have involved more than one destination, for example Macau/Hong Kong; Singapore/Malaysia/Thailand and 5 European countries in 10 days. The most travelled respondent had visited 12 countries during 8 trips, each lasting 6–12 days from 2001 to 2005. Only 1 respondent had visited Indonesia. The most visited countries were Singapore (42 per cent), Thailand (38.5 per cent), Hong Kong and Malaysia (37 per cent) and Germany (19 per cent). About 23 per cent of respondents combined leisure side trips with study trips. For example, while studying in Europe, one postgraduate student took five separate trips to different countries, each ranging from 2 to 9 days.

Although one of the requirements for travel within the ADS scheme is to lodge a security deposit with the agent in China, three-quarters of respondents stated that this was not actually required for their trip. Of those who did lodge a deposit, the amount ranged from US$3885 to US$6475 per person. However, as deposits are generally returned shortly after arrival back in China, none of the respondents felt this was a problem; even though one had to wait for three months for its return, this was felt to be reasonable!

Information to plan the trip is primarily obtained from the travel agent (45 per cent), from family and friends (24 per cent) and the Internet (21 per cent). Most people travelled with family and friends, including work colleagues and classmates (64 per cent). Of the total trips, 11 per cent travelled alone, but had friends or relatives in the destination country. Surveys among travel agencies indicated that tour groups comprised 16 people on average, but that group size could range from 4 to over 100 persons; there is some indication from the student survey of an increased willingness to travel alone or with friends rather than joining a group of strangers.

Respondents reported that the most enjoyable aspects of their trips were sightseeing (39 per cent) and culture/people (37 per cent). To taste local cuisine, meet people and observe different customs, to visit museums and to experience ‘the spirit of a city’ are considered as ‘the core of the journey’. These findings are similar to those from established agencies, who use questionnaires to gain feedback from their clients, and indicate that the
idea of temporary escape and broadening their horizons in destinations that offer safety, 
the chance to taste local cuisine, and to connect more closely with other cultures, people 
and history and to relax are high on the agenda for young outbound tourists.

Aspects of overseas travel which were disliked were also elicited from respondents. 
Mediocre Chinese food at scheduled meal stops and pre-arranged shopping where the 
travellers are encouraged to buy are turn-offs to the excitement of first-time overseas travel. 
At least 42 per cent of respondents felt under some pressure to buy products, especially in 
Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. However, most feel that this kind of shopping is ‘within the arrangement; maybe I can come across something surprising or new’ and 
thus are resigned to the situation. Travellers also complained of additional costs, excursions and park fees that had not been notified in the pre-sales information. Most travellers 
were satisfied with their travel (67 per cent) with 11 per cent very satisfied. No one was 
dissatisfied, but 26 per cent expressed a neutral attitude based on ‘not enough time to 
enjoy’ and too ‘tiring’. Travellers gave a clear warning to check the trip inclusions, costs 
and itinerary carefully before purchase.

There was diversity in the range of destinations mentioned for respondents’ ideal next 
vacation abroad. Australia and New Zealand were mentioned for their climate and land-
scape, although more expensive (21 per cent). Singapore was selected for its cleanliness, 
proximity, beauty and Chinese language features (21 per cent) and 42 per cent dreamed of 
various locales in Europe: Paris, the ‘city of romance’; Spain for its football; the UK for 
its universities. This was an open question with no prompts given, and Indonesia was 
not nominated by any respondent. However, when asked if they would travel to Indonesia, 
54 per cent stated ‘no’ and gave strong opinions such as ‘1998 anti-Chinese killings’ with 
images on the Internet; ‘this is still a shadow on our mind’, ‘terrible security and bad 
attitude towards Chinese’; ‘it’s too hot’, ‘unsafe’ and ‘too many diseases, and ‘I’m afraid 
to go there’. On the other hand, the 46 per cent who would consider Indonesia as a 
destination choice did so for reasons of being different from China: ‘if I have the time, 
why not?’ to experience its culture, scenery, and beautiful dancing. These and other similar 
comments need to be considered carefully for future promotional campaigns by Indonesia 
to China.

The indication from this preliminary study is that with increased opportunities to travel, 
there is a demand for greater flexibility and more independent small group travel is 
beginning to emerge. Even though government policy and guidelines evoke rigidity of pro-
cedures, there appears to be room for more flexibility in terms of how clients are handled 
and in the packaging of tours.

Discussion

The popularity of cheap destinations and the high volume of leisure travellers to Asian 
destinations found during the study indicate that Chinese are highly cost-conscious when 
choosing destinations, and do not always fit the ‘high spender’ image that tourism industry 
marketers have been brandishing as more ADS country agreements are signed. According 
to the survey, shopping was not the most enjoyable aspect of the tours, and targeted com-
pulsory shopping was only reluctantly accepted as ‘part of the deal’. Common pleas were
for more flexibility for choosing their own shopping locales and for exploring with a less frenetic schedule. The myth that the Chinese traveller is a ‘brand shopaholic’ is based on a misunderstanding of Chinese shopping behaviour; many of the purchases are not made by individuals for themselves, but on behalf of relatives, friends and work colleagues or as gifts for people at home.

The study also suggests a niche market that could be targeted by the Indonesian tourism authorities. This group is educated, young, confident and keen to explore the world. This is supported by several other sources, including Gong (2005) and Eyefortravel.com (2007). The new, educated, young traveller from China may still want to drive a hard bargain, but is willing to pay more for quality if all costs and services are transparent and stated up-front. Furthermore, as the market matures, travellers quickly tire of the wonder of ‘doing it all’, covering several countries in one quick trip. They are seeking more time in one place for relaxation, for exploring culture, history and getting the ‘feel’ of one destination.

Most importantly, the investigation confirms the prediction that concern with safety and security is a key consideration for Chinese tourists when choosing destinations, which clearly affects attitudes to Indonesia, since the perception lingers that Indonesians still harbour strong anti-Chinese feelings and that certain areas may be subject to terrorist attacks.

In part because of incorrect assumptions about the market, the first flush of excitement at the thought of golden hordes of Chinese coming to Indonesia has dissipated into disappointment, frustration or simply avoidance. Nevertheless, travel agents in Indonesia have been regrouping to formalise and standardise arrangements to try and control the price-cutters who offer minimum services but pressure clients for targeted shopping trips and charge for extras not explained in pre-sales information. The next stage is to become more aware of the actual characteristics of the potential market and to develop appropriate products. Rather than emulating Thailand by savage price-cutting and then desperate attempts to make up the difference with ‘compulsory shopping fees’, Indonesia would be well advised to follow a campaign which ensures that it differentiates itself from competitor destinations.

From observations over six years in China, there are two very strong potential niche markets. One is the honeymoon market, and the other is the young ecotourist or culture tourist from the wealthy eastern provinces. An escape to well-maintained marine, mountain or other natural places is popular among Chinese high-achievers needing an escape from the pressures of work and crowds.

Conclusion

This study represents just the beginning of the investigation of the China–Indonesia leisure tourism relationship. Further study is required to examine a wider range of leisure outbound travellers from the PRC, other key stakeholders in the tourism industry such as government bodies and service providers, and the response of local communities in Indonesia to Chinese leisure travellers. However, from these brief findings, some indicators and suggestions can be made for travel service providers in China and Indonesia.

First, the Chinese market increasingly consists of diverse segments with different needs; not all are hungry to shop. In particular, FITs, honeymooners and family groups are three
major trends in overseas travel. Second, the strategy of aiming for a mass market, for instance by drastically lowering prices, reduces profit margins and encourages practices such as chasing extra commission from forced shopping tours. This does nothing to build a positive relationship with China and reinforces the perception of anti-Chinese feeling. It will also threaten destination sustainability in terms of overcrowding and damage to the natural and social environment.

On the other hand, a strategy of differentiation focusing on peace and harmony in idyllic and uncrowded surroundings and offering marine, mountain and cultural activities may help to overcome the perception of safety concerns. Indeed, Indonesia’s vision is to promote ‘clean tourism’ (DepBudPar, 2006), with no casinos, sex tours or easy drugs. This can extend to ‘green’ tourism where the emphasis is on natural beauty and friendly people, with relaxed and flexible shopping opportunities.

In this context, and particularly because the number of people from the PRC visiting Indonesia is still relatively low, Indonesia has the opportunity to position itself very differently from its fellow ASEAN members. It could benefit greatly from a promotional campaign targeting the prosperous provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu, adjacent to Shanghai, rather than in the major metropolises (and more crowded and competitive markets) of Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou. Chinese travel agents surveyed for this study expressed high interest in a different type of product to the current hectic offerings of multiple destinations, shopping, nightlife and gambling.

This chapter has explored the emerging leisure tourism relationship between China and Indonesia. While the initial tourist flow to Indonesia has been slow, there is evidence of fast growth and a growing market segment of young, educated Chinese who seek more independent and flexible modes of travel. This group match the ideals of ‘clean and green’ tourism articulated by Indonesia, and support Indonesia’s culture and tourism vision of national unity in terms of multicultural community, people’s welfare and international friendship, through motivating development by preservation of cultural and natural resources.

Acknowledgements

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References


Chapter 29

Interpreting the Past: Creating the Surabaya Heritage Trail, Indonesia

Agoes Indrianto

Introduction

The use of cultural heritage in tourism is well understood, and the drive to experience other cultures and historical places is an increasingly significant motivational force for tourism (Van den Borg, Costa, & Gotti, 1996). This opens up opportunities as well as challenges for destinations with heritage elements which they may wish to develop for tourism. As stated by Richter (1999), the concept of heritage tourism is an elastic term that refers generally to the past in terms of objects or events, including visits to museums, historical areas, monuments, shrines, statues and representation of historical events. Buildings play an important part in this sector, and are increasingly interpreted in terms of their usefulness for tourism (Lasansky & McLaren, 2004; Fyall & Rakic, 2006).

Utilizing heritage assets as tourist attractions in European countries is common (Page & Hall, 2003), and since most of these countries are relatively wealthy with the advantages of good governance, planning and implementation and strong support from the community, they do not generally encounter significant difficulties in developing heritage tourism. Because of this, and because much tourism analysis has been carried out by academics based in Europe, most discussion about heritage tourism concerns European countries and other developed nations (e.g. Jansen-Verbeke & Lievois, 1999).

There has been some research into heritage tourism in Asian countries, including Indonesia, but most of the work has discussed cultural and environmental heritage. Works by Simpson and Wall (1999) and Picard (1996) address the role of cultural heritage in Bali as a tourism asset, while others have discussed issues of ethnicity in tourism (e.g. Picard & Wood, 1997). However, there has been little examination on the use of the built heritage for tourism in Indonesia, and this paper aims to make a contribution to this field.
by discussing the development of heritage trails based around historic buildings in the city of Surabaya.

Cultural and Heritage Tourism in Indonesia

In 2005 Indonesia received 5,002,101 foreign visitors (BPS, 2007); arrivals have remained depressed for several years compared to the country’s potential because of the various security, political and economic issues the country has faced in the last decade (see also the chapters by Fallon and by Hitchcock and Putra elsewhere in this volume). With its diversity of ethnic groups, Indonesia is rich in cultural and historical heritage, from the way of life of the community through to historical buildings, and cultural tourism is one of its principal tourism assets, with a particular focus on Bali, Yogyakarta and Central Java, and other remarkable areas such as Tanah Toraja in Sulawesi and the villages of Flores. There has been less attention paid to heritage tourism, and yet the growing demand for heritage protection and associated leisure opportunities by people resident in Indonesia — including domestic tourists and expatriates — is evidenced by the establishment of heritage societies in several cities, including Bandung, Yogyakarta, Medan and Jakarta. Typical of these is the Jakarta-based Indonesian Heritage Society, whose activities cover a range of areas, including producing publications on heritage attractions and organizing outings with a heritage theme (Indonesian Heritage Society, 2007).

This chapter specifically discusses heritage tourism in the major city of Surabaya, a former administrative centre for the Dutch colonial regime, which bequeathed many fine buildings to the city. Unfortunately these buildings have been neglected, although there is growing concern from the community to preserve them, in part through tourism. As argued by Hall (2003), community participation has become an important factor in developing tourism. In the case of the Surabaya Heritage Trail, the community was represented by a group of university lecturers and students who aimed to create walking trails focusing on the old colonial buildings dotted about the city. This chapter will use a narrative approach to discuss the creation of the Surabaya Heritage Trail, one of the first such initiatives in Indonesia, and will examine the challenges and opportunities of interpreting the past as a tourist attraction.

Surabaya and its History

As the second largest city in Indonesia, Surabaya is one of the most important cities in Asia. It is the capital of the province of East Java and home to 2.9 million people. It is also an important hub for other parts of Indonesia, especially the Eastern region. Recently, the service and trade sectors have overtaken industrial manufacturing in providing the greatest levels of revenue, which has stimulated the government to promote Surabaya as a centre of trade and services rather than as a manufacturing centre. The government has also become aware that tourism is a key factor in supporting economic growth. Thus, using ‘Sparkling Surabaya’ as the city’s tourism slogan, the municipal government has begun to think seriously about boosting tourism (Bisnis Indonesia, 2006; www.sparklingsurabaya.com).
Tourism is growing quite rapidly, as evidenced by the ‘Surabaya Big Sale’ event in May 2006, which received 682,324 visitors, a 98.5 per cent increase over 2005 (STPB, 2006). An important tourism asset is the heritage buildings, which are mostly located in the northern part of the city.

Surabaya is one of the oldest cities in Indonesia and key events here have helped to shape the country’s history, from the era of Surabaya Kingdom around the 13th century through to Indonesian Independence in the 20th century, and up to today. Von Faber (1933 cited in Handinoto, 1996) reports that in 1275 King Kertanegara built a new settlement for his troops on the coast of eastern Java, near the Straits of Madura, and at a crossing point of the important Brantas River. The new settlement was named Surabaya. The city’s growth typifies the development of coastal areas generally in Indonesia in that it experienced rapid economic growth because of its access to sea and inland trading routes; one consequence was that the city’s population became more heterogeneous.

A legendary version of the founding of Surabaya attributes its name to the eternal fight between the *Sura* (a big fish, or shark) and *Baya* (crocodile). The legend is still represented in the city’s symbols, the Sura fish and the Crocodile.

There are few physical legacies of the ancient or medieval history of Surabaya, as most of the older buildings were destroyed by re-development or war. The principal architectural legacy dates from 1870 to 1940, when many buildings and public facilities were built by the Dutch colonial government. Surabaya has many stories to tell of its history, and efforts to interpret these for residents and for tourists can be made most effectively through the perspective of these heritage buildings.

Changing styles of architecture have also played a significant role in the development of the fabric of the city. As described by Kwanda and Handinoto (2003), culturally Surabaya is divided into four major areas with different landmarks in terms of their architecture and community life. These are the European quarter, the Arab quarter, the Chinese quarter and the Upper city. In this chapter, the discussion will focus mainly on the buildings around the European Quarter and the Upper City, where the Heritage Trail programme is based.

**Architectural Influences on Surabaya**

The development of Surabaya was strongly influenced by Dutch architecture, and the buildings created between 1870 and 1940 give the atmosphere of a European city. Architectural movements within the Netherlands affected the construction of buildings in Surabaya as new ideas were exported to colonial towns. The Empire style, which was part of the Neoclassical movement, initially dominated buildings here: it was inspired by features popular in Ancient Greece such as large, ornamental pillars. This style was popularized by Daendels, the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies (1808–1811). Interestingly, the Empire style was not known in the Netherlands at that time, since it was inspired by buildings constructed by the Napoleonic Empire in France, which were copied by Daendels to give an elegant touch to the architecture in the Dutch East Indies. An example of the style can be seen in the official residence of the Governor of East Java, a building now known as Grahadi (Figure 29.1).
Later, around 1900, Dutch architects who came to the Indies dissented from the Empire style (Handinoto, 1996), and brought more modern designs with them. Late 19th century and early 20th century styles were dominated by features such as Dutch gables, dormers and towers, adapted to weather conditions in Surabaya: these three components become characteristic of buildings in the city. In a further adaptation to the local climate, many buildings use external galleries as protection both from direct sunlight and rain (Handinoto, 1996). They also avoided constructing buildings facing east and west in order to avoid the sun entering as it rose or fell (during the day the sun is almost overhead all year round, since Surabaya lies just south of the Equator). Later, architects inspired by movements in Europe and North America transposed their designs to the East Indies, with the result that Surabaya has examples of the Art Nouveau style (1880–1914), Arts and Crafts style (1910–1925) and Art Deco (1920–1939). The Dutch architect Berlage, one of the leading lights of the Modernist movement in European architecture, also designed one building in Surabaya: the Algemeene building (1901).

After 1920, two main architectural streams developed in the East Indies. The first tried to convey local architecture as the basis of the designs, while the other tried to apply modern shapes interpreted with new technology, available materials and local surroundings. Handinoto (1996) argues that development in Surabaya tended to follow the second stream, as it was one of the major cities of the East Indies. Architects such as G. C. Citroen, Job and Sprij were typical of this second stream: Citroen was eventually considered to be the ‘architect of Surabaya’ because so many of the city’s major buildings were designed by him. About 15 of these remain, including Wonokromo Bridge, the City Town Hall and

Figure 29.1: The Grahadi building, residence of the Governor of East Java.
the Residence of the City Mayor. The last decade or so of Dutch influence on Surabaya saw its architecture dominated by the typical square shapes, horizontal lines, flat roofs and white colours of the Modernist movement. All European influences ceased in 1942 when the Japanese came to Surabaya and the Dutch were forcibly removed.

Creating the Heritage Trail in Surabaya

Linked to their drive to increase tourism, the municipal government designated around 162 buildings in the city as heritage buildings to be conserved and protected because of their unique architectural and historical values. Calls to create a heritage tourism attraction focusing on these buildings stimulated the interest of a group of tourism academics and students from the Tourism and Leisure Management department at Petra Christian University, who used the making of the Heritage Trail as a class project. The students designed the trail, piloted it and offered it to the public as a new product. The initiative received considerable national media coverage (e.g. Kompas, 2005; Surya, 2005; Jawa Pos, 2006), and there has been a demand for similar programmes elsewhere. This section discusses the process of creating the trails from planning through to execution of the programme and its promotion.

The process of setting up the Heritage Trail included documenting the heritage buildings, training tour leaders and marketing. Since the student group’s educational background was tourism, the participants had limited knowledge of Surabaya’s heritage buildings, a shortcoming solved by involving the Senior Lecturer from the University’s Architecture Department, Timoticin Kwanda. In 2003, Kwanda had made a video presentation about architectural development in Surabaya which identified the heritage buildings, and he advised the students on the buildings’ historical and architectural values. The group also received support from the Head of the Library of Petra, Aditya Nugraha, who had set up a ‘Surabaya Memory’ programme in 2001 (http://surabaya-memory.petra.ac.id). This documented heritage buildings and historical sites in digital format using photos of old Surabaya.

As Jennings and Nickerson (2006) point out, a quality tourism experience is important to guarantee visitor satisfaction, and to guarantee this on the Heritage Trail programme the tour leader would play a crucial role in terms of knowledge about the buildings and the level of service provided. Before the first walk took place, tourism students designated as tour leaders were trained in knowledge of the history and architecture of the buildings, and about the history of Surabaya generally. Several trial runs were carried out.

The design of the Heritage Trail was based on historical values, road conditions, duration of the walk and on the principles of ensuring good quality cultural tourism, i.e. with small groups of people and a high quality of information and experience (Figure 29.2). Sunday mornings were chosen for the tours because the traffic is less frenetic then; as there are few pavements along the streets in the areas around the buildings, weekdays would be challenging because the roads are so full of vehicles. A 50-seater bus was used to take the participants from the meeting point to the destination, after which the participants were divided into smaller groups, each with a tour leader. The tours take half a day, with groups walking from one building to another. Halfway through, participants are served lunch in a
Table 29.1: Buildings viewed on the Heritage Trail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name of buildings</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Petekan Bridge</td>
<td>Jakarta Street</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Telkom Building*</td>
<td>Garuda Street</td>
<td>1915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>De Javache Bank*</td>
<td>Garuda Street</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Internatio*</td>
<td>Rajawali Street</td>
<td>1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ibis Hotel*</td>
<td>Rajawali Street</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gedung Cerutu (Cigarette Building)*</td>
<td>Rajawali Street</td>
<td>1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>PT Aperdi office</td>
<td>Jembatan Merah Street</td>
<td>1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>BII</td>
<td>Jembatan Merah Street</td>
<td>1914–1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>PT Perkebunan X*</td>
<td>Jembatan Merah Street</td>
<td>1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>Kebon Ijo Street</td>
<td>1926–1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Catholic Church</td>
<td>Kepanjen Street</td>
<td>1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Kalimas Harbour</td>
<td>Kalimas Street</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>House of Sampoerna</td>
<td>Taman Sampoerna Street</td>
<td>1862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Heroes Monument</td>
<td>Pahlawan Street</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>East Java Governor Office*</td>
<td>Pahlawan Street</td>
<td>1931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Majapahit hotel</td>
<td>Tunjungan Street</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Grahadi</td>
<td>Gubernur Suryo Street</td>
<td>1794–1798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Balai Pemuda</td>
<td>Gubernur Suryo Street</td>
<td>1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The City Town Hall</td>
<td>Walikota Mustajab Street</td>
<td>1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Darmo area</td>
<td>Darmo Street</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
well-preserved Art Deco building, the café at the House of Sampoerna (a cigarette factory, which includes a museum devoted to the history of clove cigarette production in Indonesia).

It was obviously impossible to include all of the 162 buildings designated of heritage importance in a single route, and the team therefore decided to visit 20 buildings (Table 29.1) to ensure that the trip was of a reasonable length to maintain levels of interest and keep the cost low. The list shows the places visited in the order in which they are included on the itinerary. Not all of the buildings can be accessed internally; the asterisk denotes those which can only be viewed from the outside.

After the product had been prepared, the next step was to market the Heritage Trail. This offered various challenges because the programme represented a new departure in terms of tourism attractions in Indonesia, and as Johnson (2000) remarks, new products face greater difficulties in marketing; many tourists prefer to follow what others have done and get reports of the experience before participating themselves. The marketing aimed to create an image of educational tourism and to use word-of-mouth promotion: students were designated to use this method by talking to their friends, families and other contacts. Figure 29.3 illustrates the process of creating the Heritage Trail product.

**Challenges in Developing the Heritage Trails**

The trails were run several times in 2005 and 2006 and were well received by the media (e.g. Graham, 2005). As a direct result of the initiative, the city council has become interested in introducing a regular hop on/hop off bus to tour the heritage attractions in Surabaya, but there are several obstacles which may hinder this, including difficulty in accessing the buildings, poor law enforcement in protecting them, and the strength of
market forces in countering preservation efforts. These three aspects have considerable implications for the sustainability of the programme, and will be examined below.

One of the main obstacles to developing the Heritage Trail is that not all of the buildings are accessible. Many heritage buildings are empty and most are privately owned, but often it is not known who the owners are — even the local government does not possess up-to-date information. Obtaining permission to view the interior of the buildings is obviously difficult under these circumstances. Sadly, even some of the government-owned ones are not easy to access: for example to enter the Governor’s Office and the City Town Hall a formal application has to be made and a letter of approval obtained well in advance, making it near-impossible for independent visitors to visit them. Public access to the buildings needs to be made more straightforward before they can be used as heritage attractions.

The second problem lies in the area of law enforcement. To develop the Heritage Trail as a permanent tourist attraction, an assured future is needed for the heritage buildings. Unfortunately many are poorly managed (Surya, 2007) and some have already been demolished to make way for new developments. The underlying cause of this is lack of political will, manifested in weak enforcement at both national and local government levels of legislation designed to protect heritage buildings and historical sites (Jawa Pos, 2007). National regulations passed in 1992 and 1999 (Bagyono, 2005) were followed up by a comprehensive local government law on cultural heritage (the Perda Cagar Budaya). However, there is limited knowledge and commitment by relevant personnel to understand and apply the legislation, and this affects the development of the Heritage Trail. Government actions have crucial direct and indirect impacts on tourism (Kelly & Nankervis, 2001), but here the strong framework necessary to protect the assets on which tourism depends is lacking. When demolitions have been carried out by private companies or individuals, the government is apparently unable to apply sanctions. In many cases, the local government does not actually want to protect the buildings because maintenance is expensive and because the heritage buildings hold no real significance for them.

Another significant challenge to developing the Heritage Trail is because market forces exert a strong pressure against doing so. Economic costs and benefits are always the principal consideration in maintaining the buildings, especially for their owners. Many of the buildings are strategically located in the city centre or on main roads, which means that the property tax is high, while because of the materials used and the style of the buildings it is costly for the owners to maintain them in their original state. Many have simply been left unpreserved, with only a few successfully restored (Surya, 2007). The cost of maintenance remains an important issue in developing the Heritage Trails on a wider basis. Although the Tourism and Cultural Department has set up a scheme to reduce the tax on such buildings, many owners still find it hard to maintain them because there is no further incentive from the local government. From a business perspective, it is more efficient to demolish the buildings and build new ones rather than keeping the original ones.

A further issue is that the majority of Surabaya’s resident population is unaware of the potential of their architectural heritage: many simply view them as a bunch of old buildings with no social or economic value. This, again, contributes to a general willingness to countenance demolitions. As mentioned by Kwanda and Handinoto (2003), modern architects tend to design and build buildings on the basis of function and cost instead of historical or cultural significance.
efficiency, and many of the modern ones have lower aesthetic and cultural values as a result. There is as yet no appreciation of the fact that substantial public benefits could accrue from developing the Heritage Trail: if people are either encouraged to visit Surabaya when they would otherwise not have done so or to stay longer, they will spend more money locally, thus benefiting local businesses and the economy.

Market Opportunities

To date, there is no regular Heritage Trail programme anywhere in Indonesia, which means that the Surabaya initiative has great significance in laying the foundations of a potentially valuable niche sector. Heritage trails are a proven success in other parts of the world, with most major (and many smaller) cities of touristic interest providing maps or interpretation leaflets for visitors to follow to view important sites. From the business perspective, different stakeholders need to be involved in order to capitalize on the product and promote it to known markets. The market for the Heritage Trail in Surabaya has been segmented based on existing visitors and the resident population, and has been determined as young professionals, students, expatriates and international visitors with emotional bonds to Surabaya, namely Dutch people.

A study conducted by Limastoro (2006) into potential demand for the tours showed that young professionals were extremely positive about the idea, and it was partly because of the findings of this survey that the programme was given its specific format, i.e. being held on Sunday mornings, with a combination of bus and walking, and including a meal. Many of the respondents expected to gain new experiences and knowledge about the heritage buildings. University and school students are another important market because of the educational values attached to the activities. The participants in the pilot programmes conducted have mostly been students (in large part because the project was a student scheme).

Expatriates living in Indonesia, particularly Surabaya, are another important market. Many of these people regularly undertake weekend recreational activities of some kind or another, and form a significant leisure market which is under-recognized by local governments. There is a strong argument for providing expatriates with a quality attraction within Surabaya, as knowledge-seeking and novelty-seeking are strong motivating forces for tourists (Leiper, 2004), and many are likely to be interested to learn about the history and culture of their host city. The founding of the Indonesian Heritage Society by expatriates in Jakarta (mentioned above) is evidence of the interest of many foreign residents in the Indonesian built heritage.

Perhaps the market with the greatest potential for the heritage tours is formed by European visitors to Indonesia, especially Dutch people. In 2005 there were 798,408 European arrivals to Indonesia, of whom 114,687, or almost 15 per cent, were Dutch (BPS, 2007). The large proportion of Dutch visitors is accounted for by their country’s long history of colonialism in Indonesia; many of the older visitors were born in Indonesia or lived there in as children, while many younger ones have strong family connections to the country. Many of these ‘nostalgia’ tours focus on the cities where colonial administrations were based, including Surabaya; Leiper (2004), again, points out that exploiting
nostalgic or historical connections with a place can be a successful promotional ploy. The Dutch have a high level of expenditure (US$ 1,454.95 on average per trip) and any activities such as the Heritage Trail programme which can help to extend their length of stay is therefore likely to be beneficial for the economy as a whole.

Data from the Surabaya Tourism Promotion Board show a recent steep increase in European visitors (especially people from the Netherlands) to the city, from 1,695 in 2003 to 2,690 in 2005 (STPB, 2006). Since most of the heritage buildings in Surabaya were built by the Dutch, the Heritage Trail programme is likely to be of interest to many of the Dutch tourists visiting the city if appropriately promoted and packaged. It is not too far-fetched to expect that it could even be incorporated into packages for tourists making a stopover in Surabaya en route to other, currently better-known, attractions.

**Conclusion**

Heritage tourism is hardly a new form of tourism in cities within developed countries, particularly in Europe, where a wealth of heritage buildings, historical sites and other cultural attractions are preserved for tourism and as part of the national heritage. However, this is not generally the case in developing countries and in cities such as Surabaya. Here, stakeholders such as the government and tourism industry do not yet see any significant advantage in maximizing heritage assets in the city, and the initiative for creating the Heritage Trail came from other sectors within the community, principally university academics. The main aim of the Heritage Trail is to contribute to conservation of the built heritage through tourism; this chapter has described how a group of tourism students and lecturers has developed the programme through a careful process of planning, product development and promotion.

To develop the programme further, several challenges need to be overcome. Ironically, several obstacles to development are thrown up by the very stakeholders who should be primarily responsible for taking the matter forward: these include lack of access to the buildings, complex bureaucracy, and a general lack of awareness and political will to protect the buildings. However, this chapter has given an optimistic perspective on developing the Heritage Trail, showing that with strong leadership and sound business planning, there is excellent potential for tourism to justify the preservation of many of the heritage buildings. The market for heritage tourism in Surabaya therefore remains promising, since there are still few tourist attractions in the city, despite its size and economic significance.

The next steps in developing the Heritage Trail as a regular tourist attraction are to find investors with the necessary capital and concern to use and preserve the heritage buildings, and to find a tour operator keen to take up the opportunity to promote the tours to suitable markets. More broadly, the success of the Heritage Trail programme has at the very least triggered a debate about the use and preservation of historic buildings in Surabaya and has stimulated much greater awareness of their significance among the general public, as well as some response by the government and the industry. Finally, this chapter has shown how an academic approach can be used to prompt the development of tourism products in an area where public and private sectors have been dormant.
References


Chapter 30

Responsible Destination Development: Puerto Princesa, Palawan, Philippines

John C. Gray

Introduction

Over the next few years, it is likely that the relatively unknown Puerto Princesa, in Palawan province in the Philippines, will become a major player in South-East Asian niche tourism. Sporting an environmentally aware population and a remarkable infrastructure for a ‘frontier’ town of 200,000 people, 15 years of environmentally enlightened leadership have formed the municipality into one of the region’s premier ecotourism destinations. Unlike other congested and unplanned ‘Tourism Gone Wrong’ locales, Puerto Princesa exemplifies a properly planned destination, with an educated population, sophisticated city infrastructure and honest government supported by a strong underpinning of environmental and social ethics. This chapter will discuss this achievement.

Background: Tourism in the Philippines

Under the Marcos regime in the Philippines (1966–1986) tourism policy was manipulated by the government to ‘prove’ to the outside world (and to balikbayan, or tourists of Filipino ancestry) that the country was politically stable (Richter, 1989; 1993). Upmarket tourism and high-profile events were encouraged by the regime, and developments were characterized by enclave-style resorts. Naturally, there was no community participation in such developments, with profits (generally spurious ones if inputs were taken into account) accruing only to a few of the Marcos ‘cronies’. Tourism numbers fell away markedly towards the end of the regime when its human rights abuses became better known, and particularly after the assassination of opposition politician Benigno Aquino in 1983.
When the Philippines emerged from this period, political factors continued to influence tourism development. The new president, Corazon Aquino, encouraged tourism development for the classic reasons of generating exchange and employment (Richter, 1989), while at local level the influence of individuals created numerous small-scale, poorly planned developments with little central planning (White & Rosales, 2003). Some of these developments do however make a contribution to local economic development, and in general the legislative and institutional infrastructure is supportive of environmental measures for tourism: this has particularly been the case since the release of untreated sewage at the mass tourism resort of Boracay Island in 1997 resulted in negative publicity.

Much of what has taken place at Princesa can be viewed in the context of the classic concept of the strong leader. When acting in a self-serving, nepotistic manner, individuals can exert a negative influence on tourism (as on other developments), but as White, Christie, D’Agnes, Lowry and Milne (2005) point out, they are also acknowledged as key to the effectiveness of local policies and law enforcement in several parts of South-East Asia. In this case, Puerto Princesa’s Mayor Edward Hagedorn is a highly awarded environmental activist who has developed Puerto Princesa into the Philippines’ ‘cleanest and greenest’ population centre. He began with a literal clean sweep, motivating volunteer labour to sweep the city with brooms, and continued with a host of environmental and social projects, for example rehabilitating and planting more mangroves than exist in any other area of the Philippines. Even in the city centre, litter is non-existent, rubbish is well managed, water is clean, and traffic is orderly. In 2007, the city’s ubiquitous ‘tricycles’ (a type of motorcycle with large sidecar to carry passengers and cargo) are converting to clean-burning liquid natural gas, with the City sponsoring half the conversion cost.

On the infrastructure side, Princesa now hosts regional sports festivals in an Olympic-sized swimming stadium and the 8000-seat Coliseum, which is also a covered centre for conventions and meetings. The harbour water is crystal clear, and a shantytown was converted into an upmarket residential and leisure ‘Baywalk’ development that rivals the one in Manila — except that Princesa’s sea is clean. The shantytown dwellers were relocated into a modern apartment complex.

In late 2009, the airport at Princesa will be upgraded to receive international flights, allowing international tourists to arrive directly at the city. To match demand, Princesa will require upgraded hotel and resort facilities, while maintaining a good standard of planning and containing the tourism industry within City guidelines.

The material which forms the basis of this study has been gathered over 12 years. It outlines the development of Princesa’s environmental commitment and quality infrastructure development as it relates to the general well-being of Princesa society, and the parallel development of a healthy and environmentally well-managed destination. Significantly, the municipality is run with such transparency that detailed financial information on programmes, including budgets for staff salaries, was provided unhesitatingly.

Environmental Deterioration and Tourism in the Philippines

After World War II, the Philippines suffered serious environmental degradation both on land and at sea. The Spanish colonialists had already stripped many forests during their occupation of the archipelago up to 1898, and development and high population pressure
took a further post-war toll. Today, many of the islands have damaged, unproductive soils and most coral reefs have been fished out, with many destroyed by dynamite and cyanide. The practice of ‘reef-beating’ was common here, with up to 100 adolescent boys walking across a reef, collecting anything that moved or could be broken loose. To this day, most seashells sold as South-East Asian souvenirs come from the Philippines.

The island of Palawan was typical of all this, and the young Edward Hagedorn was part of it. The Hagedorn family had prospered from illegal logging and illegal fishing, and the future national hero was a tough ‘numbers racket’ (illegal gambling) boss, insider experience that would prove excellent training for his days to come as mayor, when he would have to see through the stories, out-think the tricksters, and hold steadfast in the face of pressure.

In the mid-1980s, Palawan’s remaining forests and the presence of the world’s longest underground river on the island spawned a colony of artists and intelligentsia, some of whom became environmental activists. One of these was Bo Fernandez (now City Information Officer). In 1989, the fledgling movement organized a tree-planting festival to rehabilitate forest lands and raise the profile of environmental problems. In 1992, a now-responsible Hagedorn was proposed as Mayor by the activists. To win the endorsement of the powerful Catholic Church, Hagedorn promised the Bishop he would give up gambling — without realizing that the Bishop expected him to keep the promise: once he was elected the Bishop called his bluff, and Hagedorn gave up his gambling empire — eliminating the jobs of 600 people who depended on him in the process.

With his street-wise experience, born-again environmentalism and — crucially — the support of the public and some strong interest groups, Hagedorn inherited a city government which had been left with a balance of just US$25,000 — apparently in a move of deliberate sabotage by the previous administration which was designed to embarrass the new Mayor into breaking his campaign promises. Hagedorn responded by publicly explaining the situation, and then by asking the population to clean Princesa up with their own brooms. Hagedorn asked his former numbers vendors to volunteer, and once the City’s finances had recovered, he rehabilitated them by turning them into environmental watchdogs.

Hagedorn proved to be clever and incorruptible, and soon had Princesa on an even keel and benefiting from a series of environmental advances. In 1994, it won an award as the ‘cleanest and greenest’ city in the Philippines — and did so for three consecutive years. 1996 brought the National Hall of Fame Award. Princesa was internationally recognized at the 1997 World Environment Day with the United Nations Global 500 Roll of Honour, and subsequently won the Development Management Award from the Asian Institute of Management, the Far Eastern Economic review, and the Management Association of the Philippines. Since then, the City has won a host of awards not only for its environmental, social, and ethical achievements but also for its business and tourism programmes and its success in managing local government issues such as policing.

**How Success has been Achieved**

Mayor Hagedorn’s infrastructure and social services development strategy is straightforward: the law must be followed, with no exceptions; no bribes are accepted; and corruption is eliminated. Creative, cutting-edge solutions are applied to problems, and the
entire population has been enlisted in supporting the programmes. Furthermore, everything is implemented with passion. His simple but effective environmental management plan is to ‘Protect what is there, rehabilitate the destroyed, and plan for intelligent resource utilization’.

Once Hagedorn gained a reputation as an incorruptible environmentalist and benevolent manager, Princesa became a favourite of development agencies such as the Asian Development Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency, and grant funding flowed in. The Princesa city government operates with complete ‘open book’ transparency, with budgets detailed to the last peso and on public record. Programme accountability is guaranteed through stringent performance reviews. The grants and long-term loans are allowing Princesa to develop faster and more efficiently than any other comparable city, helped to a great extent by its medium-sized population in comparison with larger, less manageable population centres.

A strong educational system reinforces the ‘clean and green’ passion. With a major commitment to education, Princesa builds a yearly average of seven new schools throughout the municipality. Remote barangays (districts, or wards) are served by satellite dishes, providing educational and technical programmes. Educational facilities throughout the province are excellent, with all levels of education from day-care centres for the youngest children through to university level. The many awards that the City has won include several for its educational accomplishments, including the Asian Institute of Management award for its satellite library system, the top three awards in the 2005 National Achievement Test for both elementary schools and high schools, and the regional National Literacy Award in 2004. Thanks in large part to these educational efforts, tourists experience a friendly and crime-free English-speaking atmosphere. An additional benefit is that the population forms an excellent labour pool for the travel industry.

The City Administration uses the schools to mobilize youth into environmental education and protection programmes, and to foster a drug-free and crime-free society. It also encourages intense civic pride, reinforced by a year-round series of festivals and creative events. An example was the March 2007 ‘World’s Largest Human Peacock’ event, where 6500 school-students in peacock costumes formed the city’s Palawan Peacock logo during Princesa’s 136th annual Founding Ceremony. Participants in these events experience professional, well-organized planning that starts months beforehand, and are kept constantly occupied with producing the next festival, learning professional planning techniques in the process.

In terms of environmental management, the Hagedorn administration issued a strong message years ago that illegal logging, illegal fishing, poaching, and litter would not be tolerated. Occasional violations — which in most parts of the Philippines would be tolerated or ignored — are here met with strict penalties and application of the law. An example is the Baywatch bantay dagat (‘guardians of the sea’) programme, under which the six bays and 416 km coastline of Princesa are protected from illegal fishing with daily sea-patrols and monthly foot-patrols. Citizen participation is Baywatch’s cornerstone, facilitated by an annual training budget. As a result, the devastating practices of dynamiting and cyanide fishing have virtually been eliminated in the municipal waters, while daily monitoring of the City market and port facilities results in the confiscation of suspect fish catches.

A second example is the bantay gubat (‘guardians of the forest’) community-based forest management programme, which is designed to reduce illegal logging, wildlife
poaching, and other forest violations. The good forest cover resulting from the munici-
pality’s forest stewardship attracts illegal loggers and charcoal-makers, and to counter
these, daily foot patrols of both rainforest and mangroves involve the cooperation of wide
societal groups, including Forest Watch volunteers and numerous environmental clubs
and NGOs: Princesa’s ‘street gangs’ are environmental clubs. The low cost and effective-
ness of these programmes are maintained by a lack of corruption, volunteer efforts, and
citizen co-operation. A companion project implements supporting activities such as
keeping roads, canals and waterways clear of vegetation, and coastlines free of litter.

All these campaigns are of direct benefit both to the local population and to tourism.

Further campaigns concern control of the pollution emitted by Princesa’s motor vehicles
through a programme of spot checks for high emissions and conversion of the so-called
tricycles to clean-burning LNG, and stringent enforcement of prohibition on gun-
carrying and drug-dealing. Any discussion of Puerto Princesa society must include
mention of the highly successful ‘Prison Without Walls’. A minimum security ‘honour’
farm that accepts inmates from throughout the Philippines (often violent offenders),
the prison is involved in tourism by hosting four hot spring resorts, a popular waterfall,
and an administration complex that includes a handicrafts shop sporting curios made
from discarded plastic. Together with other humane actions designed to foster the
prisoners’ reintegration into society, the result is that only one in 500 prisoners returns
to prison after their stay here.

The implications of such programmes for tourism are enormous. Tourists can visit
40-metre-tall hardwood forests and dense mangroves without hearing a gun or worrying
about poachers. Wildlife populations are high, and wildlife is unafraid of human contact
while maintaining natural comfort zones. For instance in June 2006, in the space of one
hour, the author enjoyed extended sightings of macaques and monitor lizards, and while
these are common in mangroves and coastal forests throughout South-East Asia, they
normally flee on becoming aware of human presence. The endangered Palawan Peacock
is also locally common, and on this occasion actually approached the camera when
called.

Developing the Tourism Infrastructure and Products

Thus, while focusing on an infrastructure that benefits Princesa’s people, the Puerto
Princesa administration has developed an ideal tourism support base, with good medical
services and a road network (including, by 2008, a link to the Subterranean River, which
is vital for developing international tourism). The principal tourism attractions built on
this foundation centre on the province’s cultural and natural assets, and consist of festivals
and events, ecotourism, study tours, a small MICE sector, beach-based tourism, cultural
tourism, and more active pursuits.

First, Princesa’s programme of non-stop festivals and events comprises a unique visitor
attraction. The natural hospitality, honesty, pride, and exuberance of Princesa locals
make visitors feel right at home — in fact it is almost impossible to stay ‘out of the show’.
Festivals are based upon an environmental theme — to bond the population, keep kids
happy and drug-free, and develop future environmentalists. In Princesa, ‘cool’ teens know
nature and the environment — and volunteer for forest patrols and mangrove/forest planting to actualize their commitment. The most noteworthy environmental festival is the Festival of the Forest, now in its 18th year: over the years, almost two million trees have been planted during the festival to rehabilitate areas previously logged over or encroached upon by squatters. The event is organized weeks in advance, with nationally known TV and music stars lining up to appear. Other events — illustrating just a three-month period — are the Valentine’s Day ‘Love Affair With Nature’ mangrove planting festival (mid-February), Puerto Princesa Foundation Day (early March), a festival focusing on the Baywalk development (early April), the Kamarikutan Pagdiwata Arts Festival (April, before or after Holy Week), the Seafood festival (late April), and the Karagatan Festival, which celebrates the forests of the west coast, with activities such as kite-flying, trekking, mountain-biking, concerts, and a bikini contest (early May). Amidst all these are the monthly Bulanbulawan Festivals of the Golden Moon, when moon worshippers revel in the light of the full moon, in ‘an expression of the cultural passion, beliefs and aspirations of the people of the islands through their songs and dances’ (Princesa Tourist Board).

The second major area of tourism activity, and the most popular with foreign tourists, is ecotourism. Partly because of its strong environmental management programmes, Puerto Princesa has become known as the ‘ecotourism capital of the Philippines’. Its beautiful, untouched nature includes two nature-based World Heritage Sites, with another under consideration. The premier draw, the 8.2 km Subterranean River, was designated as a World Heritage Site in 1999. Cathedral chambers, wide hallways, and interesting geological formations lie hidden in the world’s longest known sea cave beneath the St. Paul Mountain. A further 292 hectares form a marine sanctuary, and there are several other cave systems within the park used for caving. Additional trips include a short ‘Jungle Trek’ and a ‘Monkey Trail’, and a guided mangrove paddle. Management of the site was passed to the City government following a political tug-of-war, with Mayor Hagedorn and his team ensuring good stewardship of the area’s resources and the participation of local communities. Revenues from tourism are retained locally and are mainly used for monitoring, enforcement, and local benefit (in contrast to the system for other Filipino parks, where the money returns to the national treasury) (Font, Cochrane, & Tapper, 2004). It is likely that once the road to the area from the city of Puerto Princesa is completed in 2008 tourism will grow swiftly. The new road has already brought some challenges, however: it has effectively reduced the length of stay by some tourists by making access to the area swifter, and it has also facilitated access to the park by local people seeking to exploit its resources illegally.

Puerto Princesa is also the gateway to the Tubbataha Reef Marine Park, the Philippines’ premier dive location and also a World Heritage Site. Additional dive sites are at Honda Bay, where the island resort of Dos Palmas Arreceffi exemplifies the perfect eco-resort. Water purity surrounding the resort is so good that rare dugong reside in nearby sea-grass beds, and there is a turtle nesting beach. A water desalinization plant, self-contained sewage treatment plant, and top-quality plumbing guarantee that this 100 cottage dive resort meets Princesa’s strict environmental requirements. For its guests, Dos Palmas offers kayaking, over-water bungalows and private dining platforms, and educational programs led by a marine biologist. There are further attractions at Ulugan Bay, close to the...
Subterranean River, consisting of over 7000 hectares of mangrove forests, coral reefs, seagrass meadows, and seaweed beds which are the breeding ground of fish, invertebrates, sea-turtles, dugong, and dolphins. Ulugan Bay has been the focus of a UNESCO-led sustainable development programme supported by the Puerto Princesa local government and funded by UNDP, in which community-based tourism plays a part (Chen Ng, 2003). However, the area has yet to become prominent on itineraries, and its likely continuing status as a small-scale, niche eco-activity (Alampay & Libosada, 2003) is perhaps due to the lack of a market-led focus and to the difficulties small ventures of this type generally experience in accessing appropriate markets.

The City’s government is aware of the potential of different kinds of tourism, and its remaining products include study tours which examine the Administration’s unique environmental ethic and culture; conferences and meetings held at the Coliseum; cultural tourism focusing on archaeological finds and the ethnology and history of the area’s indigenous inhabitants, displayed in the Palawan Museum; the beaches of the east and west coast; and activity tourism centring on rock-climbing in the Karst hills and jungle-trekking. Thanks to the original artists’ colony established here in the 1980s, Princesa is packed with art galleries, handicraft shops, and inexpensive trendy restaurants with excellent food. There are undoubtedly further attractions which could be developed, including a Jungle Canopy Walk, possibly with overnight tree-house stays, sea and river kayaking, bird-watching, and mountain-biking.

Despite Princesa’s ‘clean and green’ low-crime image and the rosy picture of tourism development painted there so far, the lingering image of the Philippines as a destination beset by crime and internecine troubles may inhibit international travel. The UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office website warns of the possibility of attacks occurring throughout the Philippines (FCO, 2007). Princesa itself is not immune from this: international tourism (and to a lesser extent domestic tourism) was badly affected by the 2001 kidnapping of 20 American and Filipino tourists from the Dos Palmas resort by a terrorist group. Some of the hostages were held for over a year, and two were killed.

In addition, there is strong competition in the ecotourism and diving market from destinations in other parts of South-East Asia. The opening of the international airport in 2009 will improve arrivals, but the city lacks the resources to compete with similar island or ecotourism destinations such as Phuket and Koh Samui (Thailand) or Langkawi (Malaysia). On the other hand, developments in these places have questionable benefits for local people; Manado (North Sulawesi, Indonesia) is perhaps a better comparison, as it is a destination created around a marine national park with excellent diving facilities. Current visitor numbers to Princesa do not justify international trade show appearances and media buys, limiting tourism promotion to the domestic market. As a result, Puerto Princesa and its remarkable accomplishments are still largely unknown outside the Philippines (except in a few smaller source markets, most notably South Korea), and while domestic tourism is effective in redistributing wealth from urban areas, it does not have the additional foreign exchange benefits that governments are keen to achieve.

A further challenge is the lack of accommodation likely to appeal to a wide international market. In early 2007, accommodation was limited to 1100 rooms, with one 3-star hotel, four 2-star hotels, and the remainder consisting of bungalow-style resorts, only one of which (Dos Palmas) has the amenities to appeal to upmarket international travellers. As an
ecotourism destination and lacking large resort hotels in the 3–5-star bracket, Princesa is outside the mainstream of conventional tourism distribution channels. Purchasing decisions therefore tend to be concentrated in smaller, specialist tour operators and independent market segments able to research and make their own travel decisions. Internet marketing can be a cost-effective solution, and some holidays are now being promoted through specialist Internet retailers such as the UK-based responsibletravel.com.

The question for Puerto Princesa is whether it wishes to move towards a standard, internationalized form of tourism development, which is certainly a possibility since the opening of international airport facilities will make the municipality more attractive to developers, or whether it wants to retain its special flavour as a destination which appeals mainly to domestic tourists and to a relatively small but growing number of international tourists. In other words, the desirability of developing large-scale hotels needs to be balanced against the benefits of retaining Princesa’s tourism product as one largely focused on ecotourism and cultural tourism. The most appropriate lodging choice of boutique-style ecolodges is more difficult to source, finance, and develop than a mainstream chain, particularly since developers must be attracted by and committed to Princesa’s stringent environmental and architectural constraints.

A Growing Market

The market for tourism in Puerto Princesa is highly promising — at least as far as certain source markets and market segments are concerned. Arrivals back in 1991 stood at less than 8,000, of whom around 48 per cent were foreigners (Puerto Princesa City Tourism Office, 2006). The intervening decade and a half has seen considerable changes in market conditions: long-haul tourism to Asia has been affected by security concerns, particularly terrorism, while intraregional tourism was affected by the Asian economic recession in the late 1990s and fears of SARS and Avian’ flu in the early 2000s. The domestic market, however, has been much more robust: there have been fluctuations because of the Asian recession in 1990s, but the underlying trend is steadily upwards, and the ratio of domestic to foreign tourists has evolved so that foreign tourists now form only around 10 per cent of arrivals, whereas 15 years ago almost half of arrivals were foreign (Table 30.1). The decline in 2001–2002 was due to the Dos Palmas kidnapping mentioned above.

Nevertheless, it is certainly to Princesa’s advantage that tourism trends indicate a strong interest in the kind of product and atmosphere that Princesa promotes, and in South-East Asia there are no comparable products at destination level. As elsewhere in Asia, the demand for domestic tourism opportunities has seen strong growth in the Philippines, with increasing numbers of upper and middle income Filipinos engaging in diving, snorkelling and beach visits (White & Rosales, 2003). A further strength of the area is that the diversity of attractions, with hot springs and waterfalls which are especially spectacular in the rainy season, keep arrivals fairly consistent year-round (Table 30.2).

Generally, although there are certainly challenges to sustained and sustainable development, as outlined above, it is likely that Puerto Princesa’s range of tourism products will appeal to a more discerning, sophisticated market capable of doing their own, Internet-based research and of making their own travel arrangements without depending on tour operators or other intermediaries.
Conclusion

It is clear that Mayor Hagedorn and his team have created a unique and attractive destination since 1990, and what is encouraging from the point of view of sustainability is that it is based on widespread community involvement and conviction. There is every likelihood


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<th>International</th>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>130,390</td>
<td>17,416</td>
<td>88:12</td>
<td>147,806</td>
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Table 30.2: Tourism arrivals to Puerto Princesa by month (2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
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<td>13,976</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130,390</td>
<td>17,416</td>
<td>147,806</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Conclusion

It is clear that Mayor Hagedorn and his team have created a unique and attractive destination since 1990, and what is encouraging from the point of view of sustainability is that it is based on widespread community involvement and conviction. There is every likelihood
that the spectrum of tourism opportunities being developed will tap into a robust swathe of market segments. While it seems likely that the municipal administration under Mayor Hagedorn’s leadership will overcome the challenges of organizing and marketing new product areas, a deeper and longer-lasting challenge will be to retain Puerto Princesa’s ‘clean and green’ crime-free, friendly society in the face of increased tourism growth, and to build the institutions necessary to continue the City’s excellent achievements once Mayor Hagedorn is no longer in post.

The case study demonstrates that strong leadership and political will backed by community support can succeed in moving exploitation of environmental resources along a different and less destructive pathway than in so many cases, with tourism forming one element of the way in which the resources are used. The challenges to successful continuation are substantial, but given the recent history of the area, there is every hope that the tough-minded mayor and his followers will succeed.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks for the assistance rendered in providing information for this chapter are due to Puerto Princesa’s Mayor Edward Hagedorn, Tourism Director Bo Fernandez, and City Tourism Officer Rene Baylon.

References


In recent years there has been a notable rise in interest in health and wellness tourism, including spa and medical tourism, which are seen as segments of the wider wellness tourism phenomenon. There are a variety of reasons for this, including relief of stress as well as beauty benefits and more rapid access to good-quality surgical interventions. Asia has benefited from this demand due to an array of social, cultural and economic factors: this chapter will explore the competitive advantage offered by many Asian destinations for this form of tourism and provide case studies that illustrate the range of wellness tourism products and services.

**Defining Health, Wellness, Medical and Spa Tourism**

There is a variety of definitions used in this field, with commentators referring to health tourism, wellness tourism, medical tourism and spa tourism as the more frequently used descriptors where ‘improved health on holiday ... has become the central theme of tourism in an active rather than a passive sense’ (Connell, 2006a, p. 1094). Before considering Asian examples of these forms of tourism, some clarification of these terms is needed.

Mueller and Kaufmann’s (2001) definition of health tourism, following Kaspar (1996), is ‘the sum of all the relationships and phenomena resulting from a change in location and residence by people in order to promote, stabilize and, as appropriate, restore physical, mental and social well-being while using health services and for whom the place where they are staying is neither their principal nor permanent place of residence or work’. Both Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) and Nahrstedt (2004) suggest that wellness tourism is a subset of health tourism. Schobersberger, Greie, and Humpeler (2004, pp. 199–200) observe that
‘it is hardly possible to define wellness in a single sentence. Wellness describes physical activity combined with relaxation of the mind and intellectual stimulus, basically a kind of fitness of body, mind and spirit, including the holistic aspect’. Mueller and Kaufmann (2001, p. 6) however provide a more expansive definition of ‘wellness’ based on that used by Ardell (1986), namely, ‘a state of health featuring the harmony of body, mind and spirit, with self-responsibility, physical fitness/beauty care, healthy nutrition/diet, relaxation/need for de-stressing/meditation, mental activity/education and environmental sensitivity/social contacts as fundamental elements’. Figure 31.1 illustrates Mueller and Kaufmann’s (2001) representation of how these elements operate to promote wellness.

The emphasis on mind, body and spirit, while perhaps trite and overused in a marketing sense, is still the best way to capture the complexity inherent in the nature of ‘wellness’, with each element having a symbiotic relationship with the others. Without a healthy mind, the body cannot be truly healthy, and so on. Smith and Kelly (2006b, p. 2) however argue that wellness is ‘more of a psychological than a physical state’ even though they acknowledge that the physical dimension does exist. Similarly, the spiritual dimension cannot be ignored, with Schobersberger et al. (2004, p. 200) referring to ‘a kind of ‘finding yourself in an age of megastress ... Well-being can therefore be understood as a holistic philosophy of life’.

Compared to wellness tourism, medical tourism is perhaps more clearly understood as a subset of health tourism — although there are elements of overlap in the area of
psychological benefits. For instance, some forms of wellness tourism aim to create health in ‘mind’ and ‘spirit’, while surgical interventions which lead to beauty enhancement also tackle the ‘mind’ as well as the ‘body’. Medical tourism has been defined by Connell (2006a, p. 1094) as tourism which is ‘deliberately linked to direct medical intervention, and outcomes are expected to be substantial and long term’. India, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia are key Asian countries successfully operating in this market. Connell (2006b) queries whether some forms of medical tourism can really be characterized as such, given that the patient may have little or no ability to engage in ‘normal’ tourist activities post-treatment. He agrees however that in many cases, individuals travelling to another country to undergo treatment do choose to package a vacation with their trip.

A number of factors have influenced the growth of medical tourism, including the high cost of medical procedures, long waiting lists and ageing populations in ‘rich world’ countries, greater affordability of flights and travel, and a shift in medical care away from the public sector, such that people are more comfortable with paying for medical services offered by private bodies or companies. It is also clear that the Internet has made retrieval of information about what is available, including comparison of prices and services, more straightforward. Another important factor is that travelling abroad may also provide a sense of privacy for the individual, enabling surgery and recuperation to take place away from prying eyes (Connell, 2006b). This is particularly relevant where the patient is undergoing cosmetic surgery such as breast augmentation, rhinoplasty or liposuction, which they may wish to have done under cover of relative anonymity.

Spa tourism is a more familiar and well-established concept within the health tourism phenomenon but even its meaning is not always self-evident. For example, natural mineral springs are often but not necessarily an element (Schofield, 2004) and may be more central to the spa tourism experience of countries — for example, Japan — than of others, such as Thailand. Smith and Kelly (2006a, p. 17) provide a definition which they argue encompasses the modern spa tourism experience. It refers to ‘tourism which focuses on the relaxation or healing of the body using water-based treatments, such as pools, steam rooms and saunas. Emphasis tends to be focused on relaxation and health and beauty treatments rather than the spiritual aspects of certain exercises such as yoga. Surroundings are usually sumptuous with pricing schemes to match. This may not be wide enough to cover all spa tourism experiences, however: Asian treatments do not necessarily involve the use of water (e.g., massage using essential oils) and may incorporate spiritual aspects (Puczkó & Bachvarov, 2006). The International Spa Association (2007) defines spas more broadly as ‘entities devoted to enhancing overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit’. This would appear to be a more workable definition, particularly in an Asian context.

Rather than just being places for hedonic gratification or leisure, spas are increasingly taking on the role of ‘health centres’ or health resorts, where ‘a concern with physical well-being is complemented by a reconsideration of mental welfare’ (Kaspar, 1990, p. 299), restoring health in all its facets. This notion of the curative benefits of a spa can be traced back to early Greek and Roman periods, and in later times to the fashion for ‘taking the waters’ in Europe in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.
The Asian Advantage

There are four principal reasons why Asia is well-positioned to be a global leader in health and wellness tourism. Firstly, in an increasingly artificial world, many Western tourists are seeking a return to nature and natural elements, and may be drawn to Eastern practices and cultures because in the eyes of the consumer, ‘Asia offers an intact world with authentic, original, genuine and deep encounters’ (Fuchs, 2003, p. 23). Many Asian techniques and therapies are based on Eastern religions or beliefs, such as the Buddhist elements in meditation, South Asian yoga and Ayurvedic practices (the term is derived from the Sanskrit ‘Ayur’, meaning ‘life’, and ‘veda’, meaning ‘knowledge’ or ‘wisdom’), and Balinese Hindu philosophies. Asian spas are thus able to offer traditional treatments and remedies which provide some measure of distinctiveness and authenticity for visitors, given that they often have a history stretching back over centuries. While this can be used as a means of differentiation between product offerings, an opposing tendency can also be observed towards a blend or fusion of treatments emanating from different cultures: the Four Seasons Resort at Langkawi, Malaysia, for example, offers an ‘Asian Fusion massage ... incorporating Thai, Malay, Chinese and Indian healing techniques’ (Eggleton, 2007). Over-use of this strategy could lead to a blander, less distinctive product or experience, which might be enjoyed as readily in Sydney as in the heart of Asia.

Secondly, the trend towards traditional, more ‘natural’ treatments and therapies is complemented by a growing desire for eco-aware products and services (Wight, 1993). Lennon (2007) notes the trend for beauty products to ‘go green’ and the move towards ‘ecologically minded brands’ such as Aveda (United States), Clarins (France) and Jurlique (Australia). Support for the use of herbs, plants and flowers for beauty therapy or well-being, rather than artificially developed products which began life in a laboratory, might lead a consumer to seek out the Asian origins of many of these more ecologically sound ingredients. For example, the Taj Green Cove Spa Resort at Kerala in India provides patrons with treatments based on natural ingredients ‘such as sandalwood, sesame, patchouli and frankincense’ and time-honoured practices: ‘a plantain leaf wrap is used to purify the skin, hair is shined with a paste that includes curry and neem leaves’ (Kurosawa, 2007, p. 10). Related to the search for more natural remedies is a greater interaction of East–West approaches to health and growing interest in the West in Eastern health techniques (Nahrstedt, 2004), even amongst mainstream medical practitioners.

Thirdly, Asia also has a natural advantage for developing a wellness tourism industry, particularly one centred on the spa tourism experience, given its varied landscapes which seem exotic to Western consumers. Wightman and Wall (1985, p. 405) identify location as an important factor in developing hot springs in parts of Canada, suggesting that ‘the scenery surrounding a spa was important to its success’. Smith and Kelly (2006a, p. 15) concur, noting that ‘it can be no coincidence that many retreats are located in aesthetically pleasing, environmentally lush and culturally rich surroundings’.

The final reason specifically relates to cost, especially concerning medical tourism. International long-haul airfares are currently extremely cheap relative to the disposable income of people in Western and other source markets, while several Asian destinations are well positioned to compete on both price and quality in terms of their service offer because of their well-educated population, the presence of wealthy investors willing to
support the sector and a supportive regulatory environment. The case study on India below explores this area of competitive advantage in greater depth.

With the above reasons — and the financial benefits — in mind, Asian governments are supporting various forms of health and wellness tourism through vehicles such as awards, promotional events such as the Asia Spa and Wellness Festival 2006, and the establishment of dedicated promotional boards and units such as the Healthcare Services Strategic Tourism Unit in Singapore (Henderson, 2003; 2004). The sector was given particular encouragement by governments after the Asian economic recession of 1997–98. So, while Malaysia received 39,140 foreign patients to its medical services in 1998, by 2004 numbers had more than quadrupled to 174,189 (TRAM, 2006). While Singapore has enjoyed a high reputation amongst expatriates in South-East Asia for its medical services for decades, other countries in the region are now developing services to match. For example, 632,300 foreigners visited 33 private hospitals in Thailand in 2001, although only 10 per cent of these actually travelled from Europe for this purpose; the remainder were expatriates living in Thailand or people from other parts of Asia (TRAM, 2006).

The trends described above can be illustrated through specific examples of medical and wellness tourism in Asia. The first case study concerns the medical tourism sector in India, while the second gives a view of the importance of spa destinations in Thailand. While these two sectors target an overseas market, the third example — of spa tourism in Japan — focuses almost exclusively on the domestic market.

Case Study: Medical Tourism in India

Historically, a number of destinations within India developed as havens for rest and recuperation, such as the hill stations at Darjeeling and the lakes at Kashmir, where during the colonial era members of the British Raj would retreat for cooling breezes and a change of scenery. Later, during the 1960s, people began travelling to India in search of an ‘alternative’ lifestyle, often focusing on yoga or meditation and following in the footsteps of celebrities. India is building on these traditions as a ‘wellness destination’ by developing expertise in medical tourism (García-Altés, 2005; Connell, 2006a). Estimates of the revenues generated by medical tourism worldwide vary greatly, but one source calculates the sector to be worth around US$10 billion. India aims to capture a tenth of this market by 2012, with annual growth rates currently standing at around 30 per cent (TRAM, 2006). As Connell (2006a) notes, however, there is a dearth of reliable statistics on the numbers travelling for this purpose for any of the countries claiming a growing medical tourism market. Some would maintain that travel to India for medical purposes is not a new phenomenon, but that the degree of structure in the product offered has increased significantly, with several airlines and tour operators coordinating with hospitals to offer specialised packages which cover all aspects of the trip from airport pick-up to post-operative recuperation in a pleasant hotel (Raja, 2004; TRAM, 2006).

India competes for this business by offering treatment by well-trained doctors and other medical staff using new and up-to-date technology at prices which can be between one fifth and one tenth of those in the West. Also, waiting lists for non-essential procedures
such as fertility treatments or knee reconstructions are considerably lower; one study showed that 87 per cent of British people travelling abroad for treatment did so because of long waiting lists in the UK (TRAM, 2006). In addition, India can offer traditional therapies in tandem with Western medical treatments (HotelMarketing.com, 2005). Mudur (2004) describes a visit to India by an English woman who had a hip re-surfacing operation at Apollo Hospital in Chennai, followed by time spent at an Indian herbal medicine centre during recuperation; the hospital arranged both visits. Language skills are also a bonus, with India’s skilled workforce generally boasting a high standard of English.

The main market segments for medical tourism in India are patients from the USA and from European and Middle Eastern nations, while a growing niche is formed by Indian expatriates, particularly those living in the USA and the UK (Connell, 2006a), who combine medical treatment with visits to family and friends. One of the reasons that Britain and the USA are strong source markets for Indian medical tourism is that their people are used to experiencing treatment from Indian doctors within their own countries, and recognize the competence and comprehensiveness of their training.

As in other countries, the Indian government has extended support for this emerging market largely because of the economic benefits perceived to flow from the influx, with the average spend of the medical tourist estimated at more than 2.5 times that of the average tourist (HotelMarketing.com, 2005). Some Indians criticize this support as giving Western tourists preferential access to scarce medical and public health resources over their less wealthy Indian counterparts; for instance, India has only 4 doctors per 10,000 people, while the US has 27 (Mudur, 2004; Connell, 2006a; TRAM, 2006). There is also criticism that this is a form of ‘medical colonialism’, whereby rich nations plunder the human resources of poorer ones (TRAM, 2006). From the consumers’ viewpoint, there are criticisms that medical tourism only focuses on the operation itself, leaving post-operative support or any complications to be dealt with back home; that there is little quality control; that it would be difficult to obtain redress in the event of a mishap; and that the data protection regulations now common in the West do not apply in most developing countries, possibly leading to misuse of personal details (Raja, 2004; Connell, 2006a).

Counter-arguments are that improvements to medical services funded by medical tourism will allow the provision of better healthcare infrastructure to the Indian population generally; that medical personnel trained overseas will be more likely to return home — bringing their valuable knowledge of the latest techniques and technology with them — if they can spend at least part of their time on lucrative private practice; and that medical tourists fill unused beds at private hospitals and thereby allow them to function more efficiently. More generally, market forces dictate that countries should exploit their comparative advantages in order to develop. As far as consumer protection aspects are concerned, very often the risk is more perceived than real, and service providers are doing their best to minimize these perceptions: for instance to allay fears in source markets, members of the Indian Healthcare Federation have undertaken promotional trips to Britain and the United Arab Emirates.

Further challenges include the complexity of obtaining visas to some Asian countries and issues with insurance cover not being extended to foreign countries.
(Henderson, 2004; García-Altés, 2005). On the other hand, the search for more cost-effective medical treatment by health insurance companies has led to agreements being forged with Indian hospitals to cover treatment of international patients, and it will be interesting to see if this arrangement is extended to other parts of Asia.

Case Study: Health Spa Tourism in Thailand

Monteson and Singer (2004, p. 282) observe with reference to the US market that ‘the mantra is that a resort is “not a resort” unless it has a spa’. Asia is arguably home to some of the most sought-after and exclusive spa resorts in the world, particularly in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Indonesia (especially Bali), with other countries such as Lao PDR following suit.

Chief among the Thai spa resorts is Chiva-Som (‘haven of life’) at Hua Hin, where ‘traditional pavilions and ocean-view rooms’ are set amongst ‘luxuriant gardens’ close to the Thai King’s summer palace. Guests are provided with a medical consultation from doctors, nurses and dieticians and offered alternative health programmes such as equilibropathy (‘a combination of acupuncture techniques, exercises and spinal correction’) and iridology (‘an analysis of markings in the iris ... used to reveal information about the digestion, circulation and other body systems’). There is a high staff to guest ratio of 4:1, while marketing literature also emphasizes the high service levels provided by the local population, whose culture is oriented towards making guests feel at ease. Spa cuisine, fusing Asian and Western styles, is a feature of the stay, with many of the ingredients grown in the resort’s own organic garden and menus featuring low fat, low salt and low sugar delicacies — all clearly designed to appeal to the quest for natural, authentic and health-giving treatments. Reflecting the resort’s élite clientele, Chiva-Som’s cuisine is now served to first class passengers on British Airways (Burt and Price, 2003; Chiva-Som, 2007). There are many similar resorts, for instance the Banyan Tree in Phuket, voted the ‘World’s Best Spa Report’ by Condé Nast magazine in 1999 (Burt and Price, 2003). All such spa-hotels aim to cater to the three elements of their customers’ health — mind, body and spirit — and offer an atmosphere where guests are treated like royalty (and charged accordingly).

While destination spas such as this are largely frequented by the international traveller, the provision of spa treatments extends to Bangkok, where day-spas are attached to hotels such as the Oriental and cater largely to a domestic market (TAT News, 2007).

Some visitors to Thai spa resorts combine their experience with a wedding ceremony, while others are couples on honeymoon or ‘romance’ packages (Burt and Price, 2003; McNeil and Ragins, 2005). This market appears to be growing alongside the spa market, with overseas weddings enjoying greater vogue, due in part to the influence of well-publicised celebrity weddings in glamorous locations (Yara, 2006). Another growing segment is the male spa-goer. McNeil and Ragins (2005, p. 32) refer to the Singaporean Raffles chain of hotel spas providing ‘gentlemen’s facials’, while Schofield (2004) also cites the 40+ male as an emerging market. While for some people a visit to this kind of spa would be a ‘once in a lifetime’ experience, many of the tourists who frequent these resorts will be increasingly used to undergoing spa treatments at home and, in keeping
with the trend for ‘value for time’ as well as ‘value for money’, maintain busy schedules while on holiday, seeking experiences which restore energy and a sense of balance in an atmosphere of tranquillity and comfort.

**Case Study: Thermal Springs in Japan**

In contrast to Thailand, where most spa resorts target overseas markets, spa tourism in Japan caters mainly to domestic tourists and almost always occurs in association with thermal hot springs. There are 142 million annual visits to spas in Japan, thanks to the existence of hundreds of naturally occurring hot springs (*onsen*) across the country (Schofield, 2004). Many have an inn (*ryokan*) attached, while others are open to the public and are effectively public baths (*sento*). According to Knight (1996, p. 168), ‘the onsen ryok (hot-spring holiday) is now one of the major forms of domestic tourism in Japan’. He also notes that the demographic of the typical visitor has changed from the largely older patron in the 1960s to a younger market and that the ‘recent scale of popularity of hot-spring bathing is unprecedented’. Ceremony and etiquette surrounding bathing is unique to Japan. For example, the visitor must wash first before soaking and will generally be naked. They will be encouraged not to rinse off the water afterwards, as it has special properties which have benefits for the skin. A special dinner will be served after the bath when staying at an *onsen ryokan*, adding to the sense of ceremony and ritual.

Inn Seiryuso in Shimoda, a *ryokan* built a century ago, offers spa and massage services alongside the traditional bathing experience. There are both outdoor and indoor baths. ‘The silence is the first thing you notice ... you enter a realm of shadows and screens, tatami mats and polished stone ... Staying at a *ryokan* is a different way of seeing the world, where space, time and self are in harmony’ (Burt and Price, 2003, pp. 178–179). This spiritual dimension has aspects of formal religion, as illustrated by the fact that many visitors to Hongū Chō, a Japanese mountain village, combine their visit to the hot springs with a visit to Hongū shrine: ‘despite their stay in the spa resorts, these visitors are not ... different in kind from the pilgrims of an earlier time, (Knight, 1996, p. 171). The association of springs as places of other-worldly occurrences, spirituality, religious practices and healing is common to many cultures: as Wightman and Wall (1985, p. 401) note, ‘every country seems to have stories about springs’. Knight (1996, p. 179) goes on to examine the spirituality inherent in a hot springs experience, which combines earth and water and ‘encloses one in a natural landscape’, forming a ‘pathway to nature’. This intersection between spa tourism and spirituality is of emerging interest, and might be usefully explored further.

The image of the *onsen* as pure and untainted has however been undermined by allegations that some establishments have created ‘fake’ hot springs through the use of coloured water or even by adding bath salts to create the milkniness of the real thing (Faiola, 2004; Ryall, 2007). Interestingly, the same phenomenon occurred in the British spa resort of Cheltenham in the 19th century, where spa patronage suffered fatally from the resultant negative publicity (Bacon, 1997). Japan’s Environment Agency is seeking to restore consumer confidence by making it mandatory for owners of hot springs to submit samples of their water for analysis once every ten years and to provide a chemical analysis of their waters to their customers (Mainichi Daily News, 2007; Ryall, 2007).
Conclusion and Avenues for Future Research

Health, wellness, spa and medical tourism are increasingly important aspects of the tourism industry. Some of the growth in these areas is undoubtedly linked to a shift towards consumer ‘experience’ and ‘style’ rather than ‘product’ (UNWTO, 2006; Pine and Gilmore, 1998), and reflects the increasing confidence of important source markets. Asia is well placed to capitalize on these markets based on its natural and human resource assets including its hospitable cultures.

It is essential however that clear standards should be set so that the public can have confidence in what is being delivered, particularly for medical tourism, and also where potentially dangerous alternative therapies are on offer, including at spas. Thailand has already addressed concern about quality by setting up standards and regulations for the spa industry (TAT News, 2007), and the professionalism of the industry has also been assisted by associations such as the Asia-Pacific Spa and Wellness Council, established in 2006 and representing fourteen countries. Many of its member countries also have their own national or regional associations, such as the Bali Spa and Wellness Association. While such moves are clearly essential where invasive medical procedures are involved, there is an argument that the potential benefits of the alternative therapies offered by spas, even if they are only effective as a placebo, are such that overly strict regulation might be an over-reaction.

Avenues for future research in this area include trends in the packaging of experiences, motivations for having medical procedures carried out in this region and case studies of destinations specializing in these niches. As mentioned earlier, the intersection between spirituality and spa (and other forms of health and wellness) tourism is also of interest and might be further explored in various contexts both within and outside Asia. Research could also consider whether different cultural backgrounds affect how the visitor views various health experiences. For example, Knight (1996, p. 169) observes that ‘absence of sex-segregation and the possibility, indeed facility, of voyeurism’ may represent an important element of a visit to a Japanese onsen, which might be linked to cultural characteristics.

Each country highlighted in this chapter has particular issues to deal with relating to developing their health and wellness tourism industry but also shares challenges in achieving and sustaining growth (Henderson, 2003). Shared challenges centre on the need to maintain high standards and to reduce the perception of risk; this may have added benefits in that countries perceived as being acceptable for medical tourism may also be considered safe for ordinary tourism. In terms of the individual challenges facing the countries highlighted in the case studies, India will need to develop and maintain high quality medical tourism while ensuring continuing improvements in health services targeting its own population; Thailand has a strong foothold in the world spa resort market, but may need to guard against delivering a homogenous, blandly Asian product which can be duplicated elsewhere in the world; and it will be interesting to see whether Japan’s hot springs can appeal to a more international market. On balance, it seems likely that whatever the particular manifestation of its health and wellness tourism, Asia will continue to be a major player in the field.
References


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## Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South-East Asian Nations</td>
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<td>CNTA</td>
<td>China National Tourism Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIT</td>
<td>Free, Independent Traveller</td>
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<td>GMS</td>
<td>Greater Mekong Subregion</td>
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<td>JNTO</td>
<td>Japanese National Tourism Organization</td>
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<td>LNTA</td>
<td>Lao National Tourism Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>MICE</td>
<td>Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Events/Exhibitions</td>
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<td>MPDF</td>
<td>Mekong Private Sector Development Facility</td>
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<td>MTDP</td>
<td>Mekong Tourism Development Project</td>
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<td>PATA</td>
<td>Pacific Asia Travel Association</td>
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<td>SAARC</td>
<td>South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Program</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNWTO</td>
<td>United Nations World Tourism Organization (from 2005)</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>VNAT</td>
<td>Vietnamese National Administration of Tourism</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
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