

BOOK REVIEW

Indigenous Tourism: The Commodification and Management of Culture

Chris Ryan & Michelle Aicken, editors. Elsevier Ltd., Advances in Tourism Research Series, UK; 319pp., £54.62 (hardback), (ISBN 0-08-044620-5)

Despite a perceptible geographic limitation in the editors' treatment of their subject matter, this is a very good book. When a volume announces that it has assembled papers from a regional conference and complemented these with several works to represent indigenous tourism concerns in other parts of the globe, one might be tempted to cut and run. Be forewarned; anyone who yields to such temptation will miss out on a true didactic achievement. The editors of *Indigenous Tourism: The Commodification and Management of Culture* have accomplished the extraordinary task of defining, describing and analyzing the complex web of issues surrounding their subject matter, and performed admirably. Where some politicians, tourism managers and others have been quick to regard tourism as a panacea for treating local as well as global-level concerns, and others are just as quick to reject its potential, this volume offers a clear-minded approach. Exploring a multitude of socio-cultural, political and management points of view, *Indigenous Tourism* is a book that, while not providing solutions, puts indigenous tourism into much clearer perspective for an audience of academicians, law makers and tourism managers. The majority of this work consists of papers from a conference entitled, "Taking Tourism to the Limits," which the University of Waikato's department of tourism had hosted in 2003. Other chapters consist of updates of research reported in prior works, utilized to add Canadian, Scandinavian, and East Asian perspectives to an investigation of indigenous tourism issues focused primarily upon Oceania.

The volume opens with Chris Ryan's identification of key issues impacting indigenous peoples. Ignorance, prejudice, greed, geographic isolation, and media/public relations biases have succeeded in marginalizing indigenous populations worldwide. In the introduction, Ryan sets the tone for the book with two statements. The first is that the



reader will be examining the dimension of media superimposed upon the two primary linking systems of tourism—supply and demand. The second is actually a series of axioms that resurface throughout the volume: tourism has been a factor in creating stereotypical images of marginalized people, a means by which people aspire to economic and political power for self-advancement, and a foundation for dialogue between and within differing world views. Through these statements, we observe the hope and the hoax that is indigenous tourism's dual legacy. The hope, for indigenous peoples, is the promise of access to jobs and income; conversely, the hoax is that it is possible to accomplish the former without changing the very fabric of the culture which has spawned the arts, music, foods, etc. that visitors crave. Nineteen contributions (chapters) later, these same ideas remain to be pondered, for the editors have identified the important issues and posed the pertinent questions, but the volume itself does not answer them. It remains for us, the readers, to ensure that these questions are not ignored.

The nineteen contributions are distributed among four Sections: A. Visitor Experiences of Indigenous Tourism; B. Who Manages Indigenous Cultural Product—Aspiration and Legitimization; C. Events and Artifacts; and, D. Conceptualization and Aspiration. Editors C. Ryan and M. Aicken have neatly woven these disparate, but informative contributions into a fabric, while smoothly transitioning the reader from fundamental position to fundamental position. In Section A, Visitor Experiences of Indigenous Tourism, the focus is on the nature of visitors' experiences while being exposed to indigenous cultures that are offered as items to be purchased. Four essays address the expectations of the guests, and how these are often at odds from what the hosts are prepared to offer. The authors in this section discuss such essential topics as the perception of authenticity and the motives of the respective parties—where indigenous hosts attempt to convey cultural understanding, while their guests seek a feeling that they have interacted with their hosts, thereby placing another checkmark on a long list of lifetime experiences. Toward this end, C. Ryan and B. Trauer offer four visitor-host paradigms—unease, allocentrics, disappointment and psychocentrics—wherein the relationship between the expectations of the guests and the predilections of the hosts define the quality of the experience. G. Ingram offers a phenomenological investigation of visitors' experiences with Australian indigenous culture to show the understandings and misunderstandings that are potential byproducts of indigenous tourism. A. McIntosh and H. Johnson examine the character of the Marae experience in New Zealand, from hosts and guests viewpoints, concluding that reticence for

interaction undermines the achievement of the stated purpose of a “real” cultural experience. Finally, C. Ryan and J. Huyton examine the interface between non-Aboriginal visitors and indigenous hosts. They determine that an interactive experience is not as important to visitors as purchasing arts and artifacts; thus arises the question of whether indigenous people who still occupy their remote homelands can compete for visitor dollars with brethren who have relocated to more accessible, large urban centers.

Section B, *Who Manages Indigenous Cultural Product—Aspiration and Legitimization*, examines the issue of whether indigenous peoples, while occupying a place within the tourism network, are positioned to control the flow of information that is crucial to proper representation of their cultures. C. Ryan examines the paradox between the desire to bring new economic opportunities into the culture area and efforts to sustain the very culture that faces commodification as a consequence. V. Gerberich assesses factors that create successful and sustainable tourism developments. J. Mbaiwa examines government initiatives in Botswana, and details the emergence of a new power elite that has been created as a consequence of government promotion policies. S. Nepal’s work examines how education can be used to inform the outside world, with the intention of empowering local areas economically. Finally, J. Buultjens, I. Waller, S. Graham and D. Carson analyze how political and resource constraints impact Aboriginals’ efforts to develop community-based tourism.

Section C, *Events and Artifacts*, examines a range of perspectives of how commodification is reflective of the changing importance of values within indigenous cultures. C. Ryan voices concern about how non-indigenous people have capitalized on growing interest in indigenous art and, as a result, these items and the process of creating them are becoming commodified. M. Erb has examined the production and consumption of tourism attractions on Flores, and has found an ongoing conflict between those who wish to preserve versus exploit the island’s resources. The government has complicated matters here by misrepresenting what the local tourism product is. T. Yamamura reports that Donba art in China continues to be sold by locals and outsiders despite the fact that the traditions which gave rise to the art form are no longer being practiced. He makes the point that such a practice, while undesirable on the surface, demonstrates how tourism can generate interest in preserving heritage in remote areas. D. Miller and R. Pettersson examine how events based upon Sami culture can provide experiences for both indigenous and visitor attendees, by providing two parallel, but separate experiences that take place simultaneously in one locale. In such

a setting, true cultural experiences are shared by Sami attendees, while events staged for visitors have a lasting educational value.

Section D, *Conceptualization and Aspiration*, examines how indigenous peoples shape and reshape their identities through the medium of tourism. C. Ryan and B. Trauer reiterate the idea that indigenous tourism has supply and demand elements that are shaped by outside forces—the media, governments, and market economies. J. Edelheim discusses how descriptions of the “real Australia” generally ignore Aboriginals. In her exploration of “Otherness,” J. Cave discusses how indigenous peoples and other minorities have found it necessary to exploit their cultural distinctiveness, while others struggle against commodification of the culture. In this context, a cultural experience that both hosts and guests are willing to accept and share, is the desired outcome.

For the last word, C. Ryan and M. Aicken outline the book’s shortcomings—its lack of attention to gender roles and the scant attention it pays to indigenous tourism outside of Oceania. These limitations aside, the editors deserve credit for producing a most valuable addition to the literature. They have provided us with a chronometer and a compass: the volume is at once a candid depiction of indigenous tourism during the early years of the twenty-first century, and a guide for what remains to be accomplished.

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