

RETHINKING TOURISM  
Unfamiliar Histories and Alternative Futures

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Tourism Management (Vol. 16, No. 6, 1995), 411–415

DECONSTRUCTION

This essay seeks to deconstruct tourism. We ask: what are the futures of tourism and how does the idea of the tourist circulate in the discourse of modernity? We are not concerned with providing empirical data or giving futuristic projections, rather our task is to make the underlying scheme--the boundaries of knowledge that make the idea of tourism intelligible--problematic.

We seek then to disturb our normal notions of what it means to be a tourist. We do not seek to give yet another plan, a list of policy implications that are to be debated, rather the effort is to take a step back and a step forward. By moving through time, we hope to make the present less familiar, to take it out of its essentialized, concrete quality, and perhaps make it somewhat liminal--to make it less frozen, less impossible to change. We seek then to transform the present.

Our move into history is to make present notions of tourism peculiar, not universal. Our move into the future is to distance ourselves from the present, to see the present afresh in light of what can be. These futures, while derived through various methodologies, are important not because they might occur but how because they force us to reconsider the present. This is especially important as we have been in the 15th century for over 14 years now (within the framework of Islamic temporal dynamics), and already the freshness of the future has become stale.

## THE TRAVELLER/PILGRIM

Staying within Islamic perceptions of travel and time, perhaps the best classical tales of tourism are the accounts of Ibn Battuta, Travels in Asia and Africa: 1325--1354. There were no tourists then but there were travelers or pilgrims. Within this world, the Islamic world, all Muslims had to travel, they had to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Indeed, travel or the accumulation of wisdom was the essence of Islam. Traveling, visiting wise people, finding holy sites, was an integral part of life. "The pilgrim on his journey travelled in a caravan whose numbers increased at every stage. He found all arrangements made for his marches and his halts (what we now call the travel agent), and if the road lay through dangerous country (that is bad food and rude visa officers), his caravan was protected by an escort of soldiers (immigration personnel and information booths). In all large centers as well as many intermediate stations were rest houses and hospices where he was hospitably welcomed and entertained out of endowments created by generations of benefactors" (Battuta, 4).

There was then an ecology of travel, where previous generations took care of future ones. While "this was the lot of every pilgrim, the [wise person] received still greater consideration" (5). Islam then provided an incentive to travel unknown in any other age or community--as it was said, "my house is your house." Of course, Hawaiians had a similar system but the response by the West was "first, your house is my house, and then: get out, this is my house!"

Travel for Ibn Battuta was about learning differences. In Ceylon, the idolaters (the Buddhists) served him rice on banana leaves and leftovers were eaten by the dogs and birds. However, "if any child, who had not reached the age of reason, ate any of it, they would beat him, and make him eat cow dung, this being, as they say, the purification for the act" (94).

While in Turkey, Ibn Battuta, met the Christian Emperor George, who after being satisfied that Ibn Battuta knew something about the holy land, was given a robe of honor. "They have a custom that anyone who wears the king's robe of honor and rides his horse is paraded round with trumpets, fifes and drums, so that the people may see him" (157).

This was an era where the Idea of the transcendental was supreme, where there was an integrated code of ethics: a clear sense of the self, a clear sense of the text which gave the world meaning, and a clear sense of what happened if one did not fit into the system. The self travelled to gain spiritual knowledge. The traveler, poor or rich was respected, since traveling was fraught with difficulties. Traveling indeed was isomorphic with the spiritual journey of the Self.

Of course today in Mecca, the modern planner has entered. In an attempt to make the pilgrimage more efficient--the long walk between religious sites--a huge highway was installed. Instead of increasing efficiency, the highway is now flooded with buses and cars, making it still easier to walk, although the noise and pollution from the traffic is an additional burden the pilgrim must bear.

Moreover the idea that travel itself leads to the broadening of the mind is not so certain. As R.J. Scott has argued in his paper, "The Development of Tourism in Fiji since 1923."

Today, travel, far from broadening the mind is actually contriving to shrink it. Along with the benefits of efficiency and labor saving that the package tour concept has brought, with it comes the concomitant danger of stultifying sameness. As our people in Fiji go about their daily task of serving the visitors we see an endless succession of the same little old ladies, with the same blue hair rinses, spending the same life insurance money and speaking in the same accents of the same things which have penetrated their similar perceptions. And what of little old ladies? As they climb in and out of their same cars, their same planes, their same hotel beds, as they eat the same foods, drink the same drinks and buy the same souvenirs is it to be wondered that many cannot tell from one day to the next which country it is they presently visiting? These people travel the world like registered parcels, blindly unaware of the local populations, their aspirations, problems and tragedies. Instead of promoting mutual understanding they promote mutual contempt (212).

## WHO ARE TODAY'S TOURISTS

But more than retired old ladies are four types of tourists. They are the merchants--the business class in search of the ultimate deal. Travel for them is the perfect hotel and relaxation afterwards--local sex and alcohol. They are the warriors--the military bases with relaxation not nightly but during R&R periods--Bangkok and Manila reflect that social practice. They are the intellectuals--going from conference from conference, creating a conference culture, taking photos of sacred spots, sometimes in search of spiritual adventure, but often in search of the Other that their own culture cannot provide. While intellectuals often notice the contradictions of their conference culture, finding ways to include the local with global information culture, except as a site for research, has proved more elusive. And last of all they are the middle-class and workers--mass tourism. Joining package tours that minimize risk and difference, they travel to forget their daily lives, leaving convinced that they have met the Other and equally delighted that McDonalds and Coca-Cola have entered all local spaces.

## THE CULTURAL DIVISION OF TOURISM

What then is the larger framework to understand the present of tourism? Just as there is a global division of labor, there is also a global division of tourism, Asian nations provide raw materials in the form of the environment (jungle and beaches, although this because of environmental crises is becoming less available) and raw bodies (in terms of prostitution and the erotic although this too is becoming problematic because of AIDS) and most importantly they provide premodern culture (which again is becoming less available because of the homogenization of global culture). The premodern is necessary for the West as it provides evidence of Western superiority, of the linear flow of history from caveman to

Cambridge. It also gives hope to the West, providing a communitarian alternative to the fatigue of Western individualism.

The West manufactures rationality creating Asia and Africa as the Other--the land of the exotic and erotic--as the irrational. It exists to be studied by social scientists, developed by international policy experts, and visited by tourists. In search of traditional culture, the West also helps transform culture into custom, creating "museumized" cultures where living culture is frozen so as to best present it to the tourist. Culture as resistance, appearing on the margins of official and conventional definitions of reality, is lost in this representation of history.

The West also manufactures tourism services and the idea of Tourism itself, which we have suggested is not a universal concept but a particular idea by a specific culture. It also provides the high-end dimension of tourism, the post-modern artificial intended world--Disneyland. While tourists go to Asia to seek the premodern, god and sex, tourists go to the West to seek the future of high technology and postmodernity. Western tourism is the high-tech museum, the theme park, where space and time are appropriately compressed since there is so much to see and so little time to see it in. Space has become unbounded, easy to commodify, and inversely time has become rapidly scarce, diminishing by the moment.

Tourism development or research on tourism policy is merely the effort of nations to move up and down the tourism division change, by for example, having their own airline, reducing leakage of profits, and by reducing the social costs of tourism (eco-tourism, tamed tourism or tourism on our own terms).

Tourism then fundamentally is part of the broader development paradigm first articulated by Herbert Spencer. Tourism is merely the last and latest effort in becoming rich through appropriating the categories of "women," "labor," "history," "culture," and

"environment," and using them to extract surplus value from the periphery to the center.

#### DEVELOPING A CRITERIA FROM WHICH TO EVALUATE TOURISM

But of course many of will disagree, arguing that tourism is necessary for cultural exchange, for jobs, for creating a cosmopolitan city, for becoming modern. Maybe, Maybe not. For planners and policymakers the problem is that there is little consensus on the value of tourism, there is of yet not agreed upon criteria from which to judge tourism. What follows is one effort.

(1) How does tourism affect the distribution of wealth? Can we develop tourism that increases the wealth of the poor? Can tourism profits be indexed to a ceiling and floor system, with the limits to profit accumulation changing as the floor rises, as workers increase their wealth?

(2) Does tourism created conditions where economic growth is sustaining that is where there are numerous multiplier effects for the local and regional economy?

(3) Does tourism reduce structural violence (poverty, ill-health, and racism caused by the system) or does it contribute to the further impoverishment of the periphery?

(4) Does tourism reduce personal direct violence? Can we create types of tourism that enhance individual and social peace?

(5) Does tourism create the possibilities for cultural pluralism, that is conditions where one culture understands the categories of the other culture--time, language, relationship to history, family, transcendental, and land? Can knowledge of the Other reduce intolerance, creating the possibilities of a multi-cultural peaceful world?

(6) Does tourism help create economic democracy, that is, where employees participate in creating visions of tourism, where they might even own part of the industry?

The values above are: distribution, growth, structural peace, personal peace, cultural pluralism, and economic democracy. Drawing from these and other divergent values, what is needed is a dialog in the tourism policy community to help develop an index of tourism sustainability.

## THE FUTURES OF TOURISM

However, the problem with this criteria is that it assumes that the idea of the tourist will remain stable. But just as Ibn Battuta could not imagine the transformation from traveler/pilgrim to tourist, we cannot easily imagine new categories that will displace tourism. But by using emerging issues and current images of the future, we can attempt to break out of the present.

### (1) Virtual Reality

Assuming that developments in virtual reality continue, we may soon be able to don a helmet and practice safe travel (through various information highways) and safe sex. Indeed it is sex that will bring computers in our homes in the next century, not banking, nor games, but virtual reality sex. Technology will have finally captured nature--making it obsolete.

Why travel, when reality and imagination are blurred anyway?

Traditional tourism was there to forget. Eco-tourism or the sophisticated tourist is in search of more varied experiences. The postmodern self is empty, the task is to fill it with cultural, environmental experiences of the other. The ancient traveler travelled to remember--he or she went to the place that reminded one of one's place in the cosmos. In the virtual self, there is no longer any place, we are all homeless, nor is there any self to hold on to.

### (2) Genetic Engineering

While genetic developments will start out quite harmless, but since all of us want to

avoid abnormalities, various genetic diseases, we will insist on being examined by our family genetic engineer. But soon this may lead not to disease prevention but capacity enhancement. Intelligence, memory, body type and beauty will be open for discussion. Birthing will eventually be managed by State factories and we will be the last generation to produce children the old fashioned way. The biological cycle will have been terminated by technology and women will essentially be not any different than men once their reproductive capabilities become unnecessary.

What will tourism be like in this world? Will we find a tourism gene? Will there be mutant centers we go to visit? Will culture be totally destroyed? Homogenized? Or will we become the museums which the genetically born come to see? Will traditional human society become the exotic that the post-humans come to stare at?

### (3) World Travel and World Governance

Travel has begun the process of creating a narrative in which there is no longer any allegiance to a particular place. We are becoming deterritorialized, delinking ourselves from land and the nation. The loneliness that results from this discontinuity with history might be resolved not through the search of one place but the realization that the planet in itself is home. Tourism is then about moving onward to sites not seen, perhaps even other planets. In the meantime, a world government with no visa requirements would enhance the further universalization of travel and tourism. We would all be perpetual immigrants forever traveling and never fearing deportation.

### (4) Spiritual-Psychic Travel

A few argue that we will soon be able to psychically travel. It will be similar to virtual reality, but through enhanced mental powers. Or we may be able check in our body, and let our mind travel through technologies that merge mind and body. Travel becomes not body



based but psychic based, perhaps like the imagination that comes from reading, but more visceral.

## ALTERNATIVE FUTURES OF TOURISM

Given these emerging trends what are some scenarios of the future?

### (1) Gradual Growth

Tourism stays the same but grows. Government and community organizations buffer the negative economic impacts of tourism (through dialog, developer fees, low cost housing, reciprocity), and reduce the negative cultural impacts of tourism (through community development and through "authentic" cultural events).

### (2) Technological Transformation

Tourism is transformed through new technologies. Virtual reality, telecommuting, new brain/mind drugs, even spiritual practices lead to decreased travel since one can be home and elsewhere at the same time. Tourism disappears from our social constructs.

### (3) Structural and Epistemological changes

Tourism is transformed as both the structure of tourism (corporate, hierarchical, and capital-intensive) and the epistemology of tourism (fragmented selves in search of wholeness or defeated selves desiring to forget) are transformed. Tourism employees participate in the ownership of tourism centers (and thus create real aloha), small scale centers where the traveler or pilgrim reemerges, and selves expand through cultural interaction and renewal. Tourism volume declines but becomes more enriching for workers and local population. Changes in the inter-state system leads to less reduced national sovereignty (a borderless

world for capital and labor) with travel a basic right.

#### (4) Tourism Collapses

Environmental crises such as changing weather patterns, an economic depression, and violent resistance from local cultures cause tourism to decline. Tourism becomes too costly and dangerous except for the very few.

Will then the future tourist be the voyager or the eternally homeless or the satisfied *homeful*? While we cannot predict the future, these scenarios alert us to the range of possibilities ahead. Developing criteria for analysing tourism futures can help us create our own preferred visions of tourism. Within each one of these scenarios we can develop separate criteria for tourism. Tourism policies would need to shift as futures changed. In a depression, Hawaii, for example, might be desperate for any type of money--to becoming the Las Vegas of the Pacific to the Bangkok of the Pacific.

What we can be sure of then that tourism in the future will be dramatically different from tourism today, just as the tourist of today is dramatically different from the traveller of yesterday. Technology, social relations, the construction of the self all will be quite different in the near future.

In the meantime, we need to develop and find consensus on criteria from which to judge tourism. Our criteria focuses on a tourism that (1) enhances distribution of wealth and cultural meanings, (2) that creates conditions for innovative and dynamic growth at local levels, (3) that reduces structural violence, (4) that does not increase personal violence, (5) that leads to authentic cultural encounters where cultures learn how each constructs the Other, among other issues this means adopting the categories of the host culture, and (6) that transforms the local political economy to one based on economic democracy--that is, the

cooperative structure.

## STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFORMATION

What about strategies for transformation? There are many levels to this. First is supporting alternative community development models of tourism--giving funds and publicity, if they desire it. Second is working towards an alternative model of culture, knowledge and transactions--individually, intellectually and through the institutional government system.

But beyond agency, change comes about through long-term structural changes. These are the macro historical cycles: Sorokin's sensate to ideation, Eisler's patriarchy to matriarchy, Sarkar's four stage theory of history of worker, warrior, intellectual, capitalist and then revolution. For there to be an alternative form of tourism, predatory capitalism must be met head on. While this might be impossible at the national level it is possible at the local level and at the global level: that is, a new world governance system with a new model of economics. While this might be hard to believe, let us turn to another muslim traveler, Ibn Khaldun, who lived six hundred years ago. Having seen transformation in Europe, Africa and Asia and the Middle-East, he offers us these words.

At the end of a dynasty, there often also appears some (show of) power that gives the impression that the senility of the dynasty has been made to disappear. It lights up brilliantly just before it is extinguished, like a burning wick the flame of which leaps up brilliantly a moment before it goes out, giving the impression it is just starting to burn, when in fact it is going out (246).

We should expect the fantastic and be ready to create it.

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