

Southeast Asia



Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King, and Michael Parnwell, eds., *Tourism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and New Directions*

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I TEACH an anthropology course on travel and tourism in which students must delve deeply into the meanings of movement across borders, the historical contexts for exploration, adventure, and other forms of being on the road. The literature on travel that I offer them includes wide ranging thematic and conceptual work on such categories as historical material on transport, colonial trails, and pilgrimages. What has been missing is a work tying political, historical, and economic perspectives on tourism and travel, and work focused on a single region of the world. This book supplies both, and is a welcome addition to the field of travel studies. This volume uses tourism in Southeast Asia as a case study in which the impact on the host sites is emphasized over the experiences of the traveler, including political, economic, and historical framing to offer multidisciplinary views of the phenomenon of tourism.

In many views, tourism is seen as a necessary evil, causing deprivations as it fills the pockets of some locals, introducing problems for economies, health, culture, and morality. My students initially see “tourist” as an ignorant bumbler or a rapacious despoiler—“I’m NOT a tourist” is the usual denial. In this volume we get a more nuanced, complicated view of the birds of passage and a rich description of those who receive, encourage, or repel the visitor. Above all we see that tourists do not glide through on Teflon; they leave their mark, invited or not.

The current volume is a revisit of an earlier work by the same name, published in 1993. The revisit to the first wave of tourism in the early 1990s provides the reader with a view over time, a multidisciplinary, comparative, and historical treatment of regional tourism. Bringing new ideas on tourism as well as new historical realities into the picture permits more subtlety. Such events as the SARS scare of 2003 and the tsunami of 2004, the Bali bombings of 2005 as well as the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States had impacts on tourism everywhere in the region. Similarly, new trends in tourism itself, such as eco-tourism or transformative tourism in which travelers undertake to help an area through development projects or educational missions have been examined to add new directions and contexts in this area. The reader is thus exposed to more global concerns and changes influencing the multiple directions of tourism.

Sometimes the smallest things can reveal large meanings. Souvenir production and identity is an example. These are not, as Kathleen Adams’s essay points out,

trivial “by-products” of tourism” (81) but engage abstractions and hybridizations of identity as well as meeting tourists’ expectations of “what to bring back” though, perhaps, she overstates their meaning when she says “...they are micro-monuments to modernity” (82).

Bali in the aftermath of the Kuta bombing (Picard) engaged in a process of soul-searching and recasting of Balinese identity. Assembling cultural forces such as purification ceremonies, Hindu Balinese hoped to regain the strength to combat the existing feelings of ethnic vulnerability, in what I would consider a larger and more critical moment of identity shock than the smaller versions incurred through tourism. But having foreign visitors return to Bali to enjoy its beauty and culture went hand in hand with recreating a sense of cultural worth among Balinese themselves. This essay is a fine example of how the examination of the meeting point of cultures in tourism can display more. Using a crisis to show how a shocked identity can restore itself, Picard illustrates many paradoxes of identity, economics, and globalization.

Including essays treating sex tourism, which has its own poignant and disturbing story of deprivations, the volume offers sober renderings of gender in travel, and most importantly, multiple lenses through which to view the experiences one might have away from home. The essay by Shinji Yamashita on Japanese perspectives on tourism in the region reveals the important lesson in culture contact: we are what we bring with us. Japanese visitors come freighted with different cultural baggage. But it is not only a “culture” story: tourism is the product of economic and political interests at work as well as the contacts and the meanings we give them.

Merry White
Boston University