A review of:

Ecotourism: Perspectives and Experiences

Prabha Shastri Ranade

Punjagutta, The Icfai University Press, 2008. 296 pp., \$US18, ISBN: 978-81-314-1947-2.

In the rather tightly-knit world of tourism research worldwide, a new ecotourism text by an author previously unknown in this field automatically piques interest. On investigation, however, it seems that in the world of ecotourism publishing, this volume is somewhat of an oddity. It appears to be a compendium of existing articles downloaded from various websites, printed and bound in such a way that it falls apart on first reading.

Neither the editor nor the publisher are well known in tourism, so some investigation seemed to be in order. The publisher's website quoted on the back cover is a dead link. ICFAI is the Institute of Chartered Financial Analysis of India, which apparently runs ICFAI universities in seven states of India. It has its own in-house publisher, ICFAI University Press, which is quoted on secondary sites as having produced 1,400 books. On its own site, however, only finance journals and magazines are shown. An organisation called IBS Alumni Federation, which has a similar address to ICFAI HQ and runs seven Indian Business Schools, does list some of these. Prabha Shastri Ranade has apparently edited numerous books, in a wide range of academic disciplines. Contents and reviews are available for some, and they all seem to follow the same model as this one. So, my guess is that these books are the way in which ICFAI University assembles its teaching materials.

In this volume, there are 16 contributions, ranging from popular magazine articles to government policy papers. They consider aspects of ecotourism in India, China, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, New Zealand, Costa Rica, Finland, Lithuania and Uganda. Two chapters are written by the editor. Three are by well-known players in the ecotourism sector. Other authors are less well known. Their affiliations and addresses are not given.

So, is there anything of note in this hodgepodge? Yes, but only here and there. There are comments on the growth of gateway hotels around national parks in India, and of a resort built on an elephant migration pathway (p. 120). There is interesting information on park-based tourism in Sri Lanka (p. 139). There is a comparison between Wanglang and Jiuzhaigou panda reserves in China, the former with 20,000 visitors per year, and latter with well over 100 times as many. But such snippets are not enough to make this a worthwhile purchase for most ecotourism researchers. And, indeed, it seems to be intended as a relatively low-level teaching text.

We should ask, therefore, does it do a good job, for the Indian business students at which it is aimed? Actually, not bad. It presents quite a conservation-oriented view of ecotourism, emphasising impacts, management issues and greenwashing as well as economic gains. It covers quite a diverse geographical scope. As a first introduction to the sector from the free downloaded publications, it has done quite well. Even relying on freely downloadable materials, however, it does seem to have picked a rather eclectic selection. There are many ecotourism authors, academics as well as practitioners, who have written open-access as well as copyright materials.

And, in addition, one must ask why this approach is used at all. In China, for example, English language teaching and research texts in ecotourism are simply translated into Chinese, under licence from Western publishers, so that Chinese students and researchers have access to the core copyrighted publications, rather than peripheral free download materials. And, in India, students already read English. Surely it would be possible to bring out Indian editions of existing books, cheaply enough for Indian students to buy? This volume sells for US\$18, which is certainly less than most well-known ecotourism texts. But it does illustrate the maxim that you get what you pay for.

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