Adventure tourism and local livelihoods

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Whether fixed-site infrastructure or self-contained mobile tours contribute more to local livelihoods is contentious in both terrestrial and marine outdoor tourism sectors worldwide. Examples include: mobile hunting or photo safaris *cf.* game lodges in Africa; mobile tours *cf.* fixed hotels in large national parks worldwide; and mobile *travesias* *cf.* fixed luxury lodges in South America (Buckley, 2012; Explora, 2014). Comparing warm-water live-aboard charter boats with island resorts provides one test. Both can offer diving, sailing, surfing, fishing and sea-kayaking. Accessibility and luxury increase continually for both, to attract cash-rich, time-poor adventure aficionados and partners. There are examples in Fiji, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, Solomons, and Tanzania (Buckley, 2002, 2006, 2010; O'Brien and Ponting, 2013; Ponting & O'Brien, 2013). Livelihoods include: cash earnings, through local employment; subsistence, affected by environmental impact; and social structures, affected by social impacts.

Here we compare the surf-charter fleet and long-established Dhonveli Resort in North Male, Maldives, using: previous on-site audits; public information; and revenue and employment data from Ponting (2014). We consider social, environmental and economic criteria (Table 1), calculating statistics *per capita* for surf tourists specifically. Surf tourism is a recent development in the Maldives, and still minor, even at resort islands with exclusive access to surf breaks. Diving is a much larger adventure subsector than surfing, and mass beach tourism at island resorts is much larger still (Republic of Maldives, Ministry of Tourism, 2014). Most boats and resorts operate without surfers, and most tourists at Dhonveli are non-surfers (Buckley, 2006; Ponting, 2014). Surf breaks only attract surfers. For most tourists at island resorts, surf breaks are irrelevant. This applies just as much for surf islands as for non-surf islands. Surfers may bring non-surfing family members, but only a few do so. In addition, family members stay in the same rooms as the surfers, so they do not increase occupancy rates or room takings. The party reputation of surfers may also discourage non-

surfers from staying at surf resorts, since there are many other resorts that offer all the other activities except surfing. There is no evidence that resorts leverage surf breaks to attract more tourists, as claimed by Ponting (2014). Dhonveli also offers diving, for example, but Ponting (2014) does not argue that it leverages dive sites to attract non-diving surfers or beachgoers.

Surf tourists constitute 100% of clientele for surf charter boats, but only 5.3% for Dhonveli Resort (Table 2). Critically, therefore, for this resort only 5.3% of revenue and employment are attributable to surf tourism. Dhonveli resort generates $\$45.87/\$23.50 = 1.95x$ more tax per visitor night overall than North Male boats (Table 2). This reflects current Maldives tax policy for boats and resorts. Ponting calculates $\$70.34/\$39.00 = 1.8x$, a similar ratio. Ponting calculates 0.30 FTE local jobs per surfer for North Male boats, and 0.62 for Dhonveli. We calculate 0.33 and 0.31 respectively (Table 2): they generate equal local employment. Nationally, tourism generated 34,959 jobs in 2011, of which 31% (11,012) were Maldivian and 69% expatriate. Ponting's data for surf guides per surfer are incomplete. Five guides for 10 boats implies either some guideless boats, or part-time guides. Our observations at Dhonveli indicate that guides supervise multiple activities, with surf guiding <25% of total time. FTE surf guide jobs per surf tourist are thus similar for North Male boats and Dhonveli Resort.

Ponting (2014) also quotes profit margins, but these are apparently not used. Operating season is quoted only for surfing. Berths are quoted for boats, but rooms rather than beds for resorts. Ponting calculates ratios of total tax from all clients, to number of surfers in the water. This is meaningless, since ~95% of Dhonveli's clients are not surfers. That differs from Indonesia's Mentawais or Fiji's Tavarua (Buckley, 2002; Ponting & O'Brien, 2013). Ponting also compared a proposed resort on nearby Thanburudhoo Island, under a lease to Singapore-based Telos Investments. We do not, for three reasons. First, it has not been built, so all figures are projections. As of March 2014 the Tourism Ministry shows the lessee as Sifainge Ekuveni, the Maldivian National Defence Force. Second, it is highly controversial and politicized (Conolly, 2012; Mull, 2012). Third, it hired as consultants a center at San Diego State University where Ponting is apparently the only SDSU academic staff member (SDSU, 2014; Telos Investments, 2014; Thanburudhoo, 2014).

Dhonveli is on Chaaya Island, leased to Tranquility Pvt Ltd and operated by John Keells Hotels (2012), listed in Sri Lanka. Formerly, it was run by Yacht Tours Maldives (2014),

based in Male, which also operated boats (Buckley, 2006), and now runs two resorts. Some charter boats in North Male are locally owned, others foreign (Republic of Maldives, Ministry of Tourism, 2014). Boats and resorts were co-owned during early development of surf tourism in Indonesia's Mentawais, but now compete (Buckley, 2006; Buckley, 2010).

Both boats and resorts may provide social opportunities for locals (Buckley & Ollenburg, 2013; Ponting & O'Brien, 2013). Boat-based surf tourists may crowd surf breaks somewhat. Under Maldives Regulation R17/2012, however, island lessees are granted exclusive rights within 250m of shoreline, and can exclude locals completely (Conolly, 2012; Mull, 2012). Exclusive access is a major selling point for resorts and agents (Waterways Surf Adventures, 2014). Boats may damage reefs if they anchor rather than standing by under power. Resorts cause major modifications to reefs, with engineering construction including overwater accommodation (Buckley, 2006; John Keells Hotels, 2012). Both generate wastes, including sewage with nutrients which enhance algal growth. Boats pump sewage out at sea (Shakeela, Becken, & Johnston, 2014; Warnken & Byrnes, 2004). Dhonveli provides limited sewage treatment, with ocean outfall (Buckley, 2006; John Keells Hotels, 2012). Resorts modify island vegetation and fauna considerably (Buckley, 2006), which boats do not.

From current information, therefore, we cannot determine whether boats or resorts provide greater opportunities to generate sustainable local livelihoods from island adventure tourism in the Maldives. Statistics apparently favouring resorts (Ponting, 2014) appear unjustified. If social factors are emphasized, such as opportunities for locals to access surf breaks, then resorts suffer severe disadvantages (Conolly, 2012; Mull, 2012). For island adventure tourism to contribute effectively to the broader debate on relative advantages of fixed-site or self-contained mobile tours, we need additional data. These include: social and environmental as well as financial factors; other atolls in the Maldives as well as North Male; other island nations as well as the Maldives; and other adventure tourism activities as well as surfing. Until then, there is insufficient evidence to weigh mobile boat tours against fixed island resorts.

Acknowledgement

We thank colleagues in the Maldives for provision of up-to-date information on leases, owners and operators. We thank our colleagues for comments on our draft.

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Table 1. Environmental, social and economic factors for boats and resorts

Factor	Boat Fleet	Resort
Reef damage: physical damage, nutrient pollution	Moderate	High
Island modification: engineering, biological, aesthetic	Nil or low	Very high
Crowding or loss of access to surf, for local surfers	Low	Very high
Impacts on Maldivian cultures and traditions	Moderate	High
Surf guide jobs, FTE per surf tourist per day	0.055	0.05-0.20
Total local jobs, FTE per surf tourist per day	0.33	0.31
Tax revenue, US\$ per surf tourist bed night per year	23.50	45.87
Ownership	mixed	foreign

See text for sources, and Table 2 for employment and tax calculations.

Table 2. Relative economic and employment contributions of boats and resorts

	Boat Fleet		Resort	
	JP	OC	JP	OC
<i>PRIMARY DATA</i>				
Visitor bednights/yr, total, actual	16500		122567	
Non-surfer bednights/yr, actual	0		*116087	
Surfer bednights/yr, actual	16500		6480	
Average surfer occupancy, %	*90		85	
Max surfers present per day	100		30	
Total taxation revenue, US\$	387750		5622480	
Total local employment, FTE jobs	30		150	
Total surf guide employment, FTE	5		5	
<i>DERIVED STATISTICS</i>				
Mean surfers present per day		90		25.5
Surfers/total bednights, %		100		5.3
Tax revenue from surf tourism		387750		297255
Tax revenue per bednight, total	39.00	23.50	70.34	45.87
Tax revenue per bednight, surfers	39.00	23.50	737.52	45.87
Local jobs from surf tourism		30		8
Local jobs per surfer, single day	0.30	0.33	0.62	0.31
Surf guides per surfer, single day	0.050	0.055	0.14	⁺ 0.05-0.2

Sources: JP, Ponting (2014). OC, our calculations from Ponting's data.

*Not specified explicitly by Ponting (2014), but derived from his other data.

⁺See text.