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Published

2017

Book Title

Indigenous Tourism: Cases from Australia and New Zealand

Version

Version of Record (VoR)

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Introduction to Indigenous Tourism in Australia and New Zealand

Michelle Whitford, Lisa Ruhanen and Anna Carr

Our shared global history has been shaped by travel for a range of reasons, including trade, migration and/or the desire to explore. It was in the 19th century when the trend for adventure and to experience the ‘exotic other’ (Beteille, 1998; McLaren 1999; Meadows, 2001) gained momentum and was taken up by the European elite, writers, artists, anthropologists and scientists (MacCannell, 1984) who sought, among other things, opportunities to visit distant lands and see their ‘exotic’ inhabitants. These novel Indigenous tourism experiences could be found around the globe and ranged from Māori cultural performances in New Zealand, observing Sami cultural traditions in Scandinavia, and visiting reservations of the First Nations peoples of the USA and Canada, to experiencing Aboriginal cultural ceremonies in Australia (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016).

Curiosity, exploring the unknown and a craving for new knowledge and experiences still resonates in the 21st century with the demand for unique cultural experiences tending to be more prevalent amongst those tourists who are increasingly well travelled and well educated (Hinkson, 2003; Ruhanen et al., 2015a; 2015b). Thus as Indigenous tourism continues to be a drawcard for a niche sector of the tourism market in this second decade of the 2000s, contemporary Indigenous tourism operations around the world provide these tourists with opportunities to participate in a myriad of Indigenous tourism experiences which include visiting a Sami reindeer farm in Northern Finland, participating in dog sledding near the north pole with the Nunavummiut of Canada, attending Austronesian and Formosa

Indigenous cultural festival in Taiwan or visiting a Mapuche handicrafts production and sales center at nature parks in Misiones, Argentina. These and other authentic Indigenous experiences continue to emerge onto the global tourism market as Indigenous peoples around the world increasingly seek the economic and socio-cultural benefits that can be derived from developing a sustainable tourism enterprise.

While the potential economic benefits of tourism enterprises are attractive to Indigenous peoples and communities, in many instances it is the potential socio-cultural benefits of tourism (i.e. cultural pride, preservation and maintenance) that often provide a stronger drawcard as to why an individual or community might embark on developing a tourism business. In fact, according to Johnny Edmonds, Director of the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance, there are “scary similarities between Indigenous peoples in all parts of the world as they work to reclaim their cultures after the effects of colonization” (cited Tancock, 2015).

Thus as more and more Indigenous cultures around the globe actively engage in the maintenance and/or preservation of cultural traditions, history and heritage, we are witnessing a steady increase in the development of intangible cultural heritage which is representative of a community’s cultural authenticity and identity and includes oral traditions, performing arts, festive events or traditional craftsmanship which have been inherited over generations (UNESCO, 2003).

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture has long been an important, albeit niche, part of the country’s tourism experience. Much of the Indigenous tourism product in the country is culture and/or nature based, for example: guided bushwalks, Indigenous food (bush tucker experiences), and dance performances. Australia has a number of very successful Indigenous tourism businesses, nevertheless a key challenge facing Indigenous tourism in Australia is to increase visitor demand. In spite of the marketing efforts of the national tourism body, Tourism Australia, market awareness is generally low and the products and experiences on offer appear to have limited appeal to the broader international and domestic market. Addressing the underlying reasons for this declining demand is arguably key if tourism is to deliver the much anticipated improved socio-economic opportunities for Indigenous peoples in Australia.

In New Zealand, Māori cultural experiences have long been an important component of the country’s tourism offering and marketing messages.

Tourism New Zealand actively promotes Māori culture as a 'must see' component of the New Zealand experience, and cultural imagery forms a large component of these marketing messages. In the past three decades, Māori have increasingly engaged in the sector through the management, development and promotion of cultural and non-cultural tourism experiences. Importantly, tourism ventures have demonstrated sustained success and there are many examples throughout the country where businesses have used sound business principles to leverage intergenerational wealth and wellbeing for the Māori of New Zealand.

This volume focuses on Indigenous tourism developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia and Māori of New Zealand. The volume covers a wide range of topics with chapters focusing on issues pertaining to Indigenous tourism and education, national parks and eco-tourism, native foods, policy, economics of identity, inclusion, empowerment, self determination, cross-cultural understanding and respect, and Indigenous business management models, authenticity, sustainability value chains and the tourism network.