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Achieving Aboriginal Development Aspirations through Educational Tourism: Learning on country with Bana Yarralji Bubu

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Introduction

Aboriginal entrepreneurial activity in tourism is often promoted as a strategy for economic development (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010). However, despite government support, the fragile state of the Aboriginal tourism sector continues (Schmiechen & Boyle, 2007). This has been variously attributed to lack of assets, poor education outcomes, lack of business experience, business models at odds with Aboriginal community and cultural norms, and weak land rights (Buultjens et al., 2010; Pearson & Helms, 2013). Also important is the historical lack of Aboriginal choice and control over involvement in tourism (Pitcher et al., 1999). Nielsen (2010:2) argues there is a link between Aboriginal control of involvement in tourism and the ability of tourism to be “a sustainable and viable tool in the social and economic development of Indigenous people”. This link between positive outcomes from Aboriginal tourism and Aboriginal-driven, self-determined approaches to tourism planning has been widely recognized in the literature (Notzke, 1999; Ryan & Huyton, 2002; Butler & Hinch, 2007). However, while these links have been explored on a regional or community level (Nielsen, 2010), studies of family or individual-run tourism planning processes are less common. More

understanding of the planning processes applied by Aboriginal families and individuals for tourism development would be useful in understanding not only the motivations for involvement in tourism, but how these motivations affect the development and operation of the tourism enterprise.

This chapter presents a case study of Bana Yarralji Bubu, an educational tourism enterprise run by an Aboriginal family in northern Queensland, Australia. The Wallace family have developed a tourism business that reflects their multi-dimensional development aspirations. Their educational tourism enterprise provides learning experiences to visiting educational tourist groups about their country and culture, with the profits of the business used to fund projects benefiting their community. Through this case study, the opportunities and challenges facing Aboriginal tourism operators in fulfilling their development aspirations through involvement in educational tourism are examined. This research is important as it describes how an Aboriginal family identified a gap in the tourism market and are using this opportunity to create jobs, foster knowledge exchange and increase community wellbeing. The results from this research demonstrate that learning about Aboriginal culture and land can be achieved through a tourism enterprise, and that educational tourism offers scope for achievement of broader Aboriginal development aspirations. This chapter first reviews the literature on educational tourism and Aboriginal development, and this is followed by an outline of the methods used for this research. The case study is then presented, exploring the Wallace family's view of development, how they seek to fulfil these aspirations through Bana Yarralji Bubu and how tourists have reacted to the experience. The findings are then discussed before conclusions are drawn.

This chapter uses the term 'Aboriginal tourism' because it refers to mainland Australian Aboriginal tourism opportunities, recognising that this term is most appropriately used to refer to the specific identity of mainland Aboriginal peoples within Australia on a national level. I have been guided by my discussions with Bana Yarralji Bubu in deciding to use the term 'Aboriginal', and use this throughout for consistency. In this research, Butler and Hinch's (2007:5) definition of Aboriginal tourism is used, that is "tourism activities in which Indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction". Nielsen (2010:8) points out that this definition has value because it "recognises Indigenous agency and control, rather than Indigenous people being merely the passive *producers* of tourism experiences".

Educational tourism and Aboriginal tourism

Educational tourism occurs when tourists travel to a location to consume learning experiences related to that specific location (Patterson, 2006). Travel, education and learning have long been associated because of the ability of travel to “broaden the mind as people learn from and interpret experiences” (Stone & Petrick, 2013:731). From its early roots, when travel and learning about other cultures was seen as an essential part of the education of European, American and Chinese scholars and aristocracy, educational travel has now evolved into a form of tourism that encompasses a variety of educational experiences (Benson, 2007). These experiences include university educational programs, school trips, seniors’ educational tours and cultural educational programs. Education is defined for this research as “the organised, systematic effort to foster learning, to establish the conditions, and to provide the activities through which learning can occur” (Smith, 1982:47). Educational tourism “tells the stories of places in order to enrich the interactions of travellers with them”, broadening the outlook of tourists as they learn about the global contexts of specific places and events (Wood, 2010:189). In particular, this process of learning and personal development occurs through “investigating the cultural landscapes of places” and how these cultures have evolved over time in these contexts (Wood, 2010). Educational tourism can:

“give participants unique insights into different cultural traditions by travelling to the places where each tradition evolved, and tracing how climate, geography, demography and politics interact to create specific types of art and culture. The physical experience of different landscapes, environments and peoples with their myriad colours and scents is the first step to understanding different cultures”

(Bennison 1999 in Wood, 2010:189).

From its beginnings, Aboriginal tourism in Australia has attracted those seeking insight into Aboriginal culture. Early tourism activities provided opportunities for travellers to visit Aboriginal people still living a traditional lifestyle and were more about viewing ‘the vanishing race’ than gaining understanding of their culture (Schmiechen & Boyle, 2007). Since then, tourists have moved from gazing at the ‘other’ to seeking a deeper knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture. Academic and government studies have linked Aboriginal tourism experiences to tourist preferences