

8

Understanding Tourism through an Indigenous Lens of New Zealand and Aboriginal Australian Cultures

*Freya Higgins-Desbiolles, Sharleen Howison and
Zexuan Sun*

Introduction

This interface between tourism and indigenous peoples is a complex and fraught space due to the history of colonisation, exploitation and denigration that many indigenous peoples have suffered in the global community. Nonetheless, in recent years indigenous communities around the world have embraced tourism for its potential value in offering economic, social, cultural, environmental and political opportunities. Specifically in the settler colonial nations of Australia and New Zealand, positive tourism initiatives have been harnessed as these countries have worked to come to terms with tourism as an internal and external driver of community development.

In this chapter we explore the values that could reshape our understanding of tourism and its cultural interface. In part this exploratory work was inspired by the challenge set by Peters and Higgins-Desbiolles (2012:79) who noted:

“The profit-driven focus of tourism under global economic conditions of capitalism runs counter to the shared, community/group-based ideals of Indigenous cultures. As such ... many Indigenous Australians struggle to have a major impact on an industry that is focused on Western ways, disregards Indigenous thought, and has success determined by Western (capitalistic) measures.

In today's era options for Indigenous engagement with tourism are rather limited; increasingly there is the assimilationist model where Indigenous peoples join tourism on the tourism industry's terms of economic rationalism and market values (see Whitford *et al.*, 2001).

Our hypothesis in this exploratory work is that Indigenous tourism which is operationalised adhering to Indigenous cultural values can offer cultural encounters that make a difference in terms of cross-cultural understanding and respect. Understanding these underpinning cultural values is important as it enables this work to be valued and continued. We also propose that tourism viewed through a prism of Indigenous values illuminates a different paradigm for tourism that is worth considering. First we will briefly contextualise this discussion in terms of the social values of cultural tourism before moving on to Indigenous peoples' engagement with tourism and the particular cases of Aotearoa/ New Zealand and Australia.

The enduring social values secured by cultural tourism

Cultural tourism is a lucrative special interest niche of tourism and has been studied extensively since the 1980s. As Richards (2003) noted, cultural tourism has a long history and in its western form it can be traced back to the European Grand Tour. Cultural tourism can be defined as “all aspects of travel, whereby travellers learn about the history and heritage of others or about their contemporary ways of life or thought” (McIntosh & Goeldner, cited in Richards, 2003). While cultural tourism has been subject to critical scrutiny in order to identify its boundaries and parameters, we are concerned here with it specifically as a place for cultural encounter and learning. Sociologist George Ritzer (2016:56) asserted that, in essence, culture encompasses “the ideas, values, norms, practices, and objects” and it allows a group of people or a society to live collectively with a maximum of harmony. Based on this assumption, culture in a tourism context plays a

fundamental rule in shaping the attitudes of people and communities, both as visitors and hosts, and thereby providing a possibility for comprehension from cross-cultural encounters.

However as Higgins-Desbiolles (2006) has argued, the social capacities of tourism niches such as cultural tourism have been inadvertently narrowed as tourism has increasingly been approached as an industry and promoted for its contributions to economic growth. While it is impossible to ignore the business aspects of tourism in today's market society, it should not be allowed to erase tourism's vital social and cultural capacities. As Tribe (2002) confirmed, tourism stakeholders should foster both the vocational and the philosophical aspects of tourism so that we can reflect on the kinds of worlds we wish to foster through tourism. In an increasingly cosmopolitan world in need of creative answers to numerous challenges, the insights and perspectives of many cultural worldviews are vital to creating a shared future. With the industrial view of tourism, we are beginning to forget the powerful capacities of tourism to connect people and foster creative dialogue.

An example of the bold expectations of tourism from the earlier era can be found in this statement from McKean (1989:133) who asserted:

"Underlying tourism is a quest or an odyssey to see, and perhaps to understand, the whole inhabited earth, the oikumene. Tourism can be viewed as not an entirely banal pleasure-seeking escapism ... but as a profound, widely shared human desire to know 'others,' with the reciprocal possibility that we may come to know ourselves."

In her analysis of tourism as a social force, Higgins-Desbiolles (2006:1202) argued:

"The contemporary, 'western' understanding of tourism comes from a rather narrow set of experiences and philosophies, which results in its emphasis on a highly individualistic and marketised tourism. In the mainstream tourism literature it is difficult to find academic contributions to the critique of tourism that approach the topic from a 'non-western' perspective"

This chapter offers an opportunity to consider the tourism cultural encounter through the lens of the Indigenous peoples of New Zealand and Australia, the Māori and Indigenous Australians. We will briefly overview the context of Indigenous peoples' engagement with tourism in order to situate our discussion before moving to our study context in the Antipodes.