



UNDERSTANDING TOURISM

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

BOB McKERCHER
AND BRUCE PRIDEAUX

Second edition

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Understanding Tourism: Concepts and Theories

Bob McKercher and Bruce Prideaux

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Acknowledgements

This book has been 30 years in the making, since the two authors began their journeys as tourism academics. And so, there are almost too many people to thank by name for making this project possible. However, many need to be acknowledged directly and indirectly.

We started at a time when tourism scholarship was undergoing unprecedented growth. Most of the new programmes were situated in business schools or commerce departments, while most of the tourism scholars came from non-business, social science backgrounds. Our knowledge was based on the first generation of scholars who began to explore this area of study beginning in the 1970s. Their work provided the foundation for how we think about tourism the way we think about it today. The works of those pioneering scholars form the basis of this book. We, and indeed, all of tourism academics, owe a debt of gratitude to them.

In addition, we have to thank the many thousands of students we have taught over the years for challenging us, forcing us to rethink much of what was accepted to be true about tourism, yet had little real supporting evidence, and for being sounding boards for us to bounce ideas off them.

While many people can share rightfully in any success the book may have, the two authors take full responsibility for any of its deficiencies.

Preface

This second edition of the book presents a conceptual overview of how different disciplines and fields of study have developed their own ideas about tourism, the tourist and the commercial sector that links the two. In doing so, it provides a unique insight into the complex idea of what tourism is and how we have come to think of it. The two authors have a combined 80 years or more of practical, industry and academic experience. We are still amazed at how little holistic knowledge of tourism there is, leading to the recognition of the need for a book like this.

What is tourism? Simple question. Difficult to answer. We all know it exists. We all know or think we know what is definitely tourism, who tourists are and what the tourism industry is. We also all know, or think we know, what is definitely not tourism, is not a tourist and what business sectors fall outside of the tourism industry. But tourism is neither absolute nor exclusive. Instead, it is classified by vague and fuzzy boundaries. That is what makes it such an exciting field of study, on the one hand, and such an exasperating phenomenon to study on the other.

As a result, much of what we think we know about tourism is well-known but not necessarily known well. Most topics are covered in tourism texts or cited frequently in the academic literature. But, the core ideas that drive how we think about tourism are often condensed into a short paragraph, a few sentences, or simply included as one of a series of references to illustrate a point. Knowledge for many comes from these brief summations and not from the foundational works themselves. We are hoping that through this text, people can reflect more on how we think about tourism and what epistemological and ontological processes we have followed to think the way we think.

The situation is complicated by the historic traditional disciplinary silos that have influenced tourism studies, which have produced discrete sets of definitions, rules, guidelines and regulations. This book cuts through that haze by presenting the first truly comprehensive text that incorporates different academic approaches to tourism to create a holistic understanding of what it is and how it works. It examines the core theories and concepts that lead to our understanding of each of the component elements of tourism in an attempt to develop a common, cross disciplinary understanding. It then seeks to show the linkages, forward and backward, between each of these elements and the other constituent components of the tourism system. In doing so, it also pays homage to the pioneers of the field who first started to think about tourism and were largely responsible for much of what we believe to be true now.

A book like this one becomes increasingly important as the nature of tourism studies shifts from a discipline focused approach that uses tourism as a means to explore different disciplines and/or uses core disciplines to explain tourism to the

emergence of the dominant business studies/training orientation adopted increasingly in higher educational institutions. Stand-alone business tourism schools/departments or the emergence of stand-alone tourism specialisms within business schools provide an enhanced range of career opportunities for students. But these benefits come at the risk of students receiving a selective, cursory overview of the role social science research has played in our understanding of tourism, our beliefs about how tourism works and, importantly, our grounding in an understanding of how the social sciences explains much of the business of tourism.

The book is divided into five sections. Part 1 sets the stage. It begins with a review of what theory is and how models and concepts fit into this broad paradigm. A discussion of the challenge of defining tourism follows with a review of various models that describe the structure of tourism.

Part 2 examines the key features that explain how tourism works. Successful tourism is a function of attractions, access, politics and various supply and demand functions. This section begins with a detailed discussion of what attractions are and how they drive tourism. Because the term attraction is one of the most misused terms in tourism academia, a conceptual taxonomy of attractions is developed as a means of adding some structure to the topic. The issue of access is discussed next looking at the valuation of time and how both market access and physical access influence tourism flows. The following chapter focuses on the political economy of tourism and how that informs tourism as a form of international trade.

Part 3 looks at the evolution of tourism. A critical review of Butler's and Plog's lifecycle models is undertaken highlighting the conceptual strengths and limitations of each one. It also discusses unrecognized subtleties of the models. An alternate lifecycle model using complexity theory is then discussed. We argue it is a more reliable way to document destination evolution for its dynamic nature allows for multiple factors to play a role in influencing change.

Part 4 focusses on the tourist. It examines such issues as why tourists travel by exploring various motivational approaches and then examines the sociological and anthropological contributions to tourism. This section then examines the tourist as an individual and how tourists consume destinations.

Part 5 focusses on a range of pressing issues facing the sector, from an examination of social impacts through to the never ending challenge of sustainability and how tourism needs to be reconsidered in a dynamic, crisis-embedded world. The section concludes by reviewing planning models and calls for a rethink of how tourism is planned.

We hope you enjoy the book and that it makes you think about what tourism is and how it works.

Bob and Bruce.

About the authors

Prof Bob McKercher has been a tourism academic since 1990. Prior to that he worked in the Canadian tourism industry in a variety of advocacy and operational roles. He has broad ranging interest in tourism. He is a Fellow of the International Academic for the Study of Tourism, the Council for Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education and the International Academy of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research.



Prof Bruce Prideaux commenced his academic career in 1992 at the University of Queensland where he later obtained a PhD. He began his professional life as a high school teacher and later moved to the public service where he worked as a transport analyst. His pre academia wanderings through Africa, Europe and Asia played a large part in developing his interest in tourism as both a traveller and later as a scholar. He has a wide range of research interests including sustainability issues, climate change, transition to carbon-neutrality, drive tourism, protected area tourism, rural tourism, remote area tourism and crisis management



To our families for putting up with us.

