

Current issues

Rethinking tourism: unfamiliar histories and alternative futures

Sohail Inayatullah

The Communication Centre, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane 4001, Australia

Critiques of tourism are commonplace, but virtually all of them take either a Western or State-oriented perspective. Using exemplary Muslim, pacific and futures narratives, this essay aims to provide a diversity of views of the motivations of tourism and the development thereof. It suggests questions that need to be asked if tourism is to be more equitably planned and speculates on alternative ways in which tourism could develop in the future.

This essay seeks to deconstruct tourism. We ask: what are the futures of tourism and how does the idea of the tourist circulate in the discourse of modernity? We are not concerned with providing empirical data or giving futuristic projections, rather our task is to make the underlying scheme – the boundaries of knowledge that make the idea of tourism intelligible – problematic.

We seek, then, to disturb our normal notions of what it means to be a tourist. We do not seek to give yet another plan, a list of policy implications that are to be debated; rather the effort is to take a step back and a step forward. By moving through time, we hope to make the present less familiar, to take it out of its essentialized, concrete quality, and perhaps make it somewhat – less frozen, less impossible to change. We seek to transform the present.¹

Our move into history is to make present notions of tourism peculiar, not universal. Our move into the future is to distance ourselves from the present, to see the present afresh in light of what can be. These emerging future issues, while derived through various methodologies, are important not because they might occur but because they force us to reconsider the present. This is especially important

as, within the framework of Islamic calendar, we have been in the 15th century for over 14 years now and already the freshness of the future has become stale.

The traveller/pilgrim

Staying within Islamic perceptions of travel and time, perhaps the best classical tales of tourism are the accounts of Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa: 1325–1354*.² There were no tourists then but there were travellers or pilgrims. Within this world, the Islamic world, all Muslims had to travel, they had to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Indeed, travel or the accumulation of wisdom, *ilm*, was the essence of Islam. Traveling, visiting wise people, finding holy sites, was an integral part of life. The pilgrim on his journey travelled in a caravan whose numbers increased at every stage. He found all arrangements made for his marches and his halts (what we now call the travel agent), and if the road lay through dangerous country (that is, bad food and rude visa officers), his caravan was protected by an escort of soldiers (immigration personnel and information booths). In all large centres as well as many intermediate stations were rest houses and hospices where he was hospitably welcomed and entertained out of endowments created by generations of benefactors' (Battuta² p 4).

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There was, then, an ecology of travel, where previous generations took care of future ones. While 'this was the lot of every pilgrim, the [wise person] received still greater consideration' (Battuta² p 5). Islam provided an incentive to travel unknown in any other age or community – as it was said, 'my house is your house'. Of course, Hawaiians and other indigenous people had a similar system but a typical response from the West was 'first, your house is my house, and then: get out, this is my house!'³

Travel for Ibn Battuta was about discovering differences. In Ceylon, the idolaters (the Buddhists) served him rice on banana leaves and leftovers were eaten by the dogs and birds. However, 'if any child, who had not reached the age of reason, ate any of it, they would beat him, and make him eat cow dung, this being, as they say, the purification for the act' (Battuta² p 94).

While in Turkey, Ibn Battuta met the Christian Emperor George, who after being satisfied that Ibn Battuta knew something about the Holy Land, was given a robe of honour by the Emperor. 'They have a custom that anyone who wears the king's robe of honor and rides his horse is paraded round with trumpets, fifes and drums, so that the people may see him' (Battuta² p 157).

This was an era when the idea of the transcendental was supreme, when there was an integrated code of ethics: a clear sense of the self, a clear sense of the text which gave the world meaning, and a clear sense of what happened if one did not fit into the system. The self travelled to gain spiritual knowledge. The traveller, poor or rich, was respected, because traveling was fraught with difficulties. Traveling indeed was a microcosm of the spiritual journey of the Self.

Of course, today in Mecca the modern planner has entered the scene. In an attempt to make the pilgrimage more efficient – there is a long walk between religious sites – a huge highway was constructed. Instead of increasing efficiency, the highway is now flooded with buses and cars, making it still easier to walk, although the noise and pollution from the traffic cause an additional burden for pilgrim to bear.⁴ Moreover the idea that travel itself leads to the broadening of the mind is not so certain. As R.J. Scott has argued in his paper, 'The development of tourism in Fiji since 1923':⁵

Today, travel, far from broadening the mind is actually contriving to shrink it. Along with the benefits of efficiency and labour saving that the package tour concept has brought, with it comes the concomitant danger of stultifying sameness. As our people in Fiji go about their daily task of serving the visitors we see an endless succession of the same little old ladies, with the same blue hair rinses, spending the same life insurance money and speaking in the same accents of the same things which have penetrated their similar perceptions. And what

of little old ladies? As they climb in and out of their same cars, their same planes, their same hotel beds, as they eat the same foods, drink the same drinks and buy the same souvenirs is it to be wondered that many cannot tell from one day to the next which country it is they are presently visiting? *These people travel the world like registered parcels, blindly unaware of the local populations, their aspirations, problems and tragedies. Instead of promoting mutual understanding they promote mutual contempt.* (p 212, see also 6).

However, even intellectuals who provide such commentaries are not exempt. Many of us are the new class of tourists, going from conference to conference, creating a conference culture, taking photos of sacred spots, sometimes in search of spiritual adventure, but often in search of the Other that our own culture cannot provide. While intellectuals often notice the contradictions of their conference culture, finding ways to include the local within global information culture, except as a site for research, has proved more elusive.

The cultural division of tourism

What, then, is the larger framework to understand the present of tourism? Just as there is a global division of labor,⁷ there is also a global division of tourism. Asian nations provide raw materials in the form of the environment (jungle and beaches, although this because of environmental crises is becoming less available) and raw bodies (in terms of prostitution and the erotic although this too is becoming problematic because of AIDS) and most importantly they provide premodern culture (which again is becoming less available because of the homogenization of global culture). The premodern is necessary for the West as it provides evidence of western superiority, of the linear flow of history from caveman to Cambridge. It also gives hope to the West, providing a communitarian alternative to the fatigue of western individualism.

The West manufactures rationality creating Asia and Africa as the Other – the lands of the exotic and erotic – as the irrational. They exist to be studied by social scientists, developed by international policy experts, and visited by tourists. In search of traditional culture, the West also helps transform culture into custom, creating 'museumized' cultures where living culture is frozen so as to best present it to the tourist. Culture as resistance, appearing on the margins of official and conventional definitions of reality, is lost in this representation of history.⁸

The West also manufactures tourism services and the idea of tourism itself, which we have suggested is not a universal concept but a particular idea of a specific culture. It also provides the high-end dimension of tourism, the postmodern artificial world – Disneyland. While some tourists go to Asia to seek

the premodern, God and sex, others go to the West to seek the future of high technology and postmodernity. Western tourism is the high-tech museum, the theme park, where space and time are appropriately compressed since there is so much to see and so little time to see it in. Space has become unbounded, easy to commodify, and inversely time has rapidly become scarce, diminishing by the moment.

Tourism development or research on tourism policy is merely the effort of nations to move up and down the tourism division continuum by, for example, having their own airline, reducing leakage of profits, and by reducing the social costs of tourism (ecotourism, tamed tourism or tourism on 'our own terms'). Tourism, then, is fundamentally part of the broader development paradigm first articulated by Herbert Spencer. Tourism is merely the last and latest effort in becoming rich through appropriating the categories of 'women', 'labour', 'history', 'culture' and 'environment' and using them to extract surplus value from the periphery to the centre.

Developing criteria from which to evaluate tourism

But of course many will disagree, arguing that tourism is necessary for cultural exchange, for jobs, for creating a cosmopolitan city, for becoming modern; indeed arguing that tourism has changed from commodifying the native to a responsible global industry. Maybe, maybe not. But for planners and policy makers the problem is that there is little consensus on the value of tourism, there are as yet no agreed criteria from which to judge tourism. What follows is one effort.

1. How does tourism affect the distribution of wealth? Can we develop tourism that increases the wealth of the poor? Can tourism profits be indexed to a ceiling and floor system, with the limits to profit accumulation changing as the floor rises, as workers increase their wealth?
2. Does tourism create conditions where economic growth is sustaining, that is, where there are numerous multiplier effects for the local and regional economy?
3. Does tourism reduce structural violence (poverty, ill-health and racism caused by the system) or does it contribute to the further impoverishment of the periphery?
4. Does tourism reduce personal direct violence? Can we create types of tourism that enhance individual and social peace?
5. Does tourism create the possibilities for cultural pluralism, that is, conditions where one culture understands the categories of the other culture – time, language, relationship to history, family, transcendental and land? Can knowledge of the Other reduce intolerance, creating the possibilities of a multicultural peaceful world?

6. Does tourism help create economic democracy, that is, where employees participate in creating visions of tourism, where they might even own part of the industry?
7. Is tourism progressive? Is there a progressive use of resources, from physical to mental to cultural-spiritual? Are employees encouraged over time to develop these other potentialities?

The values above are: distribution, growth, structural peace, personal peace, cultural pluralism and economic democracy. Drawing from these and other divergent values, what is needed is a dialogue in the tourism policy community to help develop an index of tourism sustainability.

The futures of tourism

However, the problem with these criteria is that they assume that the idea of the tourist will remain stable, continuing conventional understandings of tourism. But just as Ibn Battuta could not imagine the transformation from traveller/pilgrim to tourist, we cannot easily imagine new categories that will displace tourism. By using emerging issues and current images of the future, however, we can attempt to break out of the present. These emerging issues are not meant as predictive but as elicitive of alternative futures, of foresight. While their probability of occurrence might be low, if they develop, they will have a profound impact on every level of society. We present four such emerging issues.

Virtual reality

Assuming that developments in virtual reality continue, we may soon be able to don a helmet and practice safe travel (through various information highways) and safe sex. Indeed it is sex that will bring computers into our homes in the next century, not banking, nor games, but virtual reality sex. Technology will have finally captured nature – possibly making it redundant. Why travel, when reality and imagination are blurred anyway?

Traditional tourism was often there to help us to forget. The sophisticated tourist is in search of more varied experiences. The postmodern self,⁹ committed neither to the transcendental nor to the empirical, is empty; the task is to fill it with cultural and environmental experiences of the Other. The ancient traveller travelled to remember – he or she went to the place that reminded one of one's place in the cosmos. In the virtual self, there is no longer any place, we are all homeless, nor is there any central self to hold on to, only impressionistic personalities that appear and quickly disappear, like faces sketched on clouds.

Genetic engineering

Genetic developments may start out as quite harmless, but since all of us want to avoid genetic

abnormalities – wanting the best for our children – we will insist on being examined by our family genetic engineer.¹⁰ But soon this may lead not to disease prevention but to capacity enhancement.¹¹ Intelligence, memory, body type and beauty will be open to discussion. Once the artificial womb is in place, then issues of equal access and the right to genetic treatment will become current. As a way to deal with genetic inequities, giving birth may eventually be managed by state functionaries. It is quite possible that our children will be the last generation to produce babies in the old-fashioned way. The biological cycle will have been terminated by technology and women will essentially not be any different from men once their reproductive capabilities become unnecessary.

What will tourism be like in this world? Will we find a tourism gene? Will there be mutant centres we go to visit? Will culture be totally destroyed? Homogenized? Or will we become the museums which the genetically born come to see? Will traditional human society become the exotic that the genetically created or post-humans come to stare at?

World travel and world governance

Travel has begun the process of creating a narrative in which there is no longer any allegiance to a particular place. We are becoming deterritorialized, delinking ourselves from land and the nation. The loneliness that results from this discontinuity with history might be resolved not through the search of one place but the realization that the planet itself is home. While this is quite a conceptual jump, nation-states are not eternal. Moreover, humanity's survival may depend on moving to a new order of identity, at the very least some form of global governance and planetary self. Certainly a world government structure with limited visa requirements would enhance the further universalization of travel and tourism. We could all become perpetual immigrants, forever travelling and never fearing deportation.

Spiritual-psychic travel

A few argue that we will soon be able to travel psychically. This will be similar to virtual reality, but through enhanced mental powers. Or we may be able to check in our body, and let our minds travel through technologies that merge mind and body.¹² Travel becomes not body based but psychic based, perhaps like the imagination that comes from reading, but more visceral. While this issue is not likely to emerge in the short term, certainly the ability of the sensate world to define self and culture continues to decline.^{13–15}

Alternative futures of tourism

Given these emerging trends, and other more conventional trends, what are some scenarios of the future?

Gradual growth

Tourism stays the same but grows. Government and community organizations buffer the negative economic impacts of tourism (through dialogue, developer fees, low-cost housing, reciprocity), and reduce the negative cultural impacts of tourism (through community development and through 'authentic' cultural events).

Technological transformation

Tourism is transformed through new technologies. Virtual reality, telecommuting, new brain/mind drugs, even spiritual practices lead to decreased travel since one can be at home and elsewhere at the same time. Tourism disappears from our social constructs.

Structural and epistemological changes

Tourism is transformed as both the structure of tourism (corporate, hierarchical and capital intensive) and the epistemology of tourism (fragmented selves in search of wholeness or defeated selves desiring to forget) are transformed. Tourism employees participate in the ownership of tourism centres (and thus create real *aloha*), small-scale centres where the traveler or pilgrim re-emerges, and selves expand through cultural interaction and renewal. Tourism volume declines but becomes more enriching for workers and local population. Changes in the inter-state system lead to less reduced national sovereignty (a borderless world for capital and labour) with travel a basic right.

Tourism collapses

Environmental crises such as changing weather patterns, an economic depression and violent resistance from local cultures cause tourism to decline. Tourism becomes too costly and dangerous except for the very few.

Will the future tourist be the voyager or the eternally homeless or the satisfied homeful? While we cannot predict the future, these scenarios alert us to the range of possibilities ahead. Developing criteria for analysing tourism futures can help us create our own preferred visions of tourism. Within each of these scenarios we can develop separate criteria for tourism. Tourism policies would need to shift as futures changed. In a depression, Hawaii, for example, might be desperate for any type of capital, to the extent of becoming the Las Vegas or Bangkok of the Pacific.

What we can be sure of, then, is that tourism in the future will be dramatically different from tourism today, just as the tourist of today is dramatically different from the traveller of yesterday. Technology, social relations, the construction of the self all will be quite different in the near future.

In the meantime, we need to develop and find consensus on criteria from which to judge tourism.

Our criteria focus on a tourism that (1) enhances distribution of wealth and cultural meanings, (2) creates conditions for innovative and dynamic growth at local levels, (3) reduces structural violence, (4) does not increase personal violence, (5) leads to authentic cultural encounters where cultures learn how each constructs the Other – among other issues this means adopting the categories of the host culture, (6) transforms the local political economy to one based on economic democracy – that is, the cooperative structure, and (7) allows the physical, mental and cultural-spiritual development of labour and management.

Strategies for transformation

Finally, what are some strategies for transformation to lead us out of the present? There are many levels to sustained change. First is supporting alternative community development models of tourism – giving funds and publicity, if they desire it. Second is working towards an alternative model of culture, knowledge and transactions – individually, intellectually and through the institutional government system.

But beyond agency, change occurs through long-term structural means. These are the macro-historical cycles: Sorokin's sensate to ideational civilization, Eisler's patriarchy to matriarchy, Sarkar's four-stage theory of history of worker, warrior, intellectual, capitalist and then revolution or evolution by labour before the next centralized world system. But for there to be an alternative form of tourism, predatory capitalism must be met head on. While this might be impossible at the national level it is possible at the local level and at the global level: that is, a new world governance system with a new model of economics.¹⁶ While this might be hard to believe, let us turn to another Muslim traveller, the sociologist Ibn Khaldun, who lived 600 years ago. Having seen great transformations in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, he offers us these words from his *The Muqaddimah*¹⁷ (An Introduction to History) that might cause us to pause to think

even as many rejoice at the victory of liberal capitalism and the supposed sustainability of modernity.

At the end of a dynasty, there often also appears some (show of) power that gives the impression that the senility of the dynasty has been made to disappear. *It lights up brilliantly just before it is extinguished, like a burning wick the flame of which leaps up brilliantly a moment before it goes out, giving the impression it is just starting to burn, when in fact it is going out.* (p 246).

We should expect the fantastic and be ready to create it.

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