

Foreword

These reports provide a unique comparative perspective on agencies, bureaus, and offices charged with tourism governance world-wide. It is important to note that they are not press releases or mission statements provided by the governing organizations. Each report was written by independent researchers and scholars who are knowledgeable about tourism governance in the country under review. Amir Gohar, our editor, conceived of the project, commissioned the reports, and shepherded us through the various drafts and revisions.

This volume covers most of the variation in global tourism governance. The only part of the story that is not told here is tourism governance in countries with centrally planned economies – Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea, People’s Republic of China. With the exception of sub-Saharan Africa, every region of the world is represented. There are chapters on countries like Italy and France with deep historical engagement with tourism, and other chapters on countries that are just beginning to attract tourists, like Oman. Some of the entries, e.g., Lebanon and Colombia, report on governmental efforts to overcome recent internal conflict that tarnished their reputations as tourist destinations. Others, like Turkey and Thailand, describe governmental efforts to increase tourism even though their recent success suggest they may have already reached their peak.

Reading these reports, we soon discover that governmental action, no matter how well intended, does not always lead to increasing and/or improved tourism – two goals that do not always align. There are almost as many negative examples here as positive ones. This volume will prove to be indispensable to government officers tasked with managing tourism development. It will provide them with alternative responses to problems similar to the ones they face. It will be helpful to local and foreign entrepreneurs who want to learn about the governance landscape before undertaking any tourist business dealings in these countries. It will also be valuable to anyone interested in comparing governing strategies in general in our fraught, globalizing world.

There are a few basic matters that every system of tourism governance must deal with. These include who may and who may not cross the border as a tourist? How long do they get to stay as a tourist? Must they pay a fee for the right to visit? Which, if any, of their bank cards will work in your country? In his very helpful last chapter in this volume, Nelson Graburn outlines these baseline issues that every country must deal with as well as a number of related matters that require multinational agreements – airline and cruise ship safety protocols, for example.

There are some commonalities across the patterns described in these chapters. As a general rule, the governing bodies engage in the following: They assume responsibility for promoting national identity abroad and constructing and disseminating a positive image of tourism in their countries. They set quality standards for guide training and grading of hotels and restaurants. They establish preservation requirements for natural and cultural heritage. They designate sub-national places,

regions, and sites as having touristic value and establish rules for their protection and presentation. They set goals for future tourism development at the national level and propose policy to reach those goals. They commission studies and/or support tourism research in their universities. Not every system of tourism governance does all of these things, but most of them do most of these things.

Beyond these commonalities, tourism governance is heterodox. The chapters in this volume make it clear that anything human beings have ever done in appreciable numbers is now the basis for a “type” of tourism. These “types” include medical tourism, extreme tourism, sex tourism, nature tourism, conflict tourism, pro-poor tourism, MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions), WOOF tourism (World-Wide Working On Organic Farms), etcetera. This list can be as long as anyone would wish to make it. Some countries have pristine, warm beaches and there is notorious competition between them for tourists seeking sun, sea, and sand. But specific combinations of attractions are unique to each of these countries or shared with only one or two others. Turkey and Tunisia, for example, feature low priced plastic surgery that attracts “medical tourists.” But there is no mention of plastic surgery tourism as an important component of the tourist economy in any of the other reports. Poland uniquely provides its medical tourists with dental work that is less costly than other EU nations.

In Colombia armed guards offer “Favela Tours” of neighborhoods controlled by drug cartels. The federal government worries that these might project an unwanted image of the country. Egypt highlights its UNESCO designated “A-list” attractions, as does every country that has one. But World Heritage Sites are, by definition, completely different from one another. In Finland, it is the Northern Lights, and down-list but worthy of mention, its famous “Wife Carrying World Championship” and “Swamp Soccer.” Almost every country makes claims for the attractiveness of its local, distinctive cuisine. France double underscores its cuisine as among its top attractions. India features its tigers, and Italy its art. From 1950 to 1970, Lebanon was proud of its reputation as “Paris of the Middle East.” After its civil war, multiple invasions by Israel, and an explosion that destroyed much of downtown Beirut, Lebanon has scrambled to build thousands of new hotel rooms. Now it is trying to come up with some reason for tourists to visit. Mexico is trying to shift emphasis from warm beach tourism to cultural tourism featuring distinctive rural villages, customs, festivals, and folk art. Oman has just begun to recognize the potential touristic value of its natural beauty, mountain and beach areas, and open and welcoming Omani culture, and old towns. Poland has a wide range of attractions, but it continues to emphasize the old Soviet equation of tourism with youth festivals, exercise, physical education, health, and sports. Portugal enjoys its reputation as “the best destination country in the world,” but worries that as annual tourist visits outnumber the Portuguese population by 2:1, the sheer numbers of tourists may be destroying the country. Thailand has had enormous success as a global destination by emphasizing the happiness, warmth, and hospitality of its people and the generosity of its Royal Family. Turkey is seeking to enhance its attractiveness

beyond its UNESCO sites (the Blue Mosque Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace) by adding bird watching, hiking, and scuba diving to its offerings. The direct contribution of foreign and domestic tourism to the GDP of the United States is US\$581 billion, topping the second place People's Republic of China (US\$403 billion) by almost one-third. But the United States uniquely has no federal agency, bureau, or office of tourism anywhere in its federal system.

Out of this diversity, these reports broadly recognize two general types: (1) “mass tourists,” who favor sun, sea, and sand, who come in pre-paid packages, and/or spend their time in resorts that provide for all of their vacation needs, wants, and desires; and (2) “cultural/natural tourists” who search out cultural attractions (museums, distinctive local traditions, archeology, architecture, etc.) and/or scenic landscapes and opportunities for expressive self-testing in nature (scuba diving, rock climbing, skiing).

“Mass tourism” is favored by private sector developers because the flow of income from tourism can be contained and controlled. A resort can be built to include gift shops, bars, restaurants, golf courses, horseback riding, surfing, scuba diving, parasailing, and other services and amenities to the point that no one need leave the premises for the duration of their stay. This allows the corporate owner(s) to collect every tourist dollar that is spent.

“Nature/culture tourism” is diffuse and potentially more intimately connected to local peoples and economies. A family that hires a car and moves through the countryside following their own itinerary from nature preserve, to ethnic crafts market, to museums and archeological sites, might actually spend more per person per day than someone in an all-inclusive resort. But they will purchase meals, buy petrol, stay in bed and breakfasts, and get snacks and souvenirs, from dozens of different local entrepreneurs and providers, not from a single resort owning corporation or consortium.

The role of tourism governance in “mass tourism” development usually involves initiatives to attract and facilitate capital investment in building resorts, hotels, golf courses, amusement parks, and so on. Some of these are complex public/private projects. Others involve licensing agreements, tax breaks, granting exemptions from building codes, easing tourist industry labor laws, waiving environmental protections, and providing public funding for infrastructure upgrades – new transportation, broadband, electrical grid, sewer and water systems, to increase carrying capacity for private resort development.

The role of tourism governance in “cultural/natural tourism” usually involves setting aside nature preserves, protecting distinctive plant and animal species, restoring historic architecture, shrines, and technologies, and subsidizing remote communities so they can fit themselves into the global economy as exemplary of traditional and colorful ways of life, worthy of tourist attention.

These reports make it clear that in order to succeed, different types of tourism require different human skills in the host communities, different environmental and natural contexts, and different organizational support frameworks. There is no overlap

between the support required and special equipment needed to service skiing, face-lifts, working on organic farms, sightseeing, enjoying a drink on a beach, among others. It is important that tourist governing organizations not make the mistake of assuming that types of tourism equate to types of tourists. The tourists themselves are no more specialized than humanity in general. Some may arrive with specific preferences and expectations, but they can be lured into other experiences that they didn't necessarily anticipate. World-wide, tourists are found gathered around every recreational activity, every kind of natural formation and every knot in the social fabric. They multi-task and switch easily between attractions visiting a museum in the morning and relaxing on the beach in the afternoon. Having a well-established "tourism brand" should not blind the host country to its own potentially attractive undeveloped features and qualities.

A profound lesson to be learned from these reports, taken together, is that tourism cannot be contained in organizational charts of government bureaucracy. Every chart reveals organizational porosity with aspects of tourism governance overflowing into finance, transportation, security, health, education and welfare, natural resources, housing, security, and so on. This suggests that the next stage of tourism governance will be for host countries to develop ethical guidelines for tourism development that can be operationalized across all branches of government. Will tourism policy lead to greater income equality for the citizen hosts? Will it improve labor conditions for tourism support workers? Will it promote greater mutual respect in the interactions between tourists and locals? Will it protect the integrity of natural areas and cultural minorities, especially those that are designated as attractions? Are planned new tourist developments as accessible and interesting to domestic tourists as to foreign visitors? Does the policy encourage tourists and locals to respect history and heritage? Does it understand and accept limits in the human carrying capacity of regional infrastructure and natural environments?

One country that appears to have overcome or at least minimized the inherent problem of bureaucratic fragmentation is Thailand. While the Thai organizational chart is as complicated as the others, they have come up with a transcendent criterion for tourism development across all bureaus, ministries, and offices: "Thainess." Governance does not begin with a listing of its standard tourism assets, its various separate attractions. Instead, Thailand prioritizes the overall happiness of Thai people as what is most crucially important for tourism. It leads with the fact that it is the least unequal economy, a "land of smiles." It is religiously open and tolerant, has a wonderful cuisine, not just in its five-star restaurants but everyday, and is unfailingly polite and gracious toward strangers. In Thailand, the question asked about every tourism development initiative is, "how does it leverage these components of Thainess?" Its beach may be no better than the beach in a competing country, but the other country lacks Thainess.

Tourism is perhaps the least fraught of a series of global problems that cannot be contained conceptually or politically. International migration and flows of refugees,

pandemics, global warming, economic modernization, and tourism, are precisely the kinds of problems that government bureaucracy was not designed to solve. They are not to subject to expert control by hierarchically organized specialists in a single department or agency. They have become imbricated in every detail of life on this planet and should be the work prioritized in every specialized department and initiative of government. We may someday look back upon successful tourism governance as the beta test version of our capacity to respond to the other global challenges facing nations today.

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