

BOOK REVIEW

Understanding Western Tourists in Developing Countries

Ton van Egmond (Wallingford, UK: CAB International, 2007; 190 pp., Hardcover, £49.95, \$100.00, ISBN 9781845931957).

This book is born from a need to better understand Western tourists who travel to developing countries. The term *Western* is used here to refer to tourists from the historically Protestant countries of Europe whereas the term *developing* refers to geographic locations: Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Despite the broad title, the author focuses on North-Western European tourists who travel to developing countries on escorted tours or as backpackers who travel independently and economically. The motives of those who choose escorted tours (confusingly referred to as “round trips”) are contrasted with those of backpackers.

Although the book has five chapters, it essentially contains three parts: an overview of theories of the tourist; an empirical study of the motivations and behavior of Western tourists; and a synthesis of theory and empirical findings to provide recommendations to “suppliers.”

The theoretical overview places special emphasis on Weberian theories of rationalization (travel as a need to fill deficiencies in one’s life and the standardization of travel) as well as the Protestant ethic to the travel urge. Other theories that are outlined include Marxian theories of alienation examined by MacCannell (travel as a response to alienation from ourselves and society), Urry’s theories of romanticism (travel to view the unspoiled), Wang’s theories of Eros (travel as a source of pleasure and play), and theories of modern consumerism (travel as consumption of pleasure).

The second section of the book concerns the au-

thor’s empirical study. The author discusses the findings of his 333 interviews conducted in 15 countries (Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Mexico, Nepal, Peru, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, and Turkey). More than four-fifths of the respondents were tourists on escorted tours and the remaining respondents were local professionals responsible for these tours. Of the 272 tourists interviewed, four-fifths were from historically Protestant European countries, mainly the Netherlands (42%), the UK (15%), and Germany, Scandinavia, and Belgium (23%). The author contrasts the motivations, expectations, and experiences of escorted-tour participants (as found in his primary study) to those of backpackers (as derived from a meta-analysis of nine recent backpacker studies).

The last section attempts to synthesize the theoretical perspectives with the empirical findings. Some important conclusions of this study include the lack of support for theories of rationalization, escapism, and alienation. However, there is much support for product standardization in escorted tours, as groups from different operators expect a similar experience. There is also support for theories of romanticism: travel expectations that are projections of Western consciousness rather than the reality of local existence. Lastly, the author argues that West-South tourism is a product of the Protestant Ethic obsessed with the efficient use of time, continuing education, and a deep suspicion of excessive consumption.

Despite the claims that the book is not designed to add another model, the author does classify escorted-tour participants and backpackers into four groups each. This classification allows destinations to plan for "the right tourist and the desired number of tourists" (p. 2). In Appendix B, the author provides an estimation of the net benefit of each type of tourist in terms of tax revenues and local expenditure.

In addition to a thorough summary of interactionist theories and a comprehensive overview of the literature, the book includes interesting observations. For example, the author remarks that the North-Western European countries are the primary markets for ecotourism and notes that whereas "the proportion of European tourists is limited, the regions and communities in the South that like to welcome tourists as a means of alleviating prevailing poverty are numerous" (p. 146). He cautions that all the ethnic and ecocommunity-based tourism projects are essentially "fishing from the same pond" (p. 146).

Notwithstanding the book's strengths, there are aspects that could disappoint some readers of the empirical study and recommendations. They include the focus on North-Western European tourists under the guise of "Western" and the fixation on the historic impacts of Protestantism without due reference to the influence of the modern media and the impact of the marketing communication of major tour operators that cluster around messages of the unchanged, the unrestrained, or the uncivilized (Echtner & Prasad, 2003). Furthermore, while the author found in his interviews that escorted-tour participants are more faithful to the tour operator than to a particular destination, it is disappointing that he did not offer an explanation of this phenomenon. Another topic that is left undeveloped is the analysis of the net economic results per type of tourism in Appendix B. If the goal of this text is to assist tourism suppliers, then these calculations are fundamental. It is unfortunate that the economic benefits of each of the eight types of tourist (four types of escorted tours and four types of backpackers) are not better developed and incorporated into the body of the

book. Converging the influence of the tour operator with the most attractive tourist type for a country as a function of its resources, would help the country to define its marketing strategy to fulfill its objectives (e.g. focus on escorted tours or backpackers; short tours or long stays; trade shows or travel guides).

The author writes that the book is directed at suppliers in order to provide them with the tools to develop sustainable products and practices concurrently. However, it is doubtful that suppliers would be interested in extensive theoretical and methodological discussions. Indeed, the dense review of interactionist theories of the tourist from a sociohistorical perspective would appeal to academic researchers, and the empirical study with some mild policy recommendations could appeal to consultants advising tourism policy makers.

Overall the book is an interesting analysis of the evolution of the theories of the tourist over the past four decades. It also provides clues to the validity of some of those theories, which could be fruitful avenues for further research. Moreover, it is a long overdue introduction to the important role played by tour operators in destination development. Here again, much more in-depth research is needed into the global integration of tourist markets and emerging destinations. This important book also highlights the need for a more accessible text directed at tour operators and developing countries that cuts through the dense terminology and methodology to answer key questions asked by operators and destination planners alike: who is this new tourist and how do I provide a product to satisfy her/his needs so that my business/destination prospers?

Reference

- Echtner, C. M., & Prasad, P. (2003). The context of third world tourism marketing. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30(3), 660-682.

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