There isn’t anywhere else on Earth where people confluence – like the way they do in Singapore. From visitors and transients to citizens, this progressive island and gateway to South East Asia is a dynamic mix of cultures, ideas and histories neither ethnic nor exotic, instead, the essence of modern Asia – sparklingly savvy, with a touch of old school. The first-time visitor should expect to be surprised, confused, and, charmed.

Anita Kapoor, TV and Travel Host

Introduction

This chapter examines recent changes in the tourism industry of Southeast Asia and especially the emergence of particular niches in the market, and the extent to which these trends have contributed to socio-economic development or have raised new specters of uneven development in a region where tourism is of enormous and still growing significance. Over the last decade, tourist arrivals and revenues in Southeast Asia have risen faster than in any other region in the world, almost twice the rates of industrialized countries, gaining an increased market share at the expense of America and Europe. Southeast Asia is now regarded as both a major generator and recipient of tourism, and a place for significant international tourism, regional tourism (within ASEAN) and domestic tourism. Governments have increasingly recognized, by desire and by default, that tourism is a powerful engine of growth and a creator of employment, prompting a greater ease of travel and the removal of complex (and sometime quite costly) visa requirements, part of a wider process of globalization. At the same time continued internationalization with the still growing presence of all the major global tourism chains has established tourism as a lead sector for economic growth. The natural environment (especially coasts), and its recreational possibilities, shopping, and ‘exotic’ and diverse cultures are the three major marketing themes and attractions.

Tourism growth has also been spurred by the birth of many regional low-cost airlines, taking mass tourism to a wider range of destinations. Lower operating costs, and cheaper airfares, have reduced the cost of travel, making air travel the dominant mode of travel in the region. New airlines have launched new routes to secondary destinations, especially in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, to serve the emerging and growing tourism market in secondary cities and small
islands, which has spread rather than reduced the metropolitan focus of tourism. Places such as Hua Hin (Thailand), Dalat (Vietnam), Pangkor and Langkawi (Malaysia) are growing national rather than international destinations, as tourism steadily incorporates new regions.

The devaluation of some regional currencies in the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s belatedly sparked a rise in international tourism, through favorable exchange rates, while the subsequent Asian economic revival contributed to a parallel increase in national and regional tourism. In Indonesia, for example, tourism from elsewhere in Asia had surpassed tourist numbers from European countries by the end of the century (Cochrane 2009). A wealthy new middle class of Asians, and greater leisure time, has subsequently turned the region increasingly into one of intra-regional migration, especially if tourism from PR China is included. By 2012 China had become the most important country in the world for tourism expenditure, and more than 120 million tourists left China in 2015, especially to east Asia, with more than 4 million traveling to Thailand. The growth of Chinese tourism has been a massive factor in the expansion and restructuring of tourism in Southeast Asia, but not without some tensions.

Tourism is one of the most important sectors in ASEAN economies, and increasingly so. It is the most important sector and major source of foreign exchange earnings in Thailand, ranked second in Malaysia and the Philippines, third in Singapore and Indonesia and gathering pace and prominence elsewhere. The tourism sector in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand) was the main economic growth sector from 2006 to 2013, and is no less important in Malaysia and Indonesia. Between 2007 and 2014, tourism contributed more than 10 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, and in Cambodia it contributed 23 percent (Nonthapot 2016). The tourism sector in Thailand supports over 1.5 million jobs. Each country promotes tourism widely, with a growing focus on particular niches, such as adventure tourism, shopping and medical tourism. The industry has acquired an unusual economic prominence compared with other world regions, with growing internationalization and the steady rise of national tourism and travel. The bulk of all tourism is regional (Table 13.1) while domestic tourism has been encouraged at least since the 1980s as means of fostering national integration (especially in Indonesia), of redistributing income from rural to urban areas and, in a form of ‘staycation,’ encouraging the domestic expenditure of disposable income (Cochrane 2009; Erb 2009).

In 2014 just over 100 million tourists visited the ASEAN countries, and almost half of those traveled within ASEAN, a threefold growth in the twenty-first century (Table 13.2). That total excludes the many millions of national tourists who are probably at least as numerous as international tourists. Increasingly, tourists in Southeast Asia are from Asia (Table 13.1), about half traveling between ASEAN states and more than a quarter coming from other Asian states (notably China, followed by Korea, Japan, India and Taiwan). With other tourists traveling from the Gulf and elsewhere that has meant that the numbers traveling from Europe, Australasia and North America are fewer than a quarter of all tourists, despite the slow growth of tourism from Russia. While Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore dominate destinations, the Singaporean and Malaysian numbers are magnified by many people traveling briefly and frequently across the international border. Thailand is the main economic beneficiary in the region (and is the seventh most visited country in the world) followed by Malaysia. Chinese tourists are the mainstay of Thai tourism, shifting its dependence and focus away from the west. Indonesian economic benefits are highly concentrated in Bali, as are Cambodian interests in Siem Reap. Singapore has tourist numbers some three times the national population, the highest ratio in the region.

Vietnam has grown rapidly in this century, partly as state controls have been relaxed, despite different perceptions of what a more market-oriented economy and foreign investment entail, but also because corrupt practices allow bypassing and thwarting of state bureaucracy (Lloyd
Table 13.1 Regional sources of visitors to ASEAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of tourists (thousands)</td>
<td>Percentage of total</td>
<td>Number of tourists (thousands)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>39,845.5</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>ASEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>9,283.2</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union 28</td>
<td>8079.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>European Union 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>4,275.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>4,059.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
<td>4,011.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2,984.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>2,839.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan (ROC)</td>
<td>1,846.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Taiwan (ROC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>1,834.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top ten country/ regional sources</td>
<td>79,058.4</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>Top ten country/ regional sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of the world</td>
<td>10,166.8</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>Rest of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total tourist arrivals in ASEAN</strong></td>
<td><strong>89,225.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total tourist arrivals in ASEAN</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ASEAN Tourism Statistics

Table 13.2 Tourist arrivals by country in Southeast Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>636.6</td>
<td>209.1</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>262.9</td>
<td>3,584.3</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>4,727.5</td>
<td>8044.5</td>
<td>9,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>614.3</td>
<td>3,330.1</td>
<td>4,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>7,931.1</td>
<td>25,032.7</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>198.2</td>
<td>1,059.0</td>
<td>3,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2,170.5</td>
<td>4,272.8</td>
<td>4,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>6,958.2</td>
<td>14,491.2</td>
<td>15,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>8,651.3</td>
<td>22,353.9</td>
<td>24,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>1,781.8</td>
<td>6,847.7</td>
<td>7,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASEAN</strong></td>
<td><strong>33,932.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>89,225.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>102,012</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ASEAN Tourism Statistics

2004; Bennett 2009). More than most other Southeast Asian countries Vietnam has also experienced the ‘roots tourism’ of overseas Vietnamese, Viet-Kieu, returning to former homes (Nguyen and King 1998). Laos has followed a somewhat similar trajectory on a much smaller scale, but in other respects represents a northern extension of Thailand, as it opens up to tourism and tourists seek new experiences and places. Cambodia too has grown steadily in this century in...
the wake of peace – much as in Vietnam – but mainly focused on Angkor Wat. That has given it similar numbers to the Philippines, which has never managed to convey a distinct culture and is more isolated from airline connections. Tourism is growing exceptionally fast in Myanmar, where only a decade ago ethical concerns were raised over any travel there (Henderson 2003). Isolated Timor-Leste has only a token tourist economy because of intervening opportunities, poor communications and infrastructure, and high costs. Brunei, marketing itself as ‘The Green Heart of Borneo,’ has been a little more successful.

At one level tourism is experiencing a greater geographical spread across the region; however, it has also tended to focus on certain prominent city nodes, especially as regional tourism numbers have grown. As international chains have played a greater role in the industry the benefits have thus spread rather less far and less evenly than hitherto, though they have increased substantially. The region has acquired a more metropolitan focus.

Niches

As tourism has grown in numbers it has gone substantially beyond shopping and beaches, although both – in the rapidly expanding shopping malls, iconic places such as Boracay and dozens of small islands – are crucially important and continue to be the key rationale for regional tourism. Indeed Singapore claims “The range of Singapore shopping malls is so vast that some visitors to this tiny island state book their plane tickets purely for one reason: to shop til they drop! In fact, Singapore has more high-end shopping malls per capita than anywhere else in Asia, and visitors are simply spoilt for choice in terms of both quality and quantity” (Singapore Guide, 2017; see Henderson et al. 2011). Bangkok makes similar claims and few significant tourist centers are without malls. Nonetheless expansion and marketing of ecotourism, adventure travel, cruises, golf tours, arts and entertainment, spas, food, health and medical tourism and other possibilities have given tourism increased diversity. Tourism marketing has focused on what are perceived to be ‘high value’ niches rather than on backpacking, perhaps the oldest niche of all, squeezed out by ideology and image, but a major contributor, especially in some nodes, as backpackers stay longer and spend more in country. Because Southeast Asia covers a great diversity of geographies, cultures, lifestyles and preferences, a wide range of niches has emerged.

The increasing sophistication of local, regional and international visitors has required the tourism industry to offer quality, comfort, convenience, relaxation, independence, adventure, excitement and learning: the whole gamut of visitor experiences. Convention centers and theme parks attract quite different tourist groups by family, age, nationality and socio-economic status, and other niches are as diverse. New niches, from birdwatching (especially in Indonesia) to white water rafting, mark a more sophisticated and specialized tourism. Film, food and yoga tourism have emerged. Cruise tourism has grown fast in the region, both of international cruise companies expanding their operations into Asia, and of regional cruises, many again with a significant Chinese market component. Cruises too have become more specialized. The Meridian company offers a cruise in Vietnam – ‘Rockin’ the Mekong with Elvis’: an eight-day cruise with an Elvis impersonator performing nightly, that is touted as ‘absorbing two cultures simultaneously.’ By contrast dark tourism exists in Cambodia especially, centered on the Khmer Rouge killing fields and museums (Hughes 2008), and war tourism to the tunnels and battlefields of Vietnam and the ‘Bridge on the River Kwai’ in Thailand. Ironically parts of Laos are effectively closed to tourism since the artefacts of war remain dangerous. A number of these niches are examined below to emphasize the diversity that increasingly exists, though justice cannot be done to the multiple specialist regional and local tours that exist across a range of possibilities.
Backpackers

A generation ago, backpacking, where travelers preferred budget accommodation and transport, longer holidays, meeting other travelers and some local involvement, seemed to characterize tourism in Southeast Asia. Backpacker tourism has proved a rather vague economic and cultural phenomenon: cut-price, extended in time, of youthful self-identified ‘travelers’ rather than tourists, passing through something of a rite of passage and inhabiting some famous, even notorious, tourism enclaves. From the 1960s, backpackers paved the way for tourism in a range of Asian places, but the ‘loss’ of Afghanistan to Islamic insurgency brought more regional ‘hippy trails’ in this century. Traveler nodes were cut back from the 4Ks (Kathmandu, Kabul, Kuta, and Khao San Road, Bangkok) to just the latter two, but a Vietnam Trail stimulated the growth of such places as Hoi An and Sapa, now centers for national and international tourism.

Gap years have taken the place of hippies, banana pancakes replaced magic mushrooms, and full moon parties have been complemented by Irish pubs, as backpacking has become less anarchic and more regulated, marking a political economy of different times. Backpackers could often be impatient with local values and customs, and countries could be impatient with backpackers, who they wrongly saw as contributing little economically. Although backpackers are less likely to prefer to move off the beaten track, and enthuse over what is not in the guidebook (McGregor 2000), they have enabled some small and remote places to thrive, such as Malaysia and Thailand’s small islands, or the Gili islands off Lombok (Indonesia). Party islands such as Koh Phangan and Koh Samui became more commercialized rather than matching the more laidback image of The Beach. Specialist operators and transport facilities have made backpacking more akin to flashpacking, being driven to particular nodes by commercial operators (Hampton 2013; Hampton and Hamzah 2016) but still relentlessly moving on.

Like other forms of tourism, backpacker tourism has also become national and regional, with the emergence of a ‘new generation’ of Chinese, Japanese and other Asian backpackers. Although Chinese backpackers, so-called ‘donkey friends,’ are not significantly different from their Western counterparts in terms of travel motivation, they tend to travel for rather shorter time periods, rely on the Internet and are more formally organized (Lim 2009; Chen et al. 2014). Not only do the places they visit change to meet new needs, but they change further as new ‘mass’ tourists replace the early backpackers. Thus at Sapa in highlands Vietnam, no more than a decade of tourism brought significant changes, at least to foreign backpackers as national tourism took over.

Sa Pa town is perceived by the majority of backpackers as noisy, unsightly and ultimately an infringement on nature. Modernity shocks them, urban sprawl drives them away, karaoke excesses and rampant prostitution are judged sickening; they came here precisely to get away from it all . . . There is already a tendency in their discourse to . . . label it as increasingly ‘worn out,’ a ‘spoilt’ destination where the damages of ‘bad tourism’ have made interactions too ‘commercial’ and rendered a visit less appealing.

(Michaud and Turner 2006, 799)

Tourism is always poised for a potential fall. Yet, what may here be unappealing to backpackers is admirable to the growing number of urban Vietnamese tourists; a new tourist cycle takes over as Sapa goes from small market town to mass tourism destination. The rapidly evolving tourism life cycle has been most evident in Bali, and particularly Kuta, in the 1960s a small village destination for backpackers and surfers on the Asian overland trail, where new tastes and desires were constantly linked into new tourist niches (from raves and honeymoons to whitewater rafting, camel
safaris and butterfly parks) that accommodated the needs and whims of all kinds of tourists: it became ‘whatever you want it to be’ (Connell 1993). In the course of these changes the role of local people declined, as Javanese and international interests constructed hotels, restaurants and other facilities. Balinese were displaced from now valuable coastal land, and visual culture took on a variety of transformations, simultaneously being diminished, transformed, reinvented and globalized for the tourist gaze (Howe 2005). As Kuta changed, other parts of Bali evolved in quite different ways; some specialized in manufacturing particular tourist artefacts, or staging cultural events, as, under the tyranny of supposedly ‘alternative’ guide books (McGregor 2000), tourists followed conventional paths through the island. Kuta itself became notorious as a site of drunken dissoluteness, Nusa Dua became an enclave of expensive and elegant hotels, and in the village of Pengosekan, near Ubud, a group of workshops took up the manufacture of what had hitherto been Australian didjeridus for a European market (Gibson and Connell 2005). Mass tourism from Java, and a diversity of Asian tourists, maintained ‘traditional’ beach and new resort tourism. Backpackers moved away as environmental problems in Kuta especially accelerated. Theme parks arrived in Kuta, international literary festivals, film tourism, meditation and yoga reached Ubud, with greater cosmopolitanism and a blurring of distinctions between tourists and resident expatriates (MacRae 2016), and between Balinese culture and materialism. As one of the most important and famous destinations for regional and global tourism it is hardly surprising that Bali has changed in complex and comprehensive ways, and become a microcosm of a range of evolutionary changes elsewhere.

**Natural places and ecotourism**

As Southeast Asia has become more urban and tourism more national, national parks, natural places and wildlife have acquired greater prominence, but that has yet to extend to any significant focus on ecotourism. Geoparks, where geology is perceived as heritage, are an even newer phenomenon. Both culture and a particular perception of a more ‘authentic’ nature, lost elsewhere, have drawn tourists from China and Japan (Yamashita 2009). Tropical birds and wildlife, such as orangutans in Sumatra and Borneo, have drawn tourists to particular reserves and sanctuaries and played a very small part in discouraging environmental degradation of their habitats (e.g., Rajaratman et al. 2008). Yet sanctuaries and national parks have not been established without conflict and tension. Largely a by-product of the rise of national tourism, the growing pressure to preserve landscapes has caused conflicts between people who lived off the resources of parks and the interests of tourists, invariably to the disadvantage of former forest residents displaced beyond the parks (Wong 2008, Rugendyke and Son 2008). Yet ‘natural’ tourism remains in its infancy; additional disposable income has made relatively few seek out rural pleasures other than in regimented and sanitized form. Thus in highlands Vietnam, at Sapa, the new Vietnamese “affluent population is not that keen for prolonged contact with nature, and enjoying the town’s amenities proves far more attractive than visiting unclean highlander villages” (Michaud and Turner 2006, 793). Conventional beach tourism dominates and ecotourism has proved rare, disappointing and not integrated into the wider commercial sphere of tourism, partly through lack of communication and cooperation between policymakers and other tourism stakeholders and partly because of inadequate marketing. While many adventure tours are tantamount to ecotourism, their relative closeness to nature is a function of remoteness rather than design. Thailand has had a National Ecotourism Policy since 1998 but ecotourism is caught up with adventure tourism and Thailand remains a mass tourism destination (Leksakundilok and Hirsch 2008). Other Southeast Asian countries have experienced even less ecotourism, despite the emergence of tourism in relatively remote areas, and in search of ‘natural’ and ‘unique’ experiences.
Tourism and development

Culture

The particular realm of cultural heritage tourism constitutes one of the most significant and fastest growing segments of the tourism industry, with Asia said to be ‘enriched by living cultures,’ linked to agricultural lifestyles, arts and handicrafts, musical traditions, foods and cuisine, and spiritual and religious practices that constitute tangible and intangible heritages. Almost all have been reinvented in some way. Distinctive cultures have long been a drawcard for tourism to Southeast Asia, and travel brochures and websites, and even airlines, relentlessly emphasize idealized versions of cultural distinctiveness and the ‘exotic,’ often focusing on particularly distinctive ethnic groups. Several states, notably Thailand and Vietnam, emphasize the potential of tourism in distinctive hill tribe regions involving the commodification of tribal cultures and of such visually distinctive places as Bali and Toraja (Picard and Wood 1997). Ethnic people represent a form of exotic heritage, whose dress, longhouses and recent status as ‘headhunters,’ fossilized in time, are eminently marketable (Zeppel 1997; Yea 2002). Hill tribe girls, who make a living from being photographed with tourists on the Thai-Burma border, wear ‘a contrived tribal costume’ invented from elements of different tribal attire, but marketed as ‘traditional’ (Cohen 2001, 164). Food, from Singapore’s World Gourmet Summit to every country’s street food, and hawkers are deliberate drawcards (Chaney and Ryan 2012; Henderson et al. 2012; Henderson 2016). Somewhat more subtly floating (and other) markets have been touted as urban versions of creative heritage.

More broadly cultural tourism has been promoted in most countries both for national markets and through festivals of various kinds. That is especially so in Singapore where other tourism possibilities are more limited, heritage has been deliberately conserved and ‘natural’ environments and theme parks created. National parks have become more numerous, and monuments such as Angkor Wat, Borobudur and entire cities such as Hue and Luang Prabang have been restored, promoted and commercialized. Many have become simply ‘bucket list’ places to visit as much as places of critical engagement with cultural history (Winter 2007; Smith et al. 2012). Likewise festivals have been created and promoted, such as the annual Sarawak Rainforest World Music Festival held in the Sarawak Cultural Village, “a living museum where the traditional inhabitants of Sarawak’s major ethnic groups have been lovingly reproduced” (quoted in Gibson and Connell 2005, 213). The majority of festivals cater for local tourists.

Film tourism has brought new cultural diversity, dominated by Elizabeth Gilbert’s book Eat, Pray, Love (2006), and the film that followed, starring Julia Roberts, that massively boosted yoga and spirituality tourism to Ubud, and resulted in a local hotel construction boom. One upmarket travel chain linked Bhutan, Bangkok and Bali, where guests could choose from cleansing temple rituals, sessions with Ketut (Elizabeth’s Gilbert’s own teacher) or outings to locations where the movie was shot. In 2012 and 2013 Chiang Mai (Thailand) became a major destination for Chinese tourists, enthused by the comedy hit film Lost in Thailand, then the highest-grossing Chinese film ever. As shown in the comedy, Chiang Mai is a city steeped in Buddhist culture and bursting with an exotic atmosphere. In the movie, Thais are polite, nonchalant and fun-loving people who have learned to live life at a slow yet peaceful pace. Elsewhere in Thailand, after Alex Garland’s The Beach (1997) was turned into a film starring Leonardo di Caprio, Maya Bay became a popular destination (Law et al. 2007). Following a spate of novels and films Bangkok may become a film noir tourism destination. In this niche, as elsewhere, diversity continues to increase.

Sport, adventure and beyond

Rising affluence has contributed to the expansion of sports tourism, both within the region, notably for golf, and from more distant countries for surfing, rock climbing and other activities.
Malaysia has hosted the Malaysian Grand Prix since 1999, as one stage in the Formula One World Championship, as has Singapore, but Southeast Asia has otherwise been unable to attract the global Olympics and World Cup football that its northern neighbors have attracted. Nevertheless sport is a substantial niche. Surfing has contributed to development in several small and remote places notably the Nias and Mentawai islands (Sumatra) and in better known Bali (Towner 2016). Diving tours are common as are rock climbing (Krabi, Thailand) and mountaineering (Mount Kinabalu, Borneo) that also involves volcano tours (as at Bromo and Lombok (Indonesia). Gunung Mulu National Park in Borneo (Malaysia) is home to the largest cave system in Southeast Asia, which continues to attract international caving expeditions.

Sex tourism has always been a part of tourism in Asia, and in an earlier age was even advertised in guide books (Connell 1993) with notorious nodes emerging in Pattaya and Bangkok (Thailand) and in most significant destinations. Sex tourism extends from temporary liaisons between tourists and local residents, with or without commercial relationships, that are loosely romantic, with both male and female tourists seeking short-term partners (Dahles 2009), and which may become long-term relationships (Chan 2009), into basic transactional sex, partly a function of anonymity for tourists and the regional incidence of poverty that draws more people into the industry. While sex tourism is conventionally regarded as being a phenomenon associated with Western tourists it is also a regional phenomenon associated with many border towns and crossing points, including the Thai borders with Laos and Malaysia (Lyttleton 2014), the Vietnamese border with China (Chan 2009) and Batam island (Indonesia) conveniently located for Singaporean mobility. Some of the same borders, and that between Myanmar and China, also account for trans-border tourism for gambling in casinos.

A particularly unpleasant component of sex tourism is child sex tourism, notably in Cambodia, where the trafficking of girls continues to be a serious problem, and is a destination for Asian and other foreign men. Recently, Indonesia islands like Bali and Batam have also become known for child sex tourism and sex trafficking, and Laos and Myanmar emerged as destinations, as Thailand has clamped down on its own sex industry, general tourism has increased in both countries and government regulation is weak or corrupt.

As in other forms of tourism sex tourism has contributed to distinct patterns of migration as tourism centers have developed. Both prostitution and gambling (in a formal casino sense) remain mainly urban phenomena, especially of borderlands, though often drawing workers from rural areas, sometimes through coercion and trafficking (e.g., Phongpaichit 1982). In some small but significant tourism destinations, such as Kuta and Koh Samui, massage parlors are particularly common, even in smaller towns (Garrick 2005). Within sex tourism niches have developed and regional involvement is significant.

Medical tourism

A specialized tourism niche is medical tourism that began in Southeast Asia in the 1990s and has expanded rapidly. It paralleled the wider rise of tourism and marked an early phase of privatization and corporatization, with many Asian hospitals seeking profits, new markets and new clientele in the wake of the Asian financial crisis (Henderson 2004; Connell 2011). That corresponded with the rise of a new middle class with new demands and an ability to pay for healthcare, both in Asia and in developed countries. Other boosters of tourism (assisted by television and the internet) were increased familiarity with distant places, waiting lists that could be bypassed, and a growing acceptance that most medical practices, technology and human resources, certainly in the best hospitals in ‘less-developed’ countries, were the equivalent of...
Tourism and development

those in developed countries: ‘First world care at third world prices.’ A globally aging population created new demands. Medical tourism was adopted and promoted by governments, especially in Asia, anxious to see a modern creative biotech and health industry develop with enhanced visitor numbers (Ormond 2013). While doubts extend to whether it can be truly considered a form of tourism, it usually involves some pleasurable components, such as shopping and dining, and involves patient-travelers and their relatives and friends using the same infrastructure as other tourists and engaging in similar pursuits. Indeed, in Malaysia at least, medical tourists have contributed more financially to non-medical ends, such as accommodation and food, than to direct medical expenditure (Klijs et al. 2016). In Thailand, medical tourists spend rather more than non-medical tourists, while they also travel with companions (Noree 2015). Marketing healthcare to tourists and the focus of some hospitals and practitioners on distant people’s wants have raised awkward ethical questions over the role of national health services.

Malaysia especially has focused on its ethnic diversity and cosmopolitanism both to attract medical tourists, and more generally, especially as it has oriented toward the Gulf region. Being a Muslim country has offered a competitive advantage, with halal food readily available, whereas other destinations, notably Thailand, have had to make more specific arrangements in particular floors of hospitals to cater for Muslim visitors. Captured by the image of cosmetic surgery, medical tourism was initially seen as being almost entirely of Western visitors into the region, especially to Thailand and Malaysia that have actively promoted themselves as medical tourism destinations, for ‘tourists’ from the Gulf and developed countries (Ormond 2013). However, as new facets of cosmetic surgery became more desirable, from whitening to bodily reconstruction, partly stimulated by new workplace preferences, especially in China, regional medical tourism has become more evident. More recently a significant part of medical tourism is between neighboring countries and across local borders, such as from Laos to Thailand and Indonesia to Malaysia, for minor medical procedures, contributing to the establishment of new border trading regions (Ormond and Sulianti 2017; Connell 2016). Medical tourism has thus followed the same broad trends of regional mobility evident elsewhere.

Voluntourism

Volunteer tourism has grown rapidly in this century, with the word ‘voluntourism’ only coined in 1998, as an intended version of ethical and responsible tourism. Extending from Earthwatch, volunteering on kibbutzim and national volunteer programs, such as the Peace Corps, it expanded rapidly in Southeast Asia, evolving from an alternative holiday option into what has become something of a rite of passage for many university students, and others. It largely involves tourists who volunteer to assist on seemingly worthwhile projects intended to contribute to development in poor countries, such as Cambodia, while usually also linked to an additional more ‘standard’ holiday experience.

Voluntourism has increasingly been criticized as a new form of colonialism and exploitation that reinforces the dominant paradigm that the poor of developing countries require the help of affluent Westerners, including students, to induce development (Vodopivec and Jaffe 2011). Individual sentimentality responds to, and deflects attention from, structural inequality (Mostafanezhad 2014). Companies market packages that reduce the complexity of development practice to a service that can be performed in a matter of days by the volunteer as part of an adventure experience. Private operators organize ‘meaningful tours’ such as the 14-day ‘Teaching and Temples Tour of Cambodia,’ which includes in its trip highlights ‘the killing fields’, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and ‘Cambodia’s people’ (McGloin and Georgeou 2016). Tourists seek
to both ‘make a difference’ through their contribution to teaching English, constructing houses, managing animal refuges and similar activities, while also obtaining, and recording on social media, an ‘authentic’ tourism experience through working in ‘real’ local community contexts (Sin and Minca 2014; Kontogeorgopoulos 2016) despite a considerable lack of relevant experience. Volunteer tourism has thus been heavily criticized for its inappropriate projects, failed housing schemes, corruption and fake Cambodian orphanages (Carpenter 2015) and for the self-indulgence of the tourists working on projects of doubtful or negative local value. While voluntourism ‘gives,’ it is also taking, as the experiences of the authentic ‘other’ and of ‘doing development’ become acts of consumption in the voluntourism paradigm. Again, like other forms of tourism, a limited regional component exists with volunteers traveling from Singapore to countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand.

**Employment, economics and equity**

As a labor-intensive activity, where relatively few skills are required in many occupations, tourism makes an enormous contribution to employment. Regular, secure wages, away from the uncertainty of agricultural labor, are attractive and have even led to migration away from skilled employment. Success may so transform particular destinations that ‘old’ jobs in agriculture and other arduous activities are abandoned. However employment is usually repetitive, little training exists to enable career advancement, and limited skills mean low wages. Tourism has contributed to the economies of many villages but, with rare exceptions such as upland areas of Thailand and Sulawesi (Indonesia), mainly to urban areas, small islands and accessible coastal villages, hence the returns to tourism are sporadic and localized.

In most remote areas, rural people are distant from tourism and where tourism exists the benefits may be few. Hill tribes in Thailand are often involved merely through hawking of cheap trinkets, such as bracelets, while others without such goods resort to begging (Cohen 1996). Even the small income gained from that is concentrated among relatively few households who are already relatively better off (Dearden 1996). At Sapa, in the nominally socialist state of Vietnam, cultural minorities, despite representing about 85 percent of the local population, “are basically left to watch and hope for beneficial effects to trickle down, deprived as they are from access to economic success and political power in the state apparatus due to their cultural distinctiveness, their lack of formal education, and their limited economic capital” (Michaud and Turner 2006, 803). After 12 years of increasing tourism, in one Thailand Hmong hill tribe village the economic impact was ‘astonishingly negligible’, as trekking tours were organized in urban areas using Thai vehicles, drivers and guides, and trekkers ate Thai food brought with them (Michaud 1997). However in most similar contexts, and subsequently, benefits have been rather greater and have enabled livelihood diversification and a useful flexibility.

Here and elsewhere the benefits to local people have often been slight, as more powerful interests bypass them. At the Komodo National Park on Komodo Island (Indonesia), tourists, intent on seeing Komodo ‘dragons,’ stay in nearby urban centers on other islands and never stay overnight. A handful of carvers and boat crew are the only village beneficiaries, with local people again disadvantaged by their lack of relevant skills, education and knowledge (Hitchcock 1993; Walpole and Goodwin 2000; Borchers 2009). The benefits are less likely to accrue to local people than to the private sector or government agencies. In some contexts, such as at Ayutthaya (Thailand), local people are prohibited from active commercial participation, hence their economic benefits are negligible while they simultaneously experience tourism-related
environmental degradation (Thanvisithpon 2016). As resort enclaves have replaced small hotels local people have become distanced further.

**Small business**

Tourism has invariably stimulated small business development. Local people have long been pioneers in meeting new demands for tourist facilities and “start homestays, food stalls and transportation, or hire out snorkel gear, motorcycles or mountain bikes” (Kamsma and Bras 2000, 170). In Bali men and some women are engaged in handicraft production while women are engaged in the informal sector, as masseurs, hair-braidiers, drink sellers, traders, homestay (losmen) workers and men are itinerant vendors and drivers. Women may benefit more from tourism than from many other service and manufacturing activities as informal traders, hand-craft producers, cultural performers, market sellers and hotel workers, even if their incomes are low. But in most contexts, as in Cambodia, and especially in adventure tourism, men secure better jobs in tourism than women (Brickell 2008; Tirasatayapitak et al 2015). However over time, small-scale local accommodation has gradually been displaced in prestigious locations by large hotels and resorts. In the 1970s Batu Ferringhi beach on the northern coast of Penang island, Malaysia, was characterized by fishermen’s cottages that were the main form of tourist accommodation; two decades later they had all been replaced by hotels, and international tourists, mainly backpackers, replaced by domestic tourists. The informal sector is constantly unwelcome and opposed for what is said to be the inappropriate imagery it offers but also for the ‘threat’ it may pose to formal sector economic activities, both national and international, that have gradually become the main beneficiaries.

As tourism grows local people are more likely to be displaced from their homes, from their land (required for hotel resorts, golf courses, etc.) and from jobs, as part of both a coastal squeeze, demand for higher standards of service and facilities, and government involvement. Often local workers are not hired, on the grounds that they are unreliable, to be replaced by cheaper migrant workers (Connell and Rugendyke 2008, 9–10). Even small-scale employment and income benefits can thus be brief, precarious and illusory, as corporate players take over. Entertainment becomes more ‘sophisticated’ and global rather than local, while handicrafts are imported into the region, usually from China (to where they often return). Local and regional multiplier effects can be limited. Large hotel chains are usually supported by global chains of food and drink supply that are independent of local producers, though resorts have sought to stimulate local production, to encourage good relations with local people and secure a convenient regular supply of fresh food, especially fish.

In most places the benefits from tourism are quite uneven, as certain local people and groups, with better connections and education, more land or entrepreneurial skills, take advantage. Just as tourist places go through a life cycle, so local employment experiences a cycle, initially growing only to fall when resorts take over. Tourism becomes one more means of local socio-economic differentiation. It may also contribute to marginalization and loss of local autonomy as distant outsiders take over the critical components of the industry, such as hotels, restaurants and car hire. Moreover in every context local people gain only a small proportion of the tourist expenditure of tourists, and intermediaries, or overseas companies, may often be the key beneficiaries. No country has promoted tourism as a poverty-alleviating strategy. After the 2004 tsunami, restructuring of the tourism industry around Phuket was undertaken in a more formal way that benefited the better-off who could make strong claims to land ownership and marginalized and excluded those who had worked in the informal sector. Corporations rather than
communities were the beneficiaries, with every Southeast Asian country drawn by the allure of the potential windfalls from high-end tourism.

**Environmental and cultural change**

Tourism has had diverse environmental impacts. Change is inevitable as facilities are constructed and expanded but may be less visually intrusive and damaging to the environment than many forms of development as tourists seek relatively pristine circumstances. Yet even ecotourism is not necessarily without damaging environmental repercussions, as in northern Thailand, where ‘ecotourism’ projects often “reproduce the same contradictions as other forms of capital-intensive development . . . exacerbating economic and social disparities, diverting resources and alienating the majority of people from their resource base” (Pholpok 1998, 262). Generally in Southeast Asia, where tourism has created additional income sources, the frequency of cultivation has increased through hired rural labor and/or the expansion of the cultivated area through land purchase, as in north Thailand (e.g., Forsyth 1995). By contrast, close to tourism itself, as around Sapa, as tourism developed and incomes increased, the rate of deforestation declined and marginal agricultural fields with low productivity were abandoned (Hoang et al. 2014). A similar process has occurred in Bali, Phuket, Koh Samui and elsewhere as land was too valuable to be ‘wasted’ on agriculture and small farmers.

Accentuating this trend is that the relationship between rapid tourism growth and environmental degradation has usually been close. By the end of the 1980s the rapid growth of tourism at ‘hotspots’ like Kuta and Koh Samui had outpaced the development of tourist infrastructure so that drainage, sanitation, traffic congestion and air, water and noise pollution had all become problematic (Wall and Long 1996, 43), alongside the visual pollution of poles, posters, neon lights and garbage. Inadequate environmental planning and management, alongside sand mining, land clearance and other deleterious activities, including golf courses, have resulted in the loss of coastal mangroves, fisheries habitats, coral reef damage, coastal erosion and pollution from solid and liquid waste (Williamson and Hirsch 1996). The environmental degradation (and social transformation) of Pattaya (Thailand) as it grew from a small village into an expanding city has contributed to the quintessential tourist directed dystopia: “the most extreme example of the touristic transition of a seaside resort” (Cohen 2001, 159). Vung Tau, in Vietnam, with its bars, karaoke parlors and casinos aimed at Chinese tourists, and Olongapo in the Philippines have acquired similar reputations. The environmental costs of tourism merge with social costs. Although in only a handful of places have tourists been accused of being “unpleasant guests” who are irresponsible and “loud, lecherous, drunken and rude” (Boissevain 1996, 5) fears exist that they provide demonstration effects for local youth.

Social changes have occurred because of tourism and independent of it. Tourism has kept some elements of culture ‘alive’ but often as empty practice rather than an ongoing and respected component of lives, and what was once in the course of being abandoned may be revitalized for tourist consumption, adapted, embellished and staged at particular times for the tourist gaze. Throughout Asia versions of traditional performances have been shortened and made more appropriate to the short attention spans and lack of linguistic and cultural affinity of tourists (Gibson and Connell 2005, 146–150). In Toraja funeral ceremonies were truncated to meet the needs of tourists, which resulted in community resentment, but communities were forced to relent in order to sell the souvenirs and accommodation on which they had become dependent (Adams 1990). Songkran, the Buddhist New Year festival prominent in Thailand and Laos, has gradually become a backpacker ritual of water throwing rather than something sacred (Porannond and Robinson 2008). Somewhat ironically, most of the financial benefits of tourism are
directed into forms of ‘modern’ consumption, yet even at Kuta local people have retained local agency and can distinguish what is performed for tourists from what is truly sacred and valuable.

**Conclusion**

Throughout Southeast Asia tourism is of increasing importance as an international and increasingly regional and national phenomenon, while the region is poised to become a dominant center of global tourism – mainly because of the rise of Chinese tourism – that has overturned the former ‘north-south’ trend in the region. No longer is backpacking so significant, as it has become institutionalized, international investment has taken over, resorts have replaced rustic shacks and local workers been displaced by migrants. Exotic and diverse cultures, and the soft multiculturalism of their foods, have become rather more of a marketing backdrop. Based on accelerating mobility, tourism has acquired a greater diversity, differentiation and subtlety, as newer, more specific markets emerge, requiring the delicate task of simultaneously marketing cultural diversity and heritage alongside modernity, evident in the opening quotation from Singapore and, perhaps, in its earlier slogan ‘Instant Asia’ (see Chang and Lim 2004). Activities have become as important as destinations in tourism marketing. Boutique hotels, spreading from Singapore, have diversified accommodation, and Airbnb is widespread. Medical tourism emphasizes technological change in the region, matched by the ubiquity of cable cars, shopping malls, upmarket restaurants and shows with global performers: a gradual convergence with themes and trends in other parts of the world, and extensions of it, with the new resorts and casinos seen as “cultural laboratories for testing new protocols for neoliberal governance and capitalist production” (Simpson 2016), a far cry from the localized impacts of backpacking.

Some metropolitan nodes, such as Singapore and Bangkok, remain particularly well-placed to benefit from all forms of tourism, from cruises and conventions, to food and cultural heritage, and have developed complex stop-over packages to develop this further. Islamic tours, featuring halal food, are possible in most countries, as tourism has become more complex and cosmopolitan. Continued quests for new arenas and niches such as convention tourism are seen as the key to diversity and thus growth, notably in established situations such as Singapore and Thailand. Relatively new players like Myanmar and Timor-Leste simply search for success. At every scale tourism has an uneven impact.

Environmental management has becoming more critical, as numbers increase and values change, with enormous pressures on those parts of the region that are important destinations, such as Siem Reap (Angkor Wat), fragile Halong Bay and several parts of Bali. Climate change is unlikely to help. Economic changes have endangered wildlife tourism, despite tourists formally preferring relatively pristine environments. In many coastal areas and on the edge of national parks critical conflicts have arisen, while the desire for modernity clashes with urban heritage conservation in emerging centers like Yangon. The promience of the informal sector almost everywhere, and undercurrents of tension in sex tourism and voluntourism, emphasize that tourism has not removed poverty but is often intimately associated with it. Likewise women may be useful marketing devices but are rarely the main beneficiaries of tourism. Greater emphasis is placed on sustainability and ‘green tourism’ in marketing than in actual practice. Ecotourism is no panacea and ethical and ‘responsible’ tourism are mainly academic concerns.

Recognition is evident that tourism is highly sensitive to violence and political disruption, as in Bali (Tarplee 2008; Hitchcock and Darma Putra 2007) and the southern Philippines, to biological problems, such as SARS and avian flu, and subject also to physical hazards (e.g., Calgaro and Lloyd 2008). Tourism in West Papua is unwelcome. Localized issues such as southern Thailand’s political unrest and Malaysian Airlines’ two flight disasters in 2014 have had limited
geographical or temporal impacts, with Chinese arrivals into the region increasing again by the end of the year. By contrast, greater stability and democratization, as in Myanmar, can be a great boost for tourism. In a global climate marked by some uncertainty, Southeast Asia is likely to thrive, as the Chinese tourism market continues to expand, based on relative stability and diverse cultures and geographies. Its impact however will be increasingly uneven.

**Note**


**References**


Tourism and development


