

Tourism Scan

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From Scotland to Iraq - religious tourism is the new hope

(Reference: www.scotsman.com - www.travelindustrydeals.com, and reuters.com (29 of August))

Religious and pilgrimage tourism are “in” – for which ever religion and in whatever setting. Tourism authorities try to find their niche market by promoting the religious heritage of their country. However it remains open if those tourists are really always seeking the true spiritual experience, or if just intriguing public relation is counting them as “religious tourists”.

In Scotland, for instance, the number of people visiting churches rose a 15.1 per cent during 2005-06. The Scottish cathedrals certainly prove to be a highlight – but the fact that entrance is also “free of charge” – different from other tourism sites” – might add an economic motivation for the tourists who are mainly from the Eastern European countries where Scottish pricing is seen as exaggerated. So, are we really talking about “pilgrimage tourists”? If Scotland continues with its market strategy, however, it is likely to achieve its goal to grow tourism revenues by 50 per cent by 2015.

In Iraq, the situation is quite different: faith seems here to be the only inspiration for tourists (in.reuters.com, Sep-1, 2007) visiting holy places despite the war destruction and violence. Tourism officials are promoting Iraq as a tourism and pilgrimage destination. In 2006, already some 570,000 people visited Shi'ite Muslim shrines and sites like Kerbala and Najaf are further promoted. However, the threat of war and terror is unfortunately not stopping in front of holy sites: last week, pilgrims had to be evacuated from Kerbala's Shi'ite site after 52 people were killed in clashes nearby (www.travelindustrydeals.com/news/4428).

Iraq has never been a popular tourist destination. But can pilgrimage and religious tourism be a “tool for peacebuilding” if the government focus lies on the relatively calm South, neglecting the not so safe Northern region?

ECOT's Contours will be on 'Tourism – a tool for peace building' with contributions from all around the world. To order your personal copy, write to contours@ecotonline.org.

Added value: relaxation and a good conscience combined through voluntary tourism

by Marcus Bauer

Teaching English in a remote village, saving gorillas in a National park, or planting trees are just a few examples of how travellers can contribute positively to the places they visit. The earlier 'dogma' to 'Leave nothing but footprints' is losing significance. Nowadays, the desire to 'give something back to them' is taking the lead. Generally, this is a good development: travellers identify more with the places they visit, they are searching for contact to their hosts and for a meaning of the visitors' presence in the destination. An increasing number of 'facilitators' provide access to meaningful types of occupation in tourism destinations and in doing so enable tourists to become acquainted with this kind of experience – that which they desire.

'Voluntourism' enables family home stays to gain access to a market of culturally sensitive customers. Thus, tourism revenue not only reaches remote and underdeveloped areas but also minor stakeholders in tourism. Furthermore, many programmes ensure that part of the fee is designated to community development measures. Voluntourism seems to be a panacea, combining the blessings of development assistance with the amenities of a holiday. Pro-active recreation with a good conscience on top.

Unfortunately, it is not that simple. The fast growing market of voluntary travel organisations - both the expressions 'tourism' and 'company' are obviously avoided as they may be harmful to credibility - is hard to overview. A well-elaborated programme description on a website is not necessarily a well conducted programme in reality. A reliable account and reputation of a company is usually provided by people who have participated in the programme. It would take a very responsible organisation to be self-critical. Such a responsible 'company' would describe 'voluntourism' as a business. It would explain the fact that the usefulness of a two-hour English class run by someone who is not a professional is very limited. It would, however, also mention that the sheer presence of any tourist in a home stay in a remote village can be a very valuable contribution to its economic development and that travelling is more about learning from the host community than teaching it.

The website www.gapyearresearch.org may be a good place to start for those who are interested in more detailed information about 'voluntourism'.

More construction, more infrastructures. Tourism - be careful not to destroy your mere assets!

Harbors, hotels, roads, parks, bridges... From Sri Lanka to Viet Nam and Honduras, investors in tourism infrastructure are heavily transforming the natural setting and environment of the places selected for tourism development.

In Viet Nam, the construction of a tourist area on land reclaimed from the sea in Ho Chi Minh City's will begin in September after the clearance board has granted the sea area and the land beneath it for construction

(<http://english.vietnamnet.vn/travel/2007/08/732810/>).

200 hectares will go to an artificial beach and the remaining to luxury tourist facilities, residential areas and verdant parks. The project is the first of its kind in Viet Nam to use land reclamation to develop tourism, and its investment scale ranks third in Southeast Asia.

Being aware that this plan had been first conceived in the late 1990s, this reminds us on Sri Lanka. There, huge infrastructure projects have been included under the Post-Tsunami "Re-Building the Nation" agenda, displacing fisher families from beaches, and channeling big amounts of money in ambitious township projects, including a USAID funded bridge spanning over the lagoon of sleepy east-coast Arugam Bay – a declared surfers' paradise and a "must go" eco-tourism site, according to government plans. The USAID funded bridge will cost more than was invested in rehabilitating the livelihoods of Tsunami-affected fisher people. The destruction of animal habitats is a consequence of such projects. And tourism is suffering from it. For instance, according to a recent campaign of GLOBAL RESPONSE ACTION ALERT, a industrial construction at the Orissa coast of India will negatively affect the two Wildlife Sanctuaries – renowned eco-tourist attractions. Tourism stakeholders should take that case on and stop the TATA-project in order to protect this asset.



Part of Can Gio sea will be filled in to build a tourist area

From Asia, where the entire UNESCAP Mekong development project is dealing with ambitious plans for infrastructure developments which are just partly taking into account any potential ecological and socio-cultural impacts, including displacements of vast numbers of (indigenous) local populations, across the sea in Central America we find a similar scary scenario: on the Bay Islands, heavily affected by Hurricane Mitch in 1998, the parliament has finally approved a private investment of 25 Mio US\$ in a new cruise-ship port (www.latribuna.hn, Aug 29), and additional tourist commodities, like a new terminal and parks. Cruise Ship Tourism is considered of having major environment-destructive and cultural-exploiting effects.

Sri Lankan tourism: close you eyes and enjoy!

During the International Conference on AIDS in Asia and Pacific (www.icaap8.org) in Colombo, the Sri Lankan government through its tourism body did not hesitate to promote to the visiting media people from all Asia Pacific Region – referred to as “Dear Friends in Media” - a set of tours, exclusively designed as so-called “Familiarisation Tours around Sri Lanka” comprising: a one Day Tour to Kandy or a two Day Tour to the Cultural triangle Region with overnight stay at the Cinnamon Lodge in Habarana – the town where just a few month ago a bomb explosion on a bus killed many people. Calling the invitees for their urgent reply, it seemed though that this idea had just crossed the mind of the Tourist Board while the conference was going on already (www.srilanka.travel).

Sri Lanka's government is showing a rather contradicting picture in these days, including the ICAAP: the colorful opening ceremony with a rather erotically ballet performance does not match with the strict morale setting with regards to not showing 'skin' in the public and the prohibition of prostitution, versus ongoing sexual exploitation and abduction of children and the loss of freedom of speech: 11 journalists have been murdered during the last two years. The critique previous to the ICAAP and Interfaith pre-conference IIPC announced publicly that the government would use those events only to detract from the ongoing discrimination and conflict in the North and East. Despite the governments' target to boost tourism, income was only gained from the big hotel and transport operators to whom the conference attendees were channeled. Overnight staying at small family run guesthouses was an exception if at all.

The alternative traveler should think about a visit to Sri Lanka twice looking at a similar conflict-human rights setting like in Burma/Myanmar. The devastating situation of roads and streets in the capital (excluding the so-called *development zones around shopping centers*) and the lack of appropriate health services for people living with HIV/AIDS (according to a member of the YMCA-SL during IIPC) must raise concerns. All the money seems to go into the war – and who suffers most are the poor and discriminated.

Football for Women! FiFa in South Africa gives challenging signals

allafrica.com/stories/200708060480.html and *BuaNews (Tshwane)*

Just in time for the upcoming celebration of UNWTO's World Tourism Day with the theme “Tourism Opens Doors to Women” an corresponding news was posted on South Africa's FIFA WORLD CUP in 2010 and the expected business advantages for women in that context. A leading national bank encouraged female entrepreneurs to grab the opportunities but urged all to seriously consider the sustainability of their tourism businesses beyond the month-long soccer tournament. According to bank officials, “barriers to entry are relatively low in the tourism industry”. There is a number of support tools available to women entrepreneurs as tourism is one of the high priority industries that is expected to benefit handsomely from the tournament.

However, ECOT's partner **Fair Trade in Tourism** says children may be sex targets for the 2010 visitors (allafrica.com, 14 August 2007) which would have huge social consequences for society. The executive director of the nonprofit organisation, Jennifer Seif, said that “the mega sporting events have a certain footprint of attracting mostly male foreigners” who often wanted to engage in sex with children or younger people. Seif said SA was a “watch spot” for child-sex tourism.

"Tourism is a key economic growth sector in developing countries such as SA. The social consequence is that tourism enables child-sex tourism." According to the Police Child Protection Unit in Johannesburg, about 28,000 children are engaged in prostitution. End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (Ecpat) estimates that a quarter of Cape Town's street children are involved in sex work.

According to BBC News (June 23, 2007) benefits from Foreign Direct Investment (FID) in south-central Africa are best seen in **Zambia** where tourism is said to be a basis for prosperity and economic sustainability. Today, many make their living on the fringes of the booming tourism industry following the increased aid following the Gleneagles G8 summit. However, the sector is facing major challenges: small entrepreneurs are by far not gaining enough for their living. People from remote indigenous villages have been sliding at the expense of some of the major developers.

Zambia, one of the world's poorest countries, hopes to see the number of people employed in the sector increase significantly. That would require a million tourists annually by 2010. Will the country manage to organize that tourist inflow with an ethically and sustainable development approach? For now, tourism aims at high-paying guests.

But how will communities gain from tourism development? Will Zambians be prepared to face the increasing threat of HIV and AIDS in tourist destinations, and will measures be taken to prevent displacement of farmer families being forced into migration for-scale tourism developments which are likely to be followed by sexual exploitation of women and children? Not to speak of the need to consider the climate change impact of long-haul flights' carbon emissions which will further accelerate desertification in Africa ...The "unpolished gem" (quote Tourism Authority), Zambia, seems in need of capacity building and a fair trade tourism approach – otherwise foreign currency gains will only improve the country's income balance but not the wellbeing of the local population.

Should troubled East Timor be a tourism paradise ?

(Reference: www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/JAK252853.htm)

After the EU's support for the government elections in East Timor (Timer L'Este), it has become quiet around that island, just a few hours flight east of the Indonesian island Bali. The only overseas visitors to East Timor are foreign troops, journalists and aid workers. Security is still a big concern and some tourist places even had to be closed down. However, locals stick with the tourism-dream and intend to attract westerners, Singaporeans and Thais to the mountains or for diving.

Early attempts to build up tourism were rocked last year after the sacking of 600 rebellious soldiers triggered violence that killed 37 people and drove 150,000 from their homes. Although East Timor has never been a tourism destination, the situation of about 30,000 displaced people reminds us on Sri Lanka. The tents, right next to the airport or in squares in the town centre, show the harsh reality. With an estimated 50 percent unemployment rate, a gang culture among bored youth is growing being reflected in travel advice from Australia to avoid all "unnecessary movement".

So, where does tourism fit in that picture? According to President Ramos-Horta, who won a Nobel Peace prize (Reuters), East Timor needs to focus on fighting poverty and improving security. Wouldn't that be a task for the UNWTO ST-EP initiative then?

World Indigenous Day

(www.minorityrights.org/, <http://topics.developmentgateway.org/indigenous>)

As the world marks "Indigenous Day" today, **Minority Rights Group International** (MRGI) is urging holiday makers to put pressure on governments and individuals whose activities it says have deprived the less privileged of livelihood due to tourism. The group warns that in many countries with tourism industries, minority and indigenous communities have been forced out of their land in order to build wildlife and nature resorts. They continue to be denied access to their ancestral homes and rarely benefit from the income generated through tourism. A compromise between development and the rights of indigenous people must be found, be in Kenya, Rwanda, Australia, Nicaragua or India – to name just a few 'hot spots'. MFGI has embarked on a campaign indigenous people. One of MRGI's key things is called **Trouble in Paradise**, a case that was launched before the African Commission on Human and People's Rights since 2003. All around the world, tourism

developments are continuing to displace indigenous and poor people – projects of *ex-clusive* and *ex-cluding* tourism are further widening the gap between the rich and the poor in our societies.

Insight Chiang Mai

Two controversial Chiang Mai mega-projects from ex-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's administration - an elephant reserve and a cable car to Doi Suthep - have been postponed indefinitely due to the possibility of negative effects on the fragile ecosystem of the Doi Suthep-Pui National Park. According to The Nation newspaper, the Night Safari and the pending projects have created conflict and consternation amongst Chiang Mai residents. But Chiang Mai Night Safari will remain open for the time being. Management of the Night Safari will be transferred to Thailand's Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, and there is a possibility that an advisory committee made up of local residents will be created in order to involve the community in the initiative. Locals say the Doi Suthep-Pui National Park, overlooking the city of Chiang Mai, has been consistently eroded over the years by various governmental and private organisations, and is under threat by the continued development proposals. (www.bangkokpost.com)

Announcements

Tourism – a tool for peace building: The upcoming CONTOURS magazine (September/October edition) presents views and experiences of renowned tourism activists looking into tourism's possibilities and challenges in peace building and for a peaceful society. Order your copy: contours@ecotonoine.org. Publication Date: October 5th, 2007.

Camp for Climate Action 2007 is a resounding success!

A successful 24 hours of climate action culminated in an action flurry. This marks the end of an incredible week of action, workshops and sustainable living. Thanks to everyone who has shown support! Read more about direct action during the Climate Camp... (www.climatecamp.org.uk/)

Tourism opens Doors to Women: This year's World Tourism Day on 27th of September will be hosted by the Government of Sri Lanka and look into tourism's potential to empower women from an economic perspective (www.unwto.org/wtd/eng/menu.html)

ECOT and its partners will publish a joined press release highlighting the threats of modern tourism development in the war and Post-Tsunami setting of that island.

International Coastal Cleanup just weeks away

Ocean Conservancy is gearing up for the next International Coastal Cleanup (ICC), coming to a beach or waterway near you September 15, 2007. There's still time for you to get involved. Last year 358,617 dedicated volunteers in 68 countries removed seven million pounds of debris from the ocean, rivers, and lakes. Become part of the solution to pollution, register for this year's cleanup at: <http://www.oceanconservancy.org/icc>

Olive Picking Program 2007 - A program for Civil International Solidarity with Palestinians, 21st - 30th October 2007

Once again, the Alternative Tourism Group (ATG) and the Joint Advocacy Initiative of East Jerusalem YMCA and YWCA of Palestine (JAI) are organizing an Olive Picking Program in Palestine between the 21st of October and 30th of October, 2007. info: www.palestinecampaign.org