



**ADB Working Paper Series**

**BLUE OCEAN TOURISM IN  
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC:  
TRENDS AND DIRECTIONS  
BEFORE THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS**

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**Abstract**

Tourism has played only a marginal part in the blue economy of the region of Asia and the Pacific. Most Asian and the Pacific islands and island states have sought some form of tourism development. Promoting tourism and finding markets has usually come from hotels, travel agents, and national and regional tourism bodies, all of which can be remote from local people. Remote areas and islands are disadvantaged. Resorts can alienate land, and occasionally marine resources and contribute to a coastal squeeze. Tourism generates employment, but not always for local people, and spawns a considerable informal sector. Linkages with agriculture are hard to generate on islands; hence much food is imported. Tourism projects may be sensitive to environmental management. Diverse outcomes reflect the nature of the islands (as independent states or peripheral places); their social and economic status; the scale and structure of development (from backpackers and national parks to resorts and cruises); the willingness of tourists, tourism entrepreneurs, and government agencies to engage with local people; previous experience; and the ability of tourism to meet the need for sustainable development. COVID-19 brought an abrupt end to buoyant cruise ship tourism, and the closure of national borders led to the demise of island tourism. Typically, in Vanuatu and Samoa, resorts, restaurants, and other components of the formal and informal sectors closed down. Much employment was lost (especially of women), creating development problems at every level, alongside a reversion to self-reliance, raising questions over the future of tourism industries and national and island economies.

**Keywords:** tourism, Pacific islands, blue economy, employment, incomes, environment, coronavirus

**JEL Classification:** Z32

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Growing recent interest in the blue economy has raised questions about where tourism might fit in and play a key role in maritime development on a local and global level. New emphasis on a future blue economy has largely focused on growth, technological change, and the role of deep-water activities in mining and fisheries. This paper examines recent trends in tourism, especially on islands in Asia and the Pacific, and presents an overview of contemporary development issues. The people of small islands and small island states invariably value tourism as a potentially growing source of income that offers a positive image. This reflects a transition in many small island developing states (SIDS), and islands within larger states, from the productive to the service sector. Island tourism has grown substantially since the global economic boom of the 1970s. By the 2010s, the arrival of the People's Republic of China as a new and substantial source of international tourists, and the rapid expansion of cruise ship tourism, had substantially changed the reach and impact of tourism in the region (Connell 2018b). However, what had been a period of growth in many parts of Asia and the Pacific came to a dramatic stop—the ultimate external shock—early in 2020 with the global spread of COVID-19. Ironically, the pandemic was partly facilitated by the tourism industry and the reason for its collapse. This paper considers the past and future of tourism in islands in Asia and the Pacific, and concludes with reference to Vanuatu and Samoa, since, embedded in the ocean, they exemplify both the problems of tourism development and the opportunities for it. The paper finally reflects on the unprecedented challenges of the post-COVID age.

Asian and Pacific economies include some of the most recent islands to have embraced tourism due to costs, distance from markets, and intervening opportunities, hitherto well-known structural and scalar disadvantages (Connell 2018a). Islands do, however, usually have comparative advantages in terms of clean beaches, unpolluted seas, warm weather, and water, and at least the vestiges of distinct cultures. Cheaper airlines, higher incomes, and longer and paid vacations have involved once distant and isolated islands. Conventional wisdom has long been that tourism offers economic benefits alongside social and environmental costs. However, few detailed and recent studies provide valuable insights into the role and impacts of tourism. Hence this paper offers an overview of tourism in mainly Pacific islands, which are often better documented as they participate at the edge of the blue economy, and examines the unique and dramatic challenges they face following the devastating consequences of COVID-19.

## 1. LIVING ON THE EDGE?

Some Asian islands, notably Bali, have received overwhelming tourism numbers. In SIDS such as Vanuatu and Samoa, much smaller numbers have nevertheless meant tourism has been the largest contributor to GDP for several decades, substantially in excess of the value of any exports (Connell 2013). Very small islands such as Rapanui (Easter Island) and Pitcairn, seemingly bereft of any other economic activity, have tourist economies (McCall 2008; Amoamo 2011). Once remote islands, like the Loyalty Islands (New Caledonia), the Marquesas (French Polynesia), and Aneityum (Vanuatu), have increasingly benefited from cruise tourism. A few have profited from distinctive resources whale sharks at Oslob, Cebu (Lowe 2019), the potential for surfing (Porter, Orams, and Lück 2015), supposedly authentic and exotic cultural traditions, or an active volcano in Tanna (Vanuatu)—to acquire a competitive edge.

However, the impact of tourism is varied. Most Asia and the Pacific islands have changed quite slowly and remain on the periphery, distant from conventional tourist circuits,

without distinctive cultural or natural attractions, or perceived as unsafe or expensive. Some remote Pacific islands, like Niue, have literally and metaphorically failed to make the right connections, despite a quarter of a century of endeavor (Connell 2007). Others have failed to attract significant tourist numbers mainly because of isolation. Numerous examples exist of islanders constructing tourist accommodation and somewhat forlornly waiting for tourists to arrive. Intervening opportunities, inadequate airline connections (and thus costs), and ineffective marketing to counter sometimes biased media coverage exclude certain places, such as Timor-Leste, despite reasonable accessibility to a large potential market (Currie 2016).

Tourism is inherently uneven, and impacts vary even on small islands. It can be centered on just a few islands, such as the Mamanuca and Yasawa islands (Fiji) and the Isle of Pines (New Caledonia); yet even in some remote islands, tourism may be virtually the only source of cash income (Connell 2015; Connell and Rugendyke 2008; Graci and Maher 2018). Hence islanders are invariably anxious to develop a tourism industry, especially since the combination of tourism and formal sector employment is favored as a reliable, clean, relatively pleasant, and supposedly easy source of income compared with local alternatives. Several SIDS, and many islands and their residents, are simply bypassed by tourism. Thus tourists at the Komodo National Park on Komodo island (Indonesia), intent on seeing the famous Komodo dragons, stay in nearby urban centers on other islands, ignoring the lone village. A handful of carvers and boat crews are the only village beneficiaries; villagers are without the relevant skills, knowledge, or training opportunities to compete with vested interests elsewhere (Hitchcock 1993; Walpole and Goodwin 2000). Incomes can be concentrated in the hands of relatively few households and amongst already relatively well-off households and social groups.

Tourist numbers and their impacts usually increase over time. Some local people benefit while others become alienated by the experience, and parts of the tourist economy may pass out of local hands. That may occur where 'resorts' and cruises become dominant. The initial gains from small-scale tourism are outweighed by the economic, environmental, and social costs of what increasingly becomes mass tourism, and the marginalization of those once at the core of the industry. Kuta, in Bali, in the 1960s a small village destination for backpackers and surfers on the Asian overland trail, evolved by embracing new tourist niches (from raves and honeymoons to whitewater rafting, camel safaris, and literary festivals) that accommodated the needs and whims of all kinds of tourists: it reinvented itself to become 'whatever you want it to be' (Connell 1993, 652). However, local people played a declining economic role as more distant Javanese and international interests constructed hotels and other facilities and secured employment. Agricultural land was absorbed into the tourist industry as Balinese were displaced, yet most Balinese retained crucial elements of local culture, despite its being diminished, transformed, reinvented, and globalized for the tourist gaze (Howe 2005). As Kuta changed, other parts of Bali responded quite differently; some specialized in particular tourist artefacts, including Australian didgeridoos for a European market (Gibson and Connell 2005), while Nusa Dua became an enclave of expensive, elegant hotels. Across one island, the form and impact of tourism varied enormously as people adopted mixed responses to tourism and tourists according to their perceptions, needs, abilities, location, and resources, and the desires of governments, tourists, and tourist companies.

The diverse tourism lifecycles in Bali show that the impacts of tourism are more complex than any simple model can address, and that the agency of tourists and local people, and of governments and distant entrepreneurs, plays a crucial role in outcomes. Occasionally, even on islands dominated by tourism, village benefits may be few. In

Nusa Dua (Bali), and Denarau and the Coral Coast (Fiji), where tourist developments are increasingly likely to be within resort enclaves and tourists have limited contact with the world beyond the resort perimeter, incomes from employment are the principal gain from tourism. Ironically, the most exclusive resorts in the world are on some of the most isolated islands, such as Turtle Island and Wakaya in Fiji. All obvious needs are satisfied within the resort, almost all payments are made outside the country (such as for accommodation and travel), and local people gain only from some lease payments and employment. Retention of tourist expenditure is minimized. However, several such resorts, notably Turtle Island, have a high ratio of employees to guests and hence make a substantial contribution to employment, while also seeking to operate through environmental principles. In Bali and elsewhere, with the rise of tourism from the PRC, various versions of zero-dollar tourism minimize local tourist expenditure.

## 2. EMPLOYMENT AND INCOMES

Tourism employment does not usually require high education levels (but, conversely, little training exists to enable career advancement) and is labor intensive, creating many jobs (though few are well-paid, with promotion prospects; hence many are taken by migrant workers, but also by women, where alternative wage labor may be scarce). It further generates activity in other sectors of the economy (especially in services such as construction, retail, and transport). Trends toward luxury resorts have increased the labor-intensive element, though managerial staff are often expatriates (Shakeela, Ruhanen, and Breakey 2011). Much employment is in the informal sector, especially where the industry is relatively new. As tourism develops, outsiders often displace local people, especially vendors, rather than work alongside them, a situation also true of accommodation and land ownership. A characteristic of the tourist industry is ease of entry, but also intense competition, especially for such informal sector activities as food vending, kiosks, guides, bicycle and surf-board rentals, and prostitution. Over time, restrictions may be placed on informal sector workers, reducing their income-earning ability, as the informal sector is seen as the antithesis of up-market tourism or its workers are considered to harass tourists. Informal sector workers were banned from the planned resort areas of Nusa Dua on Bali, and on Koh Samui (Thailand) were kept away from stores and hotels that offered similar goods (Williamson and Hirsch 1996). The informal sector is constantly made unwelcome by the more powerful: it is opposed for what is seen as the inappropriate imagery it offers and for its 'threat' to formal sector economic activities (though the reverse is more usually true).

Frequently, competition exists for good jobs. While many tourism projects hire local workers, distant workers are sometimes preferred in the belief that they work harder than local people and are less involved in local social and domestic activities that disrupt continuous, formal employment (Williamson and Hirsch 1996). Local people may be disadvantaged by their lack of relevant skills and knowledge, the absence of training opportunities, and the interventions of external vested interests. Where tourism has grown, people migrate from elsewhere, not just as workers but to become land, hotel, and service owners, exemplified by the rapid arrival of hoteliers from Australia, Timor-Leste, and Jakarta in the small town of Labuan Bajo in Flores (Indonesia) (Erb 2005). At Koh Samui, expatriate Westerners (*farang*) were involved, and resented, from the earliest days as bar and bungalow owners, diving instructors, and, more marginally, as prostitutes and drug dealers (Williamson 1992). Only rarely have local people been able to effectively resist the incursions of others seeking to take advantage of valuable resources. The return of once local people may produce similar discontent.

Although more prestigious jobs are usually held by men, tourism provides formal employment opportunities for women where these may otherwise be rare, which enables some empowerment even where that employment is routine and menial. In the small tourist industry of Samoa, 80% of workers in the formal tourist industry are women, and the proportion of women in the informal sector is probably even higher. Transport is almost always a male arena, and taxi driving is the only component of the industry where men outnumber women (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1994). Generally, tourism offers women new opportunities for social mobility, greater control over household incomes, and, in some contexts, a break from the patriarchal society. Women usually play an important role in cultural performances. However, even where women have played multiple roles in the tourist industry as guides, entertainers, food preparers, and handicraft sellers, as in Namuamua (Fiji), their incomes were less than half those of the men, who had different roles in the industry, notably in transport (Tokalau 2005). Here and elsewhere, women were more likely than men to use their incomes for community objectives rather than individual goals.

Even where the impact of tourism is slight and returns from tourism low, income may be a significant proportion of all cash incomes in a remote place. On Beqa island (Fiji), individuals could receive the equivalent of \$10 for four days' work, but since no other cash earning opportunities existed on the island, this was invaluable and worth competing for, and those who had tourism employment were envied by others (Burns 2003). Moreover, as in many small ecotourism projects, the income generated remains in the local community and is often spent on basic needs, while the use of local materials and expertise in ecotourism projects further concentrates income locally (Connell and Rugendyke 2008). When incomes increase, divisions and tensions are more likely to follow.

Incomes are more uneven as tourism develops and competition increases. Competition for tourist employment and income may be most intense where few alternatives exist. On Beqa, as more villagers sought to obtain contracts to perform fire-walking, they became more desperate to obtain contracts with hotels, and so undercut each other in the market and gained less income (Bigay et al. 1981). Elsewhere in Fiji, there have been (sometimes violent) conflicts between villagers over who has the right to ferry surfers, for significant incomes, to a popular surfing spot, a dispute centered on land and marine tenure (Harrison 2004). Where income gains are limited to only some people in a community, resentment may be considerable. Islanders living next to the Komodo National Park, soon perceived skewed benefits, mainly going to immigrants from other parts of Indonesia (Walpole and Goodwin 2002). Similar problems led to the demise of one of the most successful custom villages in Tanna (Robinson and Connell 2008), and created much tension and disharmony over the growth of cruise tourism in Aneityum (Vanuatu) (Cheer 2017). Where income derives from joint activities, such as the performance of fire-walking in Fijian villages or village stays in Flores (Indonesia), and is retained for village projects rather than a small sum being given to each household (Burns 2003; Cole 1997; Lin 2012), the rewards are visible and long-term survival may be more likely. This is rare and frustrations are frequent.

Occasionally, the local benefits from tourism have been largely positive and relatively equitable. Tap Mun Island (Hong Kong, China), with the decline of agriculture and fishing, saw its population decline rapidly from the 1960s, from around 5,000 to 100. Recent tourism has brought in large numbers of weekend visitors who spend money on food (in restaurants and grocery stores), souvenirs of dried fish and seaweed, and water taxis. Local people have gained enough income to ensure a feasible and stable island livelihood, retain a 'cultural connection with the sea', and maintain 'their traditional lifestyles for most of the week without interference or interruption by tourists', and have an 'acceptable balance between meeting modest economic needs and optimal lifestyle opportunities' (McKercher and Fu 2006, 521). Similar circumstances exist in the Yasawa islands (Fiji), where small-scale but regular tourism and incomes have reversed migration flows (Connell 2015). In both Tap Mun and the Yasawas, the principal beneficiaries have been external package tourism operators. Benefits from tourism are usually uneven, as people and groups with better connections and education, and more land, finances, or entrepreneurial skills, have advantages (e.g., Su, Wall, and Jin 2016). 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 critical components of the industry such as hotels, restaurants, and car hire. As tourism grows, local people are likely to receive a declining share of the overall income gains from the industry.

### **3. ACCOMMODATION AND LAND**

The most rewarding economic activity for islanders has usually been through the provision of accommodation, especially where tourists enjoyed, or made do with, simple, basic accommodation of local materials in the search for cultural experiences. However, that phase is largely over, and to convert houses into more superior accommodation, or build separate tourist accommodation, potential entrepreneurs and hoteliers require hard to obtain capital. In Koh Samui, 'bank loans are only given to those able to provide security; land is the most common security offered and this has enabled land-rich people to enter the tourist industry as entrepreneurs' (Williamson and Hirsch 1996, 194). Even developing basic tourist accommodation favored those already relatively well off, with land in attractive areas. As tourism expands, the need for more capital makes local access difficult.

Over time, much local-style accommodation has been replaced by modern accommodation, and local owners displaced by distant owners. In the 1970s, Batu Ferringhi beach (Penang Island, Malaysia) was characterized by fishermen's cottages that were the main form of tourist accommodation; two decades later, all had been replaced by hotels and resorts. In the 1970s, many parts of Bali, notably Kuta, were characterized by home-stays (losmens)—family owned houses with three or four rooms for tourists, owned by local Balinese; within a decade, almost a third were owned by other Indonesians (Wall and Long 1996). As tourism grows, local people are more likely to be displaced from their homes, from their land (required for hotel resorts, highways, golf courses, etc.), and from the informal sector as tourism creates demands for higher, specialized standards of service and facilities. Taxis displace motorcycles. Local people may even be displaced in cultural performances if their repertoire is not sufficiently exotic. Reversals in favor of local people are rare, despite resorts and governments professing to be supportive.

As tourism expands, land use and ownership may become contested, as distant interests seek to buy land and establish large hotels and resorts (which may have repercussions for marine exploitation and conservation). Local people have usually fought against land alienation, but have not always been averse to short-term profits from land sales. Governments have frequently facilitated land acquisition by companies, not always legally, to enable large-scale tourism development. On the main island of Efate (Vanuatu), a high proportion of coastal land has been sold off to foreign investors, ensuring that the best land and the largest, most profitable tourist ventures are in foreign hands while local small-scale ventures are marginalized (McDonnell 2018; Slatter 2006). Likewise on Coron island (Philippines), local elites have sought to develop coastal resorts and evict local fishing communities under the pretext of ‘cleaning up’ tourist sites (Fabinyi 2020). Typically, the poor are the first to be excluded (Su, Wall, and Jin 2016). Samoa offers a rare example of the development of large hotels and resorts being thwarted by landowners who refuse to relinquish control of communally held resources. Local families have been able to build low-cost accommodation, consisting of thatched, open-sided beach huts (fale) in prime coastal locations. Although beach fale tourism attracts backpackers rather than high-spending tourists, the economic benefits are retained locally alongside high levels of local ownership and participation (Scheyvens 2006, 2008). Despite their location, such small-scale tourism ventures have reasonable capacity to adapt to climate change (Loehr 2020; Parsons et al. 2018) and are potentially more resilient than more modern resorts; however, developing effective partnerships with larger businesses elsewhere is usually essential for sustained development (Movono and Hughes 2020).

The increased value of land for tourism poses other problems. Such land is primarily coastal, often of relatively high agricultural value, and is habitat for coastal fisheries, where valuable infrastructure is located. Low-density resorts are most likely to alienate land (and sometimes sea) from local uses, and may intensify erosion and contribute to a ‘coastal squeeze’. Where tourism is an intensive user of coastal land, that may result in net welfare losses (Nowak and Sahli 2007). Occasionally, land of little local productive potential and value, such as low-lying sandy areas close to the coast, becomes of great significance for tourism. Tourism tends to highlight already existing land tenure inequalities, where those with greater areas of land and status may benefit to the exclusion or marginalization of others, introducing new inequalities between local people and outsiders.

## 4. LINKAGES

At different scales—and whether internationally and locally—the more remote places cannot easily benefit from tourism. Intervening opportunities and high costs discourage visitors from island states such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, while within-state tourists are less likely to visit outer islands, knowing little about them, preferring to stay put, or without enough time or money (Cassidy and Brown 2010; Connell and Rugendyke 2008). The extent of local involvement in management and the kind of tourist, whether package tours or individuals, explain varying degrees of economic leakage. Tourism stimulates development in other economic sectors—notably transport, agriculture, fisheries, and handicrafts—but multiplier effects are smallest in small islands where goods are more likely to be imported and where tourism exists in enclaves. Local taxi services have flourished in most island tourism destinations and not been replaced by external interests, and driving is a preferred occupation. Small-scale industry, such as the manufacture of bread, soft drinks and beer, stores, and restaurants have all grown in response. Collectively, linkages with production, accommodation, and handicrafts, and

both the formal and informal sectors, boost household incomes and add diversity and flexibility to household survival strategies. As with employment, the small-scale nature of some of the linkages may change local power structures and sometimes increase the economic role of women.

A significant proportion of income generated from tourism leaks from islands or never reaches them. Holidays are booked with overseas travel agents; airlines, cruise ships, hire cars, and most hotels are usually owned (or franchised) by transnational corporations, while construction materials, fuel, and labor may be imported. Payments made locally may be repatriated when food, and especially drinks, are imported, alongside such tourism artifacts as swimwear, surfboards, snorkels, and scuba gear. Where tourism markets are small, consistent linkages with agriculture, and especially fisheries, have proved difficult to develop; in SIDS, neither agriculture nor fisheries has grown substantially in response to tourism. Foreign-owned hotels and fast-food restaurants usually have reliable global supply chains of food and drink independent of local producers. Hotels seek a regularity and quality that local suppliers have not always been able to meet, although resorts have usually sought to stimulate local production, to encourage good relations with local people and gain a convenient, regular supply of fresh food. In the Pacific, even 'island nights' with 'authentic' local foods rarely tempt tourists to try them, and actually require more imports (Dixon and Jamieson 2005; Scheyvens and Laeis 2019). The integration of agriculture with the tourist industry has been disappointing, usually because of low volumes, uncertain supplies, and inaccessibility. Large resorts are least likely to be linked to local producers (Scheyvens and Russell 2012). Although in several places tourism has crowded out fishing, resulting in fisher folk taking jobs in tourism and so reducing the potential for linkage, the attractions of fresh fish have still enabled a wider fishing industry to be rather better integrated with the tourist industry.

Between 40% and 85% of tourist expenditure leaves the islands, the lowest proportions retained in the smallest islands (Connell 2013). So great has that leakage been, especially because of foreign ownership, that, as in Fiji, some have questioned the value of tourism, with its social costs, as a worthwhile development strategy (Rao 2002). That is especially so where public infrastructure provision has favored tourist regions. Ironically, the most luxurious and expensive resorts, such as Wakaya, are almost totally insulated from their surroundings (on private islands purchased by foreign companies). All-inclusive resorts owned by international chains—classic enclaves—have taken similar forms, stressing that everything is available within the resort. As tourism grows, resorts tend to replace locally owned accommodation, and land alienation displaces others.

## **5. SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

Throughout the process of broad economic change, island societies and cultures have also evolved, but in an even more complex manner. Culture has never been static and was evolving long before the advent of tourism, yet tourism has often accelerated existing processes of change. In some contexts, it has contributed to a revival of material culture. Visual culture (art, dance, and music) may be transformed in quite different ways: it may be reinforced and strengthened, embellished and changed in form (by shortening or adapting more lively and exotic components), abandoned, or even invented, with simultaneous conservation and dissolution.

What was once in the course of being abandoned may be revitalized for tourist consumption. Thus the Sa people of Pentecost island and the villagers of Yakel on Tanna (Vanuatu), regarded as more traditional than others on these islands, are the main recipients of tourist income because of their retention of distinctive and marketable customs (Robinson and Connell 2008). Local cultures, such as that of the Moken ('sea gypsies') of southern Thailand, are adapted, embellished, and staged at particular times for the tourist gaze. The Trobriand Islands are renowned as a locus of traditional values and potential authentic experiences in Papua New Guinea (MacCarthy 2016a, 2016b). Tourist guides on the island of Alor (Indonesia) actively promote it as an island of black magic (Adams 2004). Various 'cultural villages' have sprung up on the fringes of Port Vila (Vanuatu) purveying 'kastom': dance, music, carving, and traditional medicine. At a national level, tourism agencies also shape images that almost always imply cultural (and scenic) distinctiveness, hinting at the cultural capital that might be acquired from observing tradition and difference and that is particularly evident on islands. Gewertz and Errington (1991, 28) have pointed to the wider paradox in New Guinea where 'tourists were drawn to Chambri to see those less developed whereas the Chambri sought to attract tourists so that they could be more developed'. The maintenance of tradition, even in an artificial form, poses problems for the sustainability of tourism when residents seek to use their tourist income to purchase elements of modernity.

Tourism has hastened modernity, and the economic gains from tourism have often been used in much the same way as remittances, usually on improved consumption, housing, and technology (e.g., Connell and Rugendyke 2008; Kerstetter and Bricker 2009; Scheyvens and Russell 2012). Social costs have ensued—uneven development, conflicts over land and incomes, abandonment of culture (and its role in social organization)—while some relatively new phenomena have appeared, such as prostitution and, less obviously, crime and an increase in sex tourism and HIV/AIDS. In the Maldives, 'luxury resorts have been contrasted with the high overcrowding, poverty, malnutrition and substance abuse of ordinary residents' (Shakeela and Weaver 2012, 1343), emphasizing the relative deprivation. In Rapanui (Easter Island), where annual tourist numbers vastly exceed the local population, the outcome has been described as 'a run-away materialism [where] individual avarice and virulent consumerism are undermining social cohesion' (Fischer 2005, 257, 260). Social change is rarely so dramatic, however, and usually merely accelerated by tourism. Indeed, critiques of the social impact of tourism have often been an external response to the loss of visual culture rather than a recognition that the most cherished values, centered on kinship, were usually resilient while tourism enabled new and positive means of self-representation. Social change has brought positive and negative consequences. Income from tourism that enables access to education, water supply, and so on is welcomed. Typically on Pari island (Indonesia), tourism has brought jobs, incomes, and better access to services, but reduced social cohesion, as competition has developed and decreased adherence to traditional customs (Kinseng et al. 2018). Change and resilience have been contemporaneous, tourism having brought a series of interconnected and sometimes paradoxical outcomes as culture and tourism become increasingly intertwined.

## 6. ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

Tourism has multiple environmental impacts. Change is inevitable where facilities must be constructed, but is less visually intrusive and damaging to the environment than many other forms of development. In some cases, this may result in a subsequently improved environment, where governments, hotels, NGOs, and villages undertake various forms of conservation and land and marine management. Several island hotels have been in advance of governments in stimulating environmental conservation when it became evident that this was crucial to the tourist industry (White and Rosales 2003). In contrast, some Asian island sites, including Boracay (Philippines), Koh Phi Phi (Thailand), and Komodo (Indonesia), have recently been temporarily closed to tourism after environmental degradation became excessive, while several islands in the Caribbean and Mediterranean, such as Santorini, have been the victims of too much tourism (e.g., Horowitz 2019; Sarantakou and Terkenli 2019). The Tidung Islands of Indonesia, only thirty kilometers from Jakarta, have experienced a recent decline in tourism primarily because of considerable environmental degradation (Hayati et al. 2020). The islands of Phu Quoc (Viet Nam) and Koh Rong (Cambodia) appear to be fast following this trend. Ironically, tourists may be more supportive of environmental stability and management than some local people, though their expectations and appreciation vary enormously.

The correlation between tourism growth and environmental degradation is usually strong. By the end of the 1980s, rapid growth of tourism on Kuta had outpaced the development of tourist infrastructure so that drainage, sanitation, traffic congestion, and air, water, and noise pollution were all problematic (Wall and Long 1996), alongside the visual pollution of poles, posters, neon lights, and garbage. Island tourism has placed considerable pressure on reefs and coasts through reconstruction (e.g., seawall and marina development), reclamation, and recreational uses. Inadequate environmental planning and management have not prevented sand mining, land clearance, and other deleterious activities, including golf courses, clearance of coastal mangroves (removing their value as protection and fisheries habitats), coral reef damage, and pollution from solid, liquid, and chemical waste. Coastal erosion has followed the removal of mangroves and the development of tourism infrastructure, as on Denarau (Fiji), despite attempts to stabilize beaches using dykes and seawalls. Recreational and tourist use of coastal land has alienated potentially or formerly productive land.

The sheer numbers of visitors and watercraft can threaten the carrying capacities of diving sites, and may result in pollution, over-fishing, and overall environmental and aesthetic degradation. Much of the waste is generated by the tourists themselves. That is particularly the case close to metropolitan areas, as in the Tidung Islands, Indonesia (Hayati et al. 2020). Numerous studies have demonstrated the harmful effects of tourism on reefs, directly through trampling and anchoring boats, and indirectly through waste deposition. Wetlands have been dried out. Golf courses, spas, and swimming pools are particularly demanding of fresh water, sometimes on islands where it is already scarce (Skrimizea and Parra 2019). Tourists are disproportionate consumers of water and energy. Economic gains have often been at some social and environmental cost.

Climate change poses particular problems for island tourism because of rising temperatures, bleaching of coral reefs, coastal erosion, and an increased risk of vector-borne diseases. In some destinations, such as Fiji, tourism operators are seeking to manage the environment to reduce and mitigate the impact of climate-related changes; in locations such as the Maldives and the Seychelles, however, this is absent since the industry assumes that profits can be made in a shorter time period than climate change (Connell 2013). Yet, in a final irony, as management has responded to the 'litaney of

ecological impacts' on island environments, long haul air travel contributes to climate change so that, in a small way, 'island tourism is contributing to its own demise' (Carlsen and Butler 2010, 3), revealing both the 'Maldivian dilemma' and the paradox of 'last chance tourism' ('see it before it disappears') in Tuvalu and elsewhere (Farbotko 2010). Although tropical islands are the most likely places to be negatively affected by climate change, future tourism is more likely to be affected by socio-economic influences of various kinds.

## 7. CRUISE SHIPS

The rapid growth of cruise ship tourism, notably a twenty-first century phenomenon, and especially in east Asia and the Pacific, has put increased pressure on islands that are relatively accessible to major Western tourism markets, particularly in the Caribbean. It has also extended the reach of tourism to once largely isolated islands, notably in the South Atlantic. Increasingly large ships offer economies of scale, leading to reductions in the cost of cruises and, in turn, opening up new markets. Some Caribbean islands with populations of less than 100,000 receive more than a million cruise ship passengers a year (Connell 2013). In the region of Asia and the Pacific, islands closest to Australia—notably Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji—have been the major beneficiaries. Some outlying islands within those states, such as the Loyalty Islands in New Caledonia, Mystery Island in Vanuatu, and Kiriwina (Trobriand Islands) in Papua New Guinea, have gone from having virtually no tourists in the twentieth century to becoming intermittently overwhelmed by them. Since cruise liners bring their own accommodation, the capacity of the islands has increased substantially, but the economic benefits have been disproportionately less substantial.

In Caribbean island ports especially, numerous cruise vessels can contribute to overcrowding on land, putting pressure on environments and contributing to reduced satisfaction amongst residents, tourists, and cruise ship visitors, resulting in local opposition to the industry in some island states. However, SIDS have a weak regulatory position against the oligopolistic cruise ship industry, wholly owned distantly by giant global corporations, and attempts by host countries to secure greater revenue by regulation or imposing taxes have 'led cruise operators to remove the offending islands from their itineraries' (Moberg 2008, 124). Only already wealthy islands, notably Bermuda, have regulated the number of ships. Such situations became evident in parts of the Pacific in the late 2010s as countries sought to attract cruise ships in what was seen by some as 'a race to the bottom' (Hampton and Jeyacheya 2020, 15), where the benefits gradually diminished.

The newest cruise ships offer an ever-increasing range of onboard attractions and services, so that the cruise ships are the primary attractions and destinations, and actual destination ports and islands are less important and enticing, enabling cruise companies to increase onboard revenues and consequently reducing local income generation. Increasingly large ships have become 'spaces of containment... built for revenue capture' (Weaver 2005, 165), and revenue has increasingly been captured on board (Cheer 2017). Simultaneously, cruise companies have sought to buy or lease particular islands, often uninhabited, to concentrate all land activities (and expenditure) in their own facilities. Begun in the Caribbean to capture revenue, the practice has now spread to the Pacific. In 2019, the Royal Caribbean line was moving toward developing what it touted as the 'world's first carbon neutral cruise destination' on the private island of Lelepa (Vanuatu), officially in partnership with the local people, to be called Perfect Day at Lelepa. Wider economic benefits were likely to be minimal.

While cruise ship visits do not generate the full-time employment of land-based tourism, they offer various short-term economic opportunities for the local provision of goods (particularly café food and handicrafts) and services (especially transport and tours). Ship-based tourism incurs fewer costs and lower financial risks than land-based hotel tourism, and creates fewer visible environmental pressures. The costs of marketing, accommodation, electricity, water, and waste disposal are largely external. However, ships place pressure on water supplies and generate waste streams including sewage, grey water, and hazardous wastes (and hard to trace illegal offshore dumping), along with air pollution.

By the end of the 2010s, the cruise ship industry was increasingly being viewed negatively as both environmentally more hazardous and economically less beneficial to destinations than had been assumed, although warnings had been in place for several decades (e.g., Smith 1988). Nevertheless, as security issues concern many tourists and cruise ship passengers are rather older than most tourists, until 2020, cruise ship tourism appeared likely to grow faster than any other form of tourism. The advent of COVID-19 overturned that perception and resulted in cruise ships suddenly being perceived as floating petri dishes. On several ships, the virus spread amongst passengers and crew (and was then transmitted on land, resulting in passengers being prevented from disembarking) as management appeared to have learned little on health care from previous incidents of Legionnaires' disease and norovirus on ships, despite prior warnings (e.g., Rossi 2018). Since most cruise ships operate under flags of convenience, with home ports not reflecting actual ownership, they are poorly regulated for workplace health and safety, and environmental management (Mahoney and Collins 2020). Two thirds of all cruise ships are registered in just three countries: the Bahamas, Panama, and Bermuda. Almost all cruise ships quickly became ghost ships, empty floating hotels without clientele. In their destinations, employment in ports and in a range of services, from cleaning and markets to restaurants and taxis, disappeared.

## **8. CORONAVIRUS AND TOURISM IN PACIFIC SIDS**

While various facets of globalization have influenced tourism in recent decades, nothing has had a more dramatic and devastating impact on tourism in Asia and the Pacific and elsewhere than the emergence and spread of COVID-19 early in 2020. Being an island, however, had advantages; the Pacific SIDS and their islands were much less directly affected than their continental neighbors, and outer islands were unaffected. Such circumstances were quite different on islands that were political dependencies of distant states (such as Tahiti and Guam) and on most Asian islands. By mid-April, when many countries had reported tens of thousands of deaths, the Pacific SIDS reported just 248 detected cases (and seven deaths), more than half from Guam. Several states, including Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga, and the Solomon Islands, reported no cases, encouraging the belief that small tropical islands might defy global trends.

However, the global presence of COVID-19 was inescapable, and its impact on tourism was immediate. Most island ports were quickly closed to cruise ships, beginning with the Loyalty Islands in February (since New Caledonia was one of the first island states to detect COVID-19 cases). The Cook Islands first banned ships from visiting outer islands, recognizing the particular challenges of meeting any health crises on remote islands. All Pacific island borders closed in March and land-based tourism ended almost as quickly. A month later, many resorts had closed down, alongside related activities such as restaurants, diving shops, travel agents, and car hire companies.

The impact of closure was most severe in those SIDS with significant tourism economies, including Vanuatu and Samoa. By April 2020, the International Labour Organization had concluded that 'Pacific island countries like Fiji, Samoa, and Vanuatu, where the tourism sector revenues accrue to more than 50 per cent of total exports, are expected to face especially severe economic contractions this year' (ILO 2020, 3). Prior to the collapse of the tourism industry in April, both Vanuatu and Samoa were already facing problems. Samoa had experienced a major measles outbreak late in 2019 that had affected 5,700 people and killed 83, and had invoked a state of emergency only lifted early in 2020. Vanuatu had been devastated by Cyclone Harold early in April 2020, with considerable damage to northern islands. Agriculture was hit hard, with more than half the agricultural systems of the northern islands, which provide both income and nutrition, severely damaged. Neither country was well placed to cope with another disaster, and one that was unprecedented, unique, all-encompassing, and without a foreseeable endpoint.

Within two months, 70 hotels and resorts in Samoa had closed, leaving 1,000 people without employment, where there was little job security and no social security net. That represented about 12% of all formal sector employment in Samoa (Tahana 2020). Losses spilled over into the informal sector, including transport services, markets, and restaurants. The Return to Paradise Resort, one of the few hotels owned by Samoans, gave 100 of its 130 staff extended leave, retaining a skeleton staff of 30, but with reduced hours and roles. While many displaced workers could return to a more agricultural lifestyle, they had utility bills and no alternative incomes, since agriculture could not immediately be productive and marketable. Other hotels lost similar proportions of staff. The majority of the displaced workers were women. The overall outcome across the country was a considerable reduction in formal and informal employment, most serious around the capital, Apia, where much of the tourism sector was concentrated and where there was greater dependence on cash incomes, higher utility bills, and less ability to achieve subsistence support. Poverty increased, especially in the already disadvantaged informal sector, with no probability of future change.

In Vanuatu, the outcome was broadly similar: 70% of all tourism jobs were lost in just six weeks. In mid-April, a sample survey recorded a reduction of 2,077 full-time employees and 214 part-time employees, representing a 70% fall in full time employment and a 33% fall in part-time employment. Some 1,633 employees were placed on unpaid leave; 462 were given paid leave and 300 workers' jobs were terminated (Department of Tourism and Vanuatu Tourism Office 2020). The survey effectively excluded the informal sector, including cultural villages, market and handicraft vendors, and taxis. It also directly excluded the impacts of the disappearance of cruise ship tourism, of great significance in Vanuatu, which had provided income earning opportunities in the informal sector. As in Apia, the overall impact was greatest on the informal sector in and around Port Vila, where poverty was more likely to be experienced. All the available evidence suggests that what happened in Samoa and Vanuatu was broadly similar to that elsewhere in the Pacific, in such destinations as Fiji and the Cook Islands. As Pechan (2020) observed for Vanuatu, and as was true elsewhere in Pacific SIDS, there seemed little likelihood of any significant change to this in 2020. Some restaurants, resorts, diving stores, travel agencies, and other activities were unlikely to open again.

In both Samoa and Vanuatu, tourism has traditionally provided more than 40% of national GDP. The disappearance of tourism is a critical economic blow, compounded by cyclone damage, the effective stagnation of aid delivery, and the loss of remittances. More than 10% of the formal workforce have lost their jobs for the foreseeable future and large numbers of informal sector workers have lost livelihoods and, even more crucial,

income. Changes in Vanuatu and Samoa parallel what is happening elsewhere in Pacific SIDS.

In early May, New Caledonia launched a plan to encourage those who had retained their incomes to support New Caledonian tourism enterprises, but most SIDS are too small to sustain a domestic tourism industry. Elsewhere, initial policy formation was directed at developing means to support the tourism sector in the short term and, in the longer term, to stimulate diversification of the economy. Domestic financial support on the scale required to give lengthy support to the industry was not feasible in SIDS, despite the significance of the sector for domestic employment and foreign exchange, and the need to support regional airlines (Pechan 2020). Achieving greater diversity is challenging where the comparative advantage of tourism has long been evident. Tourism and construction have been the sources of economic growth in Vanuatu and Samoa over the last decade, and alternatives to tourism can be equally high-risk activities (Dornan and Newton-Cain 2015). Small-scale industrialization has failed. Agricultural exports are constrained by quarantine policies in Australia and New Zealand, and, as recent cyclones have shown, are just as prone to cyclone-related damage as the tourism industry is. Diversity, whether at household or national level, is invaluable but not easily attainable.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The variety of tourist experiences and outcomes is enormous across so many islands in the region of Asia and the Pacific. Where islanders have sought to participate in tourism, it has never been easy or equitable, as capitalism, competition, and centralization have increasingly characterized the industry. Even on small islands, tourism engenders competition as much as cooperation. Local involvement has never been easy; in most contexts, it remains true that ‘international tourism constructs as it commodifies, alienates as it appropriates, and dominates as it penetrates. Local authority is undermined, local empowerment is difficult to sustain, and local environments are changed for ever’ (Conway 2002, 120). Consequently, tourist-local relationships are often marked by ambivalence and tension as the balance of power shifts from insiders to outsiders. Islands (and SIDS) have never been homogeneous, and the uneven development that has often followed tourism has tended to build on existing inequalities where these relate to power, land tenure, and access to resources. New forms of social stratification, conflict, and inequality at the local level have been familiar outcomes, with vulnerable islanders often constrained by a lack of economic and social capital and comprehension of the increasingly global dimensions of the industry, preventing effective engagement with tourists and their intermediaries. Where tourist numbers have been considerable, few have been able to retain autonomy and any real degree of control over an industry that originates far from home, especially where domestic tourism is almost non-existent. The awful recent impact of COVID-19, almost entirely absent in Pacific island tourist destinations, provides the ultimate example of the catastrophic dependence of tourism on distant circumstances.

Nonetheless, in the Pacific islands especially, tourism has been a major contributor to the blue economy and may eventually be so again. Many places have benefited from the rise of tourism. Indeed, the populations of the islands of Hong Kong, China and the Yasawa islands, where emigration was previously depleting island populations, have survived only because of it. Several SIDS, like Samoa, Vanuatu, and the Cook Islands—no longer a ‘destination on the edge’ (Burns and Cleverdon 1995, 217)—have become dominated by tourism. Remoteness has been overcome, tourism has brought new development, and villagers have been able to remain on their home islands. Beyond

such fortunate places, where tourism has transformed island life in largely positive ways, achieving equitable and sustainable development through tourism has proved difficult. But that is no less true in other sectors. Retaining agency has been crucial. Indeed, tourism as a development option has increasingly been criticized for its failure to include local people in decision-making, to manage the environment, or even to ensure the distribution of some of its benefits to those who bear its social costs (Briedenhann and Wickens 2004; Cheer et al. 2017). Such criticisms are now attached to cruise tourism. Meanwhile, terrestrial tourism has been increasingly concentrated in and captured by resorts. Local people may 'perform' their culture in the resorts rather than alongside visitors to their villages: both place and culture are diminished and marginalized (Connell 2016). However, as terrestrial tourism has become concentrated around resorts, the growing cruise tourism industry has involved both capital cities and several remote places.

All that was in the recent past. Contraction has become absolute. No economic sectors are more sensitive to external shocks than tourism, and no shock has been more devastating than coronavirus, because of the abrupt ending of the entirety of global tourism and because 'conventional' shocks (such as coups, bombs, or cyclones) tend to be instantaneous rather than of indeterminate length. SIDS lacking diversity, where tourism has been the key component of the economy, have been devastated, both at the urban center and in remote islands where cruise ships had boosted local economies hitherto dependent on agriculture and remittances.

The future of tourism in Asia and the Pacific is particularly uncertain as the end of the coronavirus crisis is unpredictable and, as it remains in place, the infrastructure of the industry—airlines (particularly small national airlines), international resorts, travel agents, and cruise ships—may simply fold as debts mount. The collapse of airlines may render destinations inaccessible, and future fare structures are unpredictable, although packages will be in place and are already on offer. Market access will be valuable, set against the threat of being stranded far from home. Staycations may become particularly attractive. Hitherto unpopular destinations, such as Timor-Leste, may emerge, but market proximity may now be offset by uncertainties over medical care, and so marketing strategies may change. Yet paradoxically, and initially, remoteness may be positive, as remote places are more likely to be virus free and more attractive than crowded cities. Over-tourism is at least briefly a thing of the past. Many Pacific islands—and some entire SIDS—are coronavirus free, and potentially particularly attractive, though that is likely to troublesome island governments. Ironically, the resorts with the least direct economic linkage to the islands, such as Wakaya and Turtle Cove, may prove to be the survivors, since their owners will not go under and they are isolated cocoons: this may be a boost for conservation and a tiny silver lining in ravaged economies. Small elite cruises with affluent passengers are most likely to revive first, hinting at a future initially small and marketed as 'green'. Technology is unlikely to make the industry less labor-intensive. While islands' scale precludes substantial diversity, the recent experience of COVID-19 provides a harsh lesson that some degree of diversity and self-reliance is essential.

A multitude of possibilities and paradoxes exist, the future being shaped by psychological and emotional issues as much as economic and social factors. Oil and energy costs, political stability, and climate change remain uncertain variables. Tourism has always been uneven and unpredictable where islands are dependent on decisions taken elsewhere (whether by potential tourists, airlines, or cruise companies). That is true for both governments and tourists, evident in 2018 when Palau's valuable tourism industry collapsed after the PRC banned tourism operators from selling package tours to Palau while the small island state was unwilling to recognize the PRC. Island governments will seek new and expanded tourism markets in any possible form, whether through cruise

ship tourism, new niches (such as meetings and convention tourism, adventure tourism, or bird and whale watching), or new sources (the Russian Federation, India, and inevitably the PRC). That much has not changed. It may be that if Pacific islands can revive early, even small islands like Niue may be recognized and marketed by travel agents, but airline connections will need to redevelop and provide the necessary bubbles. Forecasting the future of tourism is inevitably problematic, and a vaccine may reshape all contemporary conjectures, but, if nothing else, islands are sure to remain attractive destinations.

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