

Foreword

My first encounter with backpackers was in the mid 1970s when I was a student in secondary school in Penang, Malaysia. In this so-called fully residential school, the students were allowed to go out during the day at weekends and I spent most of this time in the company of close friends, watching movies and hanging out at the backpacker enclave in Chulia Street where the ambience was lively. The hippies, as they were called then, were mostly friendly towards us while we were sharing their cigarettes and improving our spoken English. However, since they were smoking something stronger than cigarettes we were not surprised to see them inevitably being chased out of their cheap lodgings by the authorities. Nonetheless, and as a testament to their resilience, these hippies managed to find a refuge along the coast at Teluk Bahang, where the authorities allowed their new enclave there to flourish, given that it was secluded and isolated and therefore not likely to spread the hippy 'yellow culture' to the locals.

Fast forward to the early 1980s when I had just begun a new phase in life as a young academic. Looking for a cheap place to stay for what was to become my annual academic tour with my students, I stumbled upon the thriving backpacker enclave at Kampung Cherating Lama. My initial reaction was utter shock and disbelief as to how simple *kampung* (village) folks without formal education or training could be running successful budget accommodation for predominantly western youths! On my subsequent and frequent repeat trips there I learned that many of these hippies had become regulars, several of the women had married the local lads and a number of the local youths had spent months travelling in Europe fully hosted by their previous guests. This unique relationship between hosts and guests was totally different to what I had read in the literature, which was then heavily focused on the negative social impacts of tourism, such as displacement and marginalization of the local community. This led me to decide that I would make the study of small-scale tourism development my area of specialization. Needless to say, there is considerable interface between small-scale tourism development and backpacker tourism from both the supply and demand sides.

At almost the same time but on a different continent, Mark Hampton was pushed by wanderlust and lured to the exoticism of South-East Asia, where he not only backpacked but also studied backpacker tourism as a phenomenon. As if fated, our paths crossed in the mid 1990s at a tourism conference in Lanzarote.

What began then as a casual correspondence between tourism researchers – who coincidentally graduated from the same *alma mater* – soon blossomed into serious collaboration, which reached its apex in 2005, when both of us (through our universities) were commissioned by the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia to carry out research to formulate strategies for backpacker tourism. Since then I have had the pleasure of collaborating with Mark on a number of international joint research projects, organizing seminars and co-writing journal papers, primarily focused on backpacker tourism.

It is a fact that backpacker tourism has now been embraced as a mainstream research area and has increasingly attracted the attention of scholars who are focusing on a myriad of issues related to this phenomenon. In this light, Mark belongs to the pioneer group of tourism researchers on this subject, and his analysis of the economic potential of backpacker tourism is not only often cited but has also persuaded tourism planners and policy makers in developing countries such as Malaysia to shift their previously negative attitude towards backpacker tourism to a more receptive stance.

While there are already books on backpacker tourism, they are mostly in the form of compilations of papers presented by individual researchers at international conferences. In view of this, this book is timely, given the growing interest among tourism researchers on this subject matter coupled with the lack of an authoritative source of reference on backpacker tourism. Towards this end, this book provides a comprehensive analysis of backpacker tourism which has been incorporated in the official tourism policies of Australia, South Africa and to a lesser extent Malaysia.

While Mark's current travel needs might be more akin to that of a flashpacker, his personal experience as a backpacker has illuminated his candid and sometimes brutal review of the evolution of backpacker tourism and the idiosyncrasies of the backpacker given at the beginning of the book. In the subsequent chapters his thorough analysis, insight and scholarship are all evident as he discusses the many facets of backpacker tourism, ranging from backpacker trails to the institutionalization of backpacking. In essence the earlier part of the book celebrates the 'good old days' of backpacking as a rite of passage, when to be inquisitive about the Other was genuine and itineraries were spontaneous, albeit somewhat guided by the *Lonely Planet*. Subsequently, the evolution of backpacking from a counter-culture to a mainstream, institutionalized and even respectable market segment is discussed in the context of national development policies. Mark has certainly done justice to the subject of backpacker tourism in this authoritative book, which is well written in elegant prose and with wit and humour too. I am indeed honoured and thankful to be given this opportunity to write the foreword for this wonderful book on a subject that has fascinated me (and Mark too) for the last 30 years.

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