Chapter XV

E-Community-Based Tourism for Asia’s Indigenous People

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Abstract

Indigenous peoples are good for national tourism development in Asia because they present an exotic image that helps to differentiate countries from each other. However, tourism is far from being good for indigenous peoples, as they are often excluded from the revenues that tourism generates and are subjected to the environmental degradation and cultural pollution that mass tourism inflicts upon them. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the hands of such people can help alleviate some of this imbalance. By catering to the rising demand for authentic travel experiences that do not damage the environment, and in a manner that is under the control of the indigenous peoples themselves, ICTs empower local communities to operate small-scale tourism on their own terms. Once familiar with the ICTs, such people can go on to apply them to their special
needs, in accordance with international conventions concerning the well-being of indigenous peoples.

Introduction

Indigenous peoples are often used to promote tourism destinations. Their images and cultures are showcased as major attractions by national tourism authorities. Often, the indigenous peoples themselves have no control over or participation in this process, either in how their cultures are represented to the outside world, or in a fair share of the incomes that tourism generates. When visitors encounter indigenous peoples, they often bring with them images that are stylised and outdated, and they expect their hosts to live up to such falsehoods. Furthermore, by the time they reach their destination, tourists have paid their expenses to travel agents, tour operators and transportation services that have little or no connection with the indigenous inhabitants of the destination, who are left to scrape what meagre incomes they can from sales of handicrafts and light refreshments or from performing stylised versions of their traditional rituals. “Tourism has turned us into performers,” remarked one Kadasan/Dusun inhabitant of Sabah, one of the East Malaysian states on the island of Borneo.

Community-based tourism (CBT) is emerging as a mechanism for fostering locally based tourism operations, as opposed to those whose financial interests are located away from the tourist destination. CBT is already operating among a number of Asia’s indigenous minorities, including the Tay and H’mong of northern Vietnam, the Gurung of Nepal, the Kelabit of Sarawak, Malaysia, the Kadasan/Dusun peoples of Sabah, Malaysia, the nomadic herders of Kyrgyzstan and the multitude of indigenous ethnic minorities in northern Thailand, the Lao PDR and south-western China.

Concurrent with the growth of CBT, information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the form of telephones, computers, the Internet and radio, are increasingly being deployed in rural and even remote locations across the developing world. Innovative rural ICT programmes are being planned or implemented across Asia, bringing a wide range of benefits to poor people, among them better health care, agricultural support, government services, enterprise creation, distance education and e-commerce. Such programmes are usually deployed in the form of shared facilities in community centres, often called telecentres.

Electronic commerce for CBT, or e-CBT, operated from shared community telecentres, places ICTs in the hands of poor communities with the potential and capacity to provide satisfying experiences to tourists. Currently, there are very
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