

CONFERENCE REVIEW:
Critical Tourism Studies – Asia Pacific, Yogyakarta,
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Critical Tourism Studies – Asia Pacific (CTS-AP) is an international network of scholars who share a vision of promoting social change in and through tourism practice, research and education (www.criticaltourismstudies.com). CTS seeks to find new ways of understanding and transforming travel and tourism by locating it in its wider political, economic, cultural and social contexts. CTS embodies “more than simply a *way of knowing*, an ontology, it is a *way of being*, a commitment to tourism inquiry which is pro-social justice, equality, and anti-oppression: it is an academy of hope’ (Ateljevic *et al.*, 2007, p. 3).

The first CTS conference was held in 2005, but the 2018 conference in Yogyakarta Indonesia was the first CTS conference that took place in the Asia Pacific Region. The region is characterized by its socioeconomic, cultural, and political diversity (Dolezal & Trupp, 2015) and is a mix of mature, emerging and nascent tourism destinations (Hall & Page, 2016; Pratt & Harrison, 2015). Pacific Island Countries – in contrast to many nations on the Asian mainland – have narrow economic bases and thus, limited choice but to seek further development of tourism (Cheer *et al.*, 2018). Pacific Island Counties are well positioned to reap rewards from tourism investments, yet lack the critical lenses and experience (compared to Asia) required for planning and developing tourism sustainably (Movono, 2017). As such, the CTS movement and its communal networks ideally set itself as a hub for knowledge and information sharing which facilitates genuine exchanges on critical tourism issues that affect the Asia Pacific region.

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The conference was hosted by Gadjah Mada University and sought to progress the dialogue between different stakeholders from both academic and practical backgrounds. The conference theme *Re-Centering Critical Tourism Studies* suggested an urgent as well as a pragmatic and inclusive multi-stakeholder approach to discussing the issues surrounding tourism development in the Asia Pacific region that will be meaningful to its varied stakeholders, host communities in particular.

The themes covered by the keynote addresses represented a range of provocative topics and featured the following scholars and presentations:

- Kathleen Adams: On gateways and yellow brick roads: Rethinking travel and travelers in an era of (im)mobility
- Tim Edensor: Bidding farewell to ethnocentric tourist theory
- Ploysri Porananonond: Liminality and the play with water in Chiang Mai's Songkran festival
- Wiendu Nuryanto: Heritage, tourism, and millennials: Is it a new paradigm?
- Stroma Cole: Empowered or burdened? Gender and tourism development in Indonesia
- Chris Gibson: Critical tourism studies: Achievements, challenges, and prospects
- Regina Scheyvens: Tourism and Sustainable Development Goals: Continuing the myth of tourism as a sustainable industry?

Given the region's rich diversity it would be remiss of the organizers not to address topics such as heritage tourism, gender and development, tourism sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals. These topics remain as evidence of the negative socio-cultural and socio-economic impacts yet to be successfully

harnessed by developing economies and tourism-dependent economies. Two very important issues raised were that of liminality within tourism experiences and a move away from ethnocentric biases within the development of tourism theory. Given the existence of sacred expressions of culture and the presence of indigenous people in the Asia and Pacific region, these presentations offered a starting point for the inclusion of the marginalized voices in that region. Notably absent from the conference keynotes, however, was a representation from the Pacific Island region.

Generally, the regional focus of the conference panel presentations was on East- and South-East Asia with only six presentations focusing on the Pacific Island Region. First, Lisa Sadaraka in her presentation investigated the sexual harassment experiences of Cook Islands hospitality employees by customers to gain insights into what social and environmental factors influence this behavior. Her findings suggest that customer-perpetrated harassment in the Cook Islands is prevalent and can be linked to existing causality models. The second paper on the Cook Islands was discussed by Marcus Stephenson and introduced a qualitative study of the perspectives of the host community concerning the socio-cultural challenges aggravated by tourism. He showed the ways in which tourism is re-defining local cultural performances and dances, as well as cultural codes of behavior and moral codes of conduct. Lynn Beckles examined the value proposition of a heritage tourism niche in the Marshall Islands. The contested views of policymakers and practitioners are examined within this framework in an attempt to articulate and interrogate the actions that can be supported by the host community which would be critical to the facilitation of the development of a cultural tourism experience.

Apisalome Movono set the stage for three papers focusing on Melanesia. He assessed how tourism-related development has set the people of one Fijian village along two distinct development pathways. His research explores how preferential access to tourism benefits has created certain disparities within the community leading to diminished community solidarity. Another paper on Melanesia was presented by Alexander Trupp. His research examines the economic and socio-cultural impacts of souvenir and handicraft businesses in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. His findings show significant differences between the two destinations in regards to the representation of locally made products. Finally, Andreas Neef discussed the role of tourism in post-disaster response and recovery, the case of Vanuatu in the aftermath of tropical cyclone Pam in 2015.

In addition to the academic presentations briefly outlined above, the conference also facilitated two fascinating movie screenings and discussions. Hill-Smith's *Strange Birds in Paradise: A West Papuan Story* (2009) presents a country which on the one hand features a rich musical, cultural and natural heritage and on the other is weighed down by Indonesian military oppression. The other movie, the documentary *Waiting for John* (2015), directed by Jessica Sherry, tells the story of America's impact on the island of Tanna in Vanuatu and explores one of the last surviving Cargo Cults, the John Frum Movement.

To sum up, a hopeful and ambitious research agenda is possible given the range of issues addressed. This raises the question of the role of the conference as a space to inspire transformation. A collaborative approach is needed if meaningful progress is to be achieved in addressing the myriad of simultaneously occurring issues within a multi-stakeholder multi-disciplinary group of academics and practitioners. Already limited by its biannual schedule, radical and timely action plans must be developed if there is to be a meaningful shift to position this forum as a leading think tank for the realization of the economic, social and cultural development promise of tourism. Connections forged through the CTS conference have translated into the establishment of a Pacific Island Researchers Facebook group where networking, discussions and knowledge sharing are already afoot. Another positive outcome of the CTS conference is the fruition of the SDGs for Tourism Conference which is being organized by one of the CTS conference keynote speakers, Regina Scheyvens along with others including Apisalome Movono (CTS presenter). Such collaborations made through links made at the CTS conference will carry discussions and further the agenda of the CTS movement within the Pacific region and beyond. If the next moves are strategically planned, the regional CTS conferences promise to be a critical space to serve the diverse and multiple cultural interests and priorities in the development of tourism in the Asia-Pacific region.

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