

Chapter 1:

Introduction.

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A. Introduction.

This research report is about the outcomes and impacts that five village communities in Thailand, Vietnam and Borneo obtain from visits by a specialist tour operator- Intrepid Travel. The report also explores the causal factors that appear to determine the outcomes obtained by local people in these communities.

The report asserts that local people in village communities are receiving mixed outcomes from visits by Intrepid Travel groups. These outcomes are determined by a range of factors, some of which are related to the internal dynamics of the village communities while others are the result of Intrepid's style of travel. The report demonstrates that when given the opportunity local people are more than just passive recipients of Intrepid's trips and are actively involved in determining the outcomes they receive.

1.1 Introduction to topic.

Reports concerning the impacts of tourism are increasingly focusing on the roles played by specialist tour operators. (Scheyvens 1999; Ashley, Roe et al. 2001; Gordon and Townsend 2001). This focus is perhaps not surprising as specialist tour operators "are a rapidly expanding sector of the tourism industry, reflecting the increasing fragmentation of tourist markets where consumers want to experience something different." (Curtin and Busby 1999, p137)

Specialist operators are considered to be "medium sized independent companies, specialising in particular geographic areas or types of holidays." (Curtin and Busby 1999, p137) Although their focus may vary in regards to geographic areas or types of holidays specialist tour operators do share similar characteristics. These include: "(1) an obvious focus on natural and cultural experiences in combination with specialised marketing; (2) small scale facilities/ infrastructure that strive to respect the native genius and heritage of the place; (3) attempts at positive host-guest interaction and mutual understanding; (4) an emphasis on local control and

equitable dispersion of benefits; and (5) in the case of ecotourism, enhanced environmental quality, community cohesion and revitalisation.” (Albuquerque and McElroy 1995, p24)

Intrepid Travel, the specialist tour company used in this study, has many of these characteristics. Intrepid is a medium sized company that began taking small groups of travellers to Asia in 1989. Since its rather humble beginnings, the company has grown exponentially and now takes over 20, 000 travellers away each year; employs over 100 leaders in Asia, 40 office staff and runs over 170 trips to 14 destinations (2001).

Intrepid describe their style of travel as Responsible Travel. This travel style is a reflection of their core purpose which is to run trips that “enrich peoples lives by creating unique, interactive travel experiences... that are fun, affordable environmentally sustainable and benefit local communities.” (Intrepid Mission Statement)

The key features of this travel style include:

- Grass roots travel using all forms of local public transport where possible.
- Using small scale locally owned accommodation and homestays were available and using local restaurants and markets for dining.
- Employing western leaders who facilitate the company’s values to travellers and local communities, educating them in sustainable tourism practices. Intrepid also employ local guides to aid travellers understanding of local culture and etiquette.
- Having maximum group sizes of twelve, which allow travellers to experience, cultures at a grass roots level offering greater opportunity for cross-cultural understanding.

Researchers have used many descriptions for the type of trips that Intrepid run to small village communities in Asia. Some of these include indigenous tourism (Butler and Hinch 1996), ethnic tourism (Adams 1997), aboriginal tourism (Altman and Finlayson 1993), adventure tourism (Zurick 1995), ecotourism (Walpole and Goodwin 2000), community-based ecotourism (Drumm 1998), alternative tourism (Smith and Eadington 1994), or rural tourism (Lane 1994).

These new alternative forms of tourism have generally been touted as a panacea for development by a number of governments and large tourism organisations such as the World Tourism Organisation. Some of the claims made include, that such tourism brings impoverished rural village communities into the mainstream of development (Bayes 2002) and, that it provides them with increased income and other economic resources. Other benefits include, the preservation of fragile cultural and ecosystems and the creation of meaningful opportunities for cross cultural understanding and mutual learning.(Hatton 1999a)

However, some tourism researchers (Butler 1989; Cazes 1989; Albuquerque and McElroy 1995) warn that alternative forms of tourism could potentially be as negative as those created by conventional tourism. (Butler 1989) argues that alternative forms of tourism can potentially be more problematic than conventional tourism because they “penetrate further into the personal space of residents, involve them to a greater degree, expose often fragile resources to greater visitation, proportionally may result in greater leakage of expenditure and may cause political change in terms of control of development. (p13)

Unfortunately the lack of comparative studies and the ideographic and disparate nature of research (Pearce and Butler 1993; Cohen 1996) conducted on the impacts of tourism makes it difficult to go beyond general assertions and focus more specifically on the types and levels of impact that alternative forms of tourism maybe having on destination communities.

(Long 1996) is particularly critical of research on the impacts of tourism suggesting that “most of the research that exists has not lead to theories or well tested concepts about the social impacts of tourism and that...different contexts with varying types of tourism have made generalisations difficult.” (p5) As Wall suggests the problem appears to be that “few authors have taken the trouble to document adequately the types of tourism, the community characteristics or the nature of the host- guest encounters which give rise to these impacts.” (Wall 1998, p2)

More specifically Wall believes that much of the research conducted by academics has limited policy relevance to practitioners because they “fail to indicate how many people, of what

type, doing which activities, in communities with specified characteristics, in specific forms of host–guest interaction, result in particular consequences” (Wall 1998, p2)

The major feature of this study is its focus on the settlement form of village communities in less developed countries. This focus is perhaps overdue given that “more than half of humanity and the overwhelming majority of the worlds poor live and work in villages” (Taylor and Adelman 1996, p6) and the types of tourism occurring in these village communities are growing segments of the tourism industry.

However, while the broad concept of village communities is used to encompass the diversity of sites included in this study it should be noted that there are no generally accepted criteria for the administrative definition of settlements such as the village.

While there is no conclusive description of a village there are elements common to most definitions. These common elements include a focus on small scale settlements in rural regions, where the livelihoods or subsistence systems of village inhabitants still rely to some degree on activities involving the natural environment, whether it be some form of gathering (fishing, hunting, plant collecting); pastoralism or farming (Finsterbusch, Ingersoll et al. 1990). Often but not always the communities living in these settlements are bonded by kinship, political or historical ties. The communities included in this research and in the studies collected as part of the literature review contain these elements. Table 1.1 highlights some of the characteristics of the five village communities included in this study.

Table 1.1 Characteristics of communities include in the study.

	Location	Ethnic group	Livelihood strategies	Size of village	Management / political system	Changes in the community
Van	Mai Chau District, Northwest Vietnam.	White Thai.	Subsistence rice farmers. Cash crops such as maize, manioc, ground nuts.	120 households	Village cooperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road built in 1968. • Mains electricity in 2000. • Dominant role of village cooperative. • Increasing influence of Viet Kinh culture through media outlets. • Visits by tour groups began in 1993.
Skandis	Lubuk Antu District, Sarawak, Borneo.	Iban	Subsistence rice farming. Cash crop of Pepper. Hosting Intrepid groups. Working in major towns such as Kuching.	14 families who live in a communal building.	Village development and security committee called the J.K.K.K. Village headman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building of road to nearby settlement of Nanga Kesit. • Introduction of power in 1994. • Arrival of Intrepid travellers in 1994. • Establishment of Pepper gardens in 1984. • Introduction of schooling for all of the children in the community. • Involvement of the community in the Malaysian government system.
Khun Puai	Mae Wang District, Northern Thailand	Karen	Subsistence rice farmers. Farm labouring in Thai towns. Markets for Intrepid group.	62 households	Village chief.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road built in 1990's. • Building of Thai primary school. • Introduction of Christianity. • Inclusion in Thai administrative system. • Visits by tour groups began in 1980's. • Increasing influence of Thai culture.
Kiau Nulu	Renau District, Sabah, Borneo.	Dusan.	Tourism employment at Mt Kinabulu National park. Teaching in the local primary school. Subsistence rice farming. Cash crops such as spring onions, bananas, corn.	86 Households	Village development and security committee called the J.K.K.K. Village headman.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of Christianity. • Administrative involvement of the village in the Sabah Government System. • Introduction of educational facilities. • Introduction of electricity in 1993. • Employment for local people outside of the village. • Visits by Intrepid groups began in 1995. • Increasing influence of Malay culture through media outlets.
Baka	Muang District, Northern Thailand	Akha	Labouring work with Royal Thai Forestry Department.	9 Households.	No management system has evolved.	Village stays by Intrepid groups began in 2000.

1.2 Purpose and Scope of Research.

The broad aim of this research is to add some clarification to the literature available on the impacts that alternative forms of tourism create in destination communities. In response to the weaknesses identified by (Wall 1998) this study adopts a very focused approach by concentrating on the outcomes and impacts for **rural village communities** in less developed countries of visits from **specialist tour operators**. The research questions that guide this study are:

- What outcomes and impacts do village communities in less developed countries obtain from visits by specialist tour operators?
- What are the factors that determine the types and level of impact that village people obtain from visits by specialist tour operators?

The study attempts to answer these research questions by; firstly, completing a comparative review of literature available on the impacts of alternative forms of tourism in village communities and secondly, by conducting an evaluative and applied study on the outcomes and impacts for five village communities of visits from Intrepid Travel groups. The specific research objectives for the research were:

- To identify what outcomes local people in village communities obtain from visits by Intrepid groups.
- To identify what effect these outcomes are having on local people in these communities.
- To identify what causal factors determine the type and level of outcomes obtained by local people.
- To apply a comparative approach to identify patterns of similarity and difference amongst the case studies involved.

Completing this research is important for several reasons. The major reason is its benefit for Intrepid Travel. The information contained in this report should enable Intrepid to modify the practical implementation of its trips so that it reduces any negative impacts while making its trips

more positive for local people. The applied and evaluative nature of the research will also be of benefit to other specialist tour operators concerned with the impacts created by their trips.

From a research perspective it is hoped that this study will add some clarification to the burgeoning literature available on the impacts created by alternative forms of tourism and on possible methods that can be used to evaluate the impacts of tourism in rural village communities.

The report contains ten chapters. Chapter two provides a background to assessing outcomes, impacts and causation and describes the research design, data collection methods, data analysis and limitations of the study. Chapter three includes the comparative literature review of the outcomes and impacts for rural village communities of visits from alternative forms of tourism. In chapters four to eight each case study is presented separately while chapter nine offers a comparative review of these chapters and outlines the patterns of similarity and difference amongst them. Chapter ten concludes the report and offers recommendations for Intrepid Travel.

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