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## Cultural Identity: Tourism Innovation and Management

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### Abstract

Sustaining local cultural identity the growing tourism market is an issue often overlooked, but a key factor in successful management of sustainable tourism development. Furthermore the call to action is critical. A distinctive tourism tactic, the Road Not Taken Tours (RNTT) answers this call. Developed as a pilot project in Lombok Indonesia, RNTT offers new opportunities for tourism destinations and a potential model for tourism innovations in developing countries. RNTT provides face-to-face exchanges between local residents and foreign tourists for short visits with simple activities. The pursuit preserves cultural identities as local status changes from those who serve to those who lead. Additionally local communities preserve cultural identity and develop from sustainable economic opportunities. This endeavor, RNTT, is not a voyeuristic experience. RNTT authentic approach offers new opportunities and solutions in tourism destinations addressing the need to preserve local cultural identities together with long-term business strategies. This paper will describe the driving force behind this idea developed in Lombok Indonesia, define the innovated approach to preserving cultural identities and elucidate management issues attached to community development projects.

**Keywords:** cultural identity, tourism management/ innovation, Indonesia

## 文化的アイデンティティ：ツーリズムに於ける革新と経営

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## Introduction

Tourism is a growing market but business booms go bust. Successful tourism impacts communities positively and also brings problems especially the deterioration of local cultures. A unique solution for the preservation of cultural identity is described herein. The Road Not Taken Tours (RNTT) offers new opportunities for local residents and tourists. RNTT presents authentic encounters by providing face-to-face exchanges. Locals become leaders whose cultural identity is sustained and supplemented by long term business strategies. The pursuit preserves cultural identities locally and creates understandings and friendships globally. These unique excursions provide meaningful experiences transcending economic and cultural differences. The paradox is that when tourism is personal, everyday experiences are powerful. Additionally, providing tourists unique and authentic opportunities in foreign or alien settings is an amenity not to be forgotten. RNTT provides everyday tourism events whether a game, or a simple meal, or coffee on the *berugak* that preserve cultural identities. The experiences create lasting memories and a great story waiting to be told. It is a lesson learned and social responsibility shared. It is the sustaining joy found in simple friendships.

Bali Indonesia is a world-renown tourist destination, and just to the east is Lombok Island. Lombok has been recently designated one of the best places to visit in Indonesia and a tourism corridor has been established for development bringing more benefits and bothers. Radiant blue oceans, opulent resorts, restaurants, crafts centers and a plethora of tourism providers flank the narrow tourism corridor. And just off this beaten path in roads not often taken by tourists, local people live in poverty without opportunity. West Nusa Tenggara Province ranks 28 out of 34 provinces on the poverty levels in 2015 (Hatuina, 2015). North Lombok Regency, for example, is where the infamous Three Gilis or islets can be found, namely Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno and Gili Air, as well as the third highest active volcano in Indonesia, i.e. Mount Rinjani. Majority of tourists, domestic and foreign, that visits West Nusa Tenggara Province flock to the Northern part of Lombok Island. It is estimated 447,797 foreign tourists and 55,544 domestic tourists stayed in North Lombok Regency in 2014 bringing in 75% of the regency's internal revenue from tourism (BPS KLU, 2015). Nevertheless, North Lombok Regency is the poorest regency in West Nusa Tenggara Province with 36% of its community living in poverty seemingly untouched by the profit of tourism (NTB Province, 2016). Tourism is a significant business and according to ASEAN, the market will increase 30% on average per year. The tourism market contributes 5% of ASEAN GDP and 3.5% employment in 2011. More specifically, the number of both domestic and foreign tourists to West Nusa Tenggara Province continues to increase every year. Visitors have more than doubled from 619,370 in 2009 to more than 1.3 million in 2013 (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi NTB, 2016). Clearly there is a growing market.

Locals beat a path to tourism opportunities leaving cultural identities behind. There is no value or esteem for indigenous culture by locals or tourists. Furthermore excursions into local communities

are rare or voyeuristic in nature with indigenous identities objectified or relegated to subservient social status.

There are many problems with prosperity. Tourism can propel deteriorations of local culture and as such programs that preserve cultural identity and provide direct economical benefits are needed now. This paper will provide a brief explanation the driving force behind the RNTT idea developed in Lombok Indonesia, and define the endeavor and management strategies.

### **Driving Force - Inspiration in Lombok Indonesia**

Research conducted in 2014 was the RNTT seed, planted in the rich green of Lombok Island Indonesia. This grew into the concept of a sustainable tourism model and the RNTT pilot project. It was the very nature of this research that was both inspiration and model for RNTT.

The initial research was a historical investigation of the leadership legacy from 1973–1976 in Lombok Indonesia. Armed with a few anecdotes, some photos and hoping to get lucky, the Lombok research search began in 2014. While there was no direct evidence of a forty-year old leadership legacy other realities were revealed.

Two research methods were employed: snowball sampling and wait-and-see. These research techniques allowed for a local perspective of people, places and food. Observing the local cattle market, wandering in old Ampenan, the Suranadi Hotel and the Port of Lembar discovered friendly helpful people without money or means. Invitations for coffee or a meal or just simple conversations was common.

The experience had nothing and everything familiar in a smile. Simple pleasures. The grace and ease of the Lombok people was charming. Yet their circumstances were disarming. These face-to-face encounters were not only memorable, they were inspirational.

Such was the stimulus to create a tourism venture providing similar authentic experiences. Framed in a sustainable tourism business model, the concept was to develop local leadership and in doing so preserve indigenous cultures. Additionally by providing long-term business solutions, community development would also be served.

### **Road Not Taken Tours (RNTT)**

RNTT offers new opportunities for tourism destinations through authentic encounters. Essentially the endeavor seeks to create face-to-face exchanges for short visits with simple activities. A testament to the validity of this concept is the popularity of television programs such as Anthony Bourdain's production, "Parts Unknown" (2013) where discovery in common places, but off the beaten path are great stories. These kinds of experiences put people together, one-on-one. Unique and common at

the same time, meaningful experiences transcend economic and cultural differences. The pursuit preserves cultural identities locally and creates understandings and friendships globally.

The objectives of RNNT are to create new opportunities in tourism destinations; preserve local culture; develop local leadership; sustain cultural identity; community development; provide jobs; greening the community including cleaning up the garbage and general upkeep; international exchanges and friendships; and ultimately world peace. RNTT will accomplish objectives by providing personal small-guided tours for two to six tourists from opulent beach resorts into poor communities, which skirt these resort developments. Tours will last about two to three hours and will have a variety of activities to choose from. For example, a tour will start with shopping in the local market and learning about indigenous food. Then go to the home of a local resident to prepare and eat a simple meal. Other tours will experience simple crafts with a snack and drink. Others will visit a preschool for games and treats. Creativity, seasonal considerations and leadership from the local people will provide inspirations to a myriad of these activity-based tours. RNTT will incorporate transportation, guides, and translators. But most of all, tours will include smiles with memories made and stories to be told.

Cultural identity is life. It is dynamic, both fluid and established. However there is core esthetics that remains. In developing countries such as Indonesia, in the rush for development, identities are not served. RNTT long-term business strategies depend on the preservations of local cultures. Development impacts and changes communities. Consequentially, education and training for in these tourism destinations will be important both to preserve local cultural identities and to maintain the tour experiences as an indigenous authentic experiences. For example, in Lombok (pilot project location) the majority of local residents are Muslim. Understanding traditions such as the headscarf for women can be explored and appreciated.

RNTT is a simple design to attain a complex and crucial set of outcomes. When diametrically opposed people, the poor and the rich, come together a spark will ignite a path to sustainable development.

## **Innovation Management**

RNTT is essentially set up to help communities develop and reap financial and non-financial benefits from tourism while preserving the cultural identity and local customs of the community. Thus, RNTT distinguish itself from profit-driven tour operators in that it aims to preserve and present culture in its natural form rather than the simulated, somewhat stilted artificial performance setup for tourists' pleasure (Pendell et. al, 2016). The vision for RNTT is to establish a simple business model based on community development and sustainability. This simple business model must be viable to be set up in other places, and making room for improvement and adaptation. The business model is designed for

maximum efficiency and easy transfer of knowledge for a sustainable project.

As local endeavor RNTT aims to be a broad based sustainable tourism business that integrates stakeholders: local residences; community leaders; and local university. Local residents with modest means will host visits. Community leaders provide pivotal roles in training, coordinating and managing community improvements. It is important that local residents fully understand the concept and an equitable sharing of business and hosting is implemented and maintained. The university will be a valuable resource in training and education for both local providers and as educational programs for students. The benefits from single tours will grow into a sustainable community improvements as well as nurturing cultural identities. Additional communities will be added to increase impact in other tourist destinations.

RNTT is committed to the local residents and indigenous cultures. As in any other company, the mission and goals of RNTT will be continually integrated. Educational in maintaining local cultures as well as developing other tours will cultivate leadership and pride in local residents. This serves local residents and provides authentic experiences as a long-term business strategy. Nurturing and discovering cultural assets will serve locals and in doing so, sustainability.

The RNTT pilot project implemented in Lombok Indonesia will serve as the template tourism business, which can be implemented in other regions. Additionally, the model can be exported worldwide. The Starbucks® of sustainable tourism, authentic, simple experiences are appreciated in all circumstances, and the value-added to long-term development for communities and indigenous cultures are clear.

## **Management Issues**

Problems in managing the community may arise from the inconsistency and willingness of the people to continue to cooperate and collaborate with the project. Knowledge of the culture and local wisdoms are essential to maintain a continuation. In Sasak culture, as in many other indigenous cultures, the elders of the community must be asked for permission before any endeavor is carried out within the community. Nevertheless, it still is not a guarantee that the community will be committed to the project in the long run.

Proponents of community development view community development activities as having the potential to combat poverty and social exclusion (Lee, 2006). It is therefore encouraging that there is potential benefit, financial and non-financial, for the participatory community involved in RNTT. However, RNTT in its development must remain committed to its vision of providing authentic experience to travelers and maintain cultural identity. As continued participation in the project reaps financial benefit, there is a natural tendency to improve and expand in order to acquire even more income. This in itself is not a bad thing. Nonetheless, preferred improvement should focus on

cleanliness, sanitation, and education. However, when the improvement is focused on expanding capacity in order to accommodate more tourist this may work against the vision of RNTT. The naturalness of that community living may disappear and replaced by a mass produced cultural exhibition. No distinction will longer be found between the cookie-cutter tourist destination and authentic community living.

Problems related to tourists or guests can take many forms. Guests that are not wearing the proper attire may insinuate disrespect and create insult for the community. This may well halt the project. Therefore, certain codes of conduct including dress code must be explained to the prospective guests. The tour operator must also adhere to the practice of explaining these codes of conduct to the guests. Many tour operators take a submissive attitude when dealing with guests in the effort to get a bigger tip. This practice runs contrary to the vision and objectives of RNTT of preserving cultural identity.

RNTT offers a unique approach to authentic tourism in significant ways. The tours are simple; lead by local residences; and last only two to three hours. RNTT are designed to be simple, easy, flexible and safe. Nonetheless, groundwork must be carried out in order to manage any foreseeable fallout with the project.

## Conclusion

The market growth is clear, however the future is blurred. In the rush for economic development consideration of indigenous cultures are disregarded. RNTT project pursues and preserves cultural identities locally and creates understandings and friendships globally. These unique excursions provide meaningful experiences transcending economic and cultural differences. Furthermore, local status changes from those who serve to those who lead and in the process acquire cultural pride, preserve cultural identity by providing sustaining and long term economic and community development.

In the context of exotic cultures, core esthetics is shared. Expanding the influence to protecting cultural heritages, the endeavor also provides pride in economic opportunities for local residents. The RNTT intends to elevate the status of local as leaders and preserve culture with long-term sustainable economic benefits.

RNTT offers new opportunities for tourism destinations by presenting authentic encounters with simple activities. The quintessential personal experience, in these everyday moments of shared compassion, everyday life becomes a rich institution of resources communicated across cultures.

In summary, respecting resources and cultures, both tangible and conceptual, provides clean environments, satisfying experiences and most of all a kind of prosperity whose long-term business strategies creating responsible and successful futures. An essence we all embrace. A real life experience in all its richness could be the best story of an exotic vacation. It is a lesson learned and social responsibility shared. It is the sustaining joy found in simple friendships. World peace is made

in such ways.

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