

Understanding Tourism

A Critical
Introduction

Kevin Hannam
& Dan Knox



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‘With this book Hannam and Knox have gone a long way towards elevating the study of tourism from the obscure margins of social science into a *bona fide* research area. They encourage us to think critically about the subject and successfully interweave dominant contemporary concepts to present tourism as a social, cultural, economic, and spatial phenomenon. Students will be sure to enjoy this innovative contribution which takes a ‘user-friendly’ approach and provides a useful pedagogic tool for those at all levels of study.’

Dimitri Ioannides, Professor of Human Geography, Mid-Sweden University and ETOUR

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Introduction**

**Kevin Hannam
& Dan Knox**



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For Kieran and Alexander

Seek and you shall find your illusions through the magic of tourism.

Amy Tan (2005) *Saving Fish From Drowning*. London: Harper, p. 147.

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1

UNDERSTANDING TOURISM: AN INTRODUCTION

Tourism is of central importance to social, cultural and economic lives in the twenty-first century. This book details the significance of the **practices** of tourist planners, tour operators, travel agencies and, above all, tourists and travellers themselves. The overarching aim of the book is to help you reach a point of understanding of the many worlds of tourism, as well as to introduce you to some of the more interesting insights of recent **research** and scholarship in the academic subject of tourism studies. This chapter is intended to not only welcome you to our book but also to outline the position from which we have written it, and to introduce ourselves (Image 1.1). We want to enliven teaching and learning in tourism-related degree programmes at universities everywhere, and we believe that this can only be achieved by successfully engaging students with the contemporary critical tourism studies literature in an accessible, readable and enjoyable way. If you happen to find yourself smiling, or even enjoying yourself as you read this book, please do not worry: we meant for that to happen. More crucially, however, we wish to present you with a reading experience that will challenge some of your own preconceptions about tourism and tourism studies.

We are interested in the ways in which tourism as a cultural activity blurs with or fades into other aspects of contemporary social, cultural, economic and environmental **experiences**. Hence, in this book we question simple binary structures that inform much academic writing and the overt rationality that pervades many tourism texts, and argue that there are many competing **interpretations** of the world. The sometimes very simple explanations given for tourist motivations in much writing on the subject need to be rejected in favour of a more nuanced discussion of the underlying power relations in tourism production and consumption, as well as how these structures are sometimes transgressed and subverted. In the contemporary world, basic models of tourism that do not problematise social categories and motivations are not just stale (and even boring) but also rather misleading because they frequently give deceptively simple answers to difficult questions. We would contend that, in many cases, they do not even ask the right questions, and frequently they do not ask sufficient numbers of

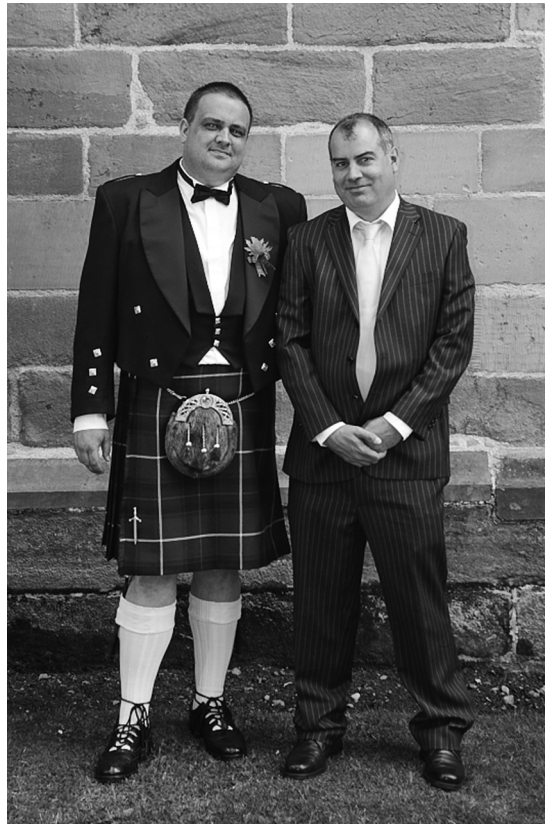


Image 1.1 The authors, Aberdeen, UK.

questions. The aim here, then, is to give more complex answers by asking additional questions, and by utilising critical theory to explore exactly what is happening in the worlds of tourism.

The study of tourism is a vibrant, innovative and interesting academic subject, although you would hardly know so from reading some of the introductory textbooks in the field. In their monumental text, *Tourism: Principles and Practice*, Cooper et al. (2005: 6–7) acknowledge that the study of tourism is ‘bedevilled by conceptual weakness and fuzziness’ and go on to note that ‘recent authors have been critical of this **“reductionism”**’. However, they then discuss at length an overall framework for studying tourism as a system adopting the reductionist model suggested by Leiper (1990) concerning just three elements: tourists, geography and the tourism sector. They go on to note the difficulties in defining tourism and, paradoxically, contrast demand and supply side definitions. Similarly, in his introduction to *Tourism Management*, Page (2006: 5) points to the ‘lack of

clarity and definition in how to study tourism, something that other researchers have defined as reductionism'. However, his book unfortunately continues to analyse the study of tourism as divided between supply and demand. So, clearly, authors are aware of some of the problems in the tourist studies literature but are uncertain as to how to proceed in a more critical and engaging way. This book is thus our proposal for a more thoughtful, critical and interesting study of tourism, and it is aimed more at students rather than at existing academics, who may be more critical of our philosophical approach (although, of course, we do hope they enjoy the book too).

OUR PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

We fully agree that tourism management matters and that the existing texts are valuable introductions to the *management* of tourism, but in this book we wish to *inspire* students not just to understand contemporary tourism from the binary of supply and demand perspectives, but also to encourage them to begin to think critically and question the assumptions inherent in much writing about tourism. While contemporary tourism textbooks are generally critical of reducing tourism to a simple set of propositions, they do by and large replicate this same reductionism in their laudable aim of making the study of tourism sensible and understandable to students. In contrast, in order to avoid making the same mistakes (though we may make others) we wish to start (and indeed finish) from the perspective that the study of tourism is always difficult and contested. So, if you are looking for neat models of tourism behaviour – be warned – look elsewhere, as we no longer find such lifecycle models particularly useful or insightful. Instead, we draw inspiration from Franklin's (2003) *Tourism* text, even though we feel that he does not go far enough, neither in radicalising and problematising the understanding of tourism, nor in making the material accessible to those new to critical theoretical perspectives. While he too 'considers general theories of tourism to be inadequate on their own' he draws predominantly upon anthropological approaches to overcome this problem. Our intention here is to search further and wider to incorporate information and ideas from disciplines as diverse as human geography, literary criticism, history, archaeology, sociology and media studies. Moreover, we would like this book to really *introduce* students to a new way of thinking about tourism.

In this context, then, we are acutely aware that the world we live in is fast-changing and full of transformations. Whether you are reading for a degree or undertaking research, you need to be equipped with knowledge and skills that enable you to think about these changes as they happen, and to apply

theoretical ideas to new practical problems as they emerge. We cannot confidently predict all of the changes that will occur within a dynamic cultural and economic activity such as tourism, but we can hope to provide readers with a set of tools for engaging with events after the publication of this book. Thus, this book should not be thought of as the definitive answer to students' questions about tourism, but rather as a starting point for an on-going project. Our account of tourism draws on many aspects of post-structuralist philosophy, not because it may be fashionable but because we do find it helps us to understand contemporary tourism as a set of complex, negotiated, contingent, blurred and incomplete practices and ideas. We also draw on the politicised aspects of tourism and tourism development to highlight how some views of tourism become normalised, legitimised and dominant as the result of their repeated use by governments, practitioners and tourists themselves. Such legitimisation of understandings is always at the expense of other more marginal and marginalised viewpoints. However, although we are politicised in our thinking we are not advocating any particular liberal, socialist or conservative political position: we seek instead to deconstruct many of the taken-for-granted positions held by thinkers and writers in contemporary tourism research. Following Nietzsche (1990), we hope that any hint of cynicism in this book is also very close to honesty. Our wish has been to write a book that truly develops the call for a critical approach to tourism studies, paying heed to the call by Pritchard and Morgan (2007: 11) that 'there remains a crucial challenge to develop conceptualisations of tourisms that encompass multiple worldviews and cultural differences and research praxis that recognises and reflects the plurality of all positions, practices and insights'. If the discipline of tourism studies is taking note of post-structuralist and other critical bodies of thought, it is only reasonable that the study of tourism at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in universities and colleges around the world makes a similar adjustment in terms of focus.

At the outset we ought to emphasise to students that our philosophical approach is premised upon the notion of the **social construction** of reality. We do not take this to the logical extreme of social **relativism** by suggesting that nothing in our social and cultural worlds is real, but simply assert that appearances of reality are influenced by thinking, writing, gazing and experiencing. We accept that there are objective facts about extant things in the world, but that the meanings we place upon these things are socially constructed: a beer may be a beer, but it has a whole host of social meanings according to the social context in which it is produced, poured and consumed. Over time, our apprehensions and mental representations of a product or service can take on new meanings as they are circulated

between individuals, in the media and in society. Meanings can become fixed, dominant or subordinate depending on the strength they acquire in different societies or cultural groups. Dominant meanings or understandings take on the appearance of truths and may become institutionalised and embedded within larger schemes of meaning and understanding, which are liable to change over time. While the notion of the social construction of reality is perhaps now commonly understood, in this book we also draw on broader post-structuralist philosophy, which helps us to further understand the contemporary fluidity of the social construction of realities that include the arenas of tourism. A post-structuralist approach seeks to avoid developing grand theories of everything in favour of a more critical engagement that investigates how different viewpoints are actually produced in contemporary society through relations of **power** at both macro and micro scales.

Thus, while empirical studies of tourism have grown rapidly in recent years, this has been mainly through case-study research that critiques tourism policies (R. Butler, 1997; Church et al., 2000; Desforges, 2000; Notzke, 1999). Such engagement with the practical consequences of tourism should be applauded, but we recognise that more sophisticated theoretical analyses of tourism are also needed (Davis, 2001; Hughes, 1992; Squire, 1994). Indeed, Dann (1999a: 27) argues that ‘unless issues are problematised – unless we acknowledge that our understanding is incomplete – we will never adequately address issues of tourism development’. The launch of more theoretically orientated and informed academic journals, such as *Tourist Studies* (Franklin and Crang, 2001), *Tourism Geographies* (Lew, 1999) and *Tourism and Cultural Change* (Robinson and Phipps, 2003), as well as a more explicit engagement with theory in longer-established journals such as *Annals of Tourism Research*, demonstrates that research into tourism has begun to take on board theoretical issues that have been the mainstay of other social sciences for some time. As Franklin and Crang (2001: 3) have pointed out: ‘tourism has broken away from its beginnings as a relatively minor and ephemeral ritual of modern national life to become a significant modality through which transnational modern life is organised’. This engagement with theory does not mean that tourism research will or should retreat into a theoretical ivory tower. By developing more sophisticated theoretical frameworks we may actually hear better the voices of people involved in the practices and processes of tourism development and management. We are firmly of the belief that critical, nuanced understandings of people and places should be central to an academic discipline that many see as being primarily vocational. The kinds of accounts offered in this book and the bodies of literature that we aim to

guide you through should be of the utmost importance to practitioners and professionals throughout tourism and related industries. This chapter thus reviews the importance of the recent engagement with theory in tourism research with reference to issues of **globalisation** and power (Hannam, 2002).

THE NEED FOR CRITICAL THEORY IN TOURISM STUDIES

Since tourism is integral to processes of globalisation both as an outcome and as a contributing factor, any analysis of tourism needs to take account of theoretical advances in the study of the processes of globalisation. As a result of processes of globalisation, virtually everyone now lives in a region that hosts tourism and such restructuring of places has resulted in greater flexibility, hybridity and difference (Potter et al., 1999). On the one hand, such additional differences have become evident because places have sought to position themselves as unique in relation to competing destinations: regions and cities that historically have done little to promote themselves now need a message to communicate to would-be visitors as they seek income from tourism. On the other hand, however, there has also been a process whereby places have become much more similar as a result of the progress of multinational companies, international popular culture and tourists themselves (Harvey, 1989; Ritzer, 2004). Indeed, Ashworth and Tunbridge (2000) point to the homogenisation of tourist-historic cities that occurs through standardisation, the repetition of successful models (e.g. waterfront regeneration) and what they call ‘catalogue heritization’. Increasingly, tourist destinations become more and more like home and more and more like each other, meaning that those responsible for promoting them have to work that much harder to generate a degree of the **exotic** (see Chapter 7).

However, Stebbins (2002, 2007) and Crouch (1999), meanwhile, have questioned the traditional division between tourism, **leisure** and **everyday** life, and Larsen (2008) has shown that holidays often involve socialising primarily with the people with whom you travel. Moreover, the growing literature on ‘visiting friends and relatives’ (VFR) tourism similarly examines the close relationships between vacations and everyday lives (Poel et al., 2006). In this context, Melanie Smith tells us that:

many tourists are actively engaging in the kinds of activity that they could quite feasibly do at home (e.g. shopping for global brands, eating international fast food, watching sport on satellite TV). Media pervade some people’s lives to the point that they watch their favourite soap

opera or football team play while they are in beach bars abroad. Work and leisure are scarcely differentiated as tourists increasingly check e-mails, carry around laptops, and are glued to the ubiquitous mobile phone whilst on holiday! (2006: 220)

The close ties and connections between what we do at home and what we do on holiday has been further explored by Knox (2009) in an account of **mass tourism** in the Mediterranean. If, in many cases, tourist behaviour is simply a manifestation of the same kinds of behaviour that people would engage in at home, then destinations and attractions need to have a definable experience to offer the visitor. Sometimes such experiences are not what we or local authorities would imagine or desire them to be (see Chapter 6).

Nevertheless many tourists revel neither in the exotic or the everyday but are in search of 'experiences' however imagined. This has been shown empirically by Nijman (1999: 155) who stated: '[f]oreign visitors no longer come to Amsterdam to seek refuge from persecution, in search of economic opportunity, or to marvel at the city's achievements as a "laboratory of modernity" as they did in the seventeenth century. Instead a growing number come to "let it all hang out" and enjoy the entertaining spectacle of "tolerance"'. As a result, a significant part of Amsterdam has evolved into a globalised cosmopolitan theme park geared to young adult tourists who watch other tourists rather than look at the city itself. Chang and Yeoh (1999) chart a similar process occurring in the re-working of Singapore as a themed and dynamic experiential tourist destination. The Singapore government has developed a policy that 'borrows' cultural resources from around the world in order to emphasise its contemporary image as a meeting place of modernity and exoticism. The Chinese government, meanwhile, has had an even more explicit policy of utilising tourism resources from around the world in its reconstruction of various foreign places in China.

In terms of the nascent experiential economy, recent research in tourism studies has also indicated that the processes of globalisation have also begun to transcend taken-for-granted environmental divides. For example, mass-market cruise companies now recognise that land-based resorts are their main competition. Ships are sold as the primary destination and as an experience in themselves, rather than the more traditional focus on the places along the way on the itinerary. As a result, cruise tourism has become more like non-cruise mass tourism. As Wood (2000: 349) argues, cruise tourism's 'distinctive characteristic of sea-based mobility has enabled it to participate especially fully in the processes of globalisation'. Lofgren's (1999) historical study of tourism similarly notes how globalisation has transcended sand, sun and sea to create the notion of the 'global beach'. Gale (2009) further backs this up with his study of the Plage, the synthetic beaches located on the

banks of the River Seine in Paris where office workers, tourists and local leisure-seekers engage in a simulation of beach tourism in the heart of the city.

THE POWER OF TOURISM

The globalisation of tourism also involves broader political questions and, importantly, the ownership of power (Hall, 1994). For example, Parnwell (1998) has linked the globalisation of tourism to issues of security in Myanmar (formerly Burma). He argues that tourism development needs to be viewed against the context of Myanmar's appalling human rights record. The military junta there is desperate for hard currency and is following the lead of neighbouring countries in promoting rapid tourist development. It has sought investment and respectability from the international community while simultaneously intensifying its exploitation of the Myanmar people. In many cases tourism development in Myanmar has thus led to the direct abuse of human rights. There have also been instances of forced labour on tourism projects, and forced resettlement in both urban and rural contexts. Duffy (2000), meanwhile, has examined how ecotourism development in Belize has been shaped by global networks involved in the illegal trading of money laundering and drugs. She focused on the ways in which political elites use informal and invisible networks to exercise economic and political power and how corrupt absentee foreign investors utilise tourism development for their own gain.

As the above examples suggest, globalisation has thus clearly led to a re-configuration of economic, political and cultural power relations. Perhaps, as a result, research into tourism has begun to focus more explicitly on the concept of power itself. In particular, this has meant a shift from the more basic political and economic concepts of power towards an examination of social and cultural relations of power in tourism (Mowforth and Munt, 2003) with particular reference to Foucauldian notions of power (Cheong and Miller, 2000; Hollinshead, 1999). Urry, in his classic text *The Tourist Gaze* (1990) was perhaps the first to draw explicitly upon Foucauldian notions of power. In particular, he focused on tourists' ways of seeing, the power inherent in their gaze upon attractions as well as the power inherent in the manipulation of tourism representations and experiences. Urry's account has been critiqued by MacCannell (2001) and others as tourism studies developed a multi-sensory perspective (Crouch, 2000). However, the notion of the **tourist gaze** remains strong and has since been extended with research into a number of mediated representations of tourism. For example, Goss

(1993) has examined the marketing of Hawaii, Bhattacharyya (1997) the guidebooks of India, Markwell (1997) tourist photography and Dann (1999b) contemporary travel writing literature. Hutnyk (1996), meanwhile, has examined how a combination of tourism representations, literary, photographic, cinematic and cartographic, enframe the tourism experience of Calcutta. There has also been some explicit connection with the conceptualisation of social relations of power within other areas of tourism research. For example, Mills (1991) has utilised Foucauldian concepts of power in her analysis of women's travel writing in the colonial context. Both Bennett (1995) and Aitchison (1999) have taken an explicit Foucauldian stance in their analysis of museums and **heritage** tourism development, respectively, while Beardsworth and Bryman (2001) also draw on Foucault in their analysis of zoos and **nature** tourism.

In their accounts, both Cheong and Miller (2000) and Hollinshead (1999), however, have sought to demonstrate the relevance of Foucauldian notions of power to tourism research more generally. They both argue that power relations are not a simple binary structure between the dominators and the dominated, but are omnipresent yet localised in their deployment, always unstable and constructed discursively as well as materially. They both question whether power should be identified with the tourist, and whether the exercise of power is exclusively repressive. Thus, Hollinshead's (1999: 15) rather hyperbolic account exhorts us to 'chronicle the history of constantly shifting forms of morality, judgement and repression in the management and development of tourism ...'.

Cheong and Miller (2000: 378), meanwhile, argue that 'power relationships are located in the seemingly non-political business and banter of tourists and guides, in the operation of codes of ethics, in the design and use of guidebooks, and so on'. In terms of tourism development strategies they recognise that in addition to participating in the formulation and implementation of tourism ethics, various brokers discuss and negotiate how far development should proceed, what type of development is optimal, and who should enter as tourists. In particular, they note that tour representatives exercise a fair degree of discretion in dealing with tourists, acting as the interface in terms of how they act or perform. Thus, rather than simply examining the power that tourists hold in terms of determining the directional strategies of tourism development, Cheong and Miller argue that tourists should themselves also be seen as the targets of specific relations of power:

because they necessarily operate from insecure positions. By definition, they are found on unfamiliar turf, and they often communicate at a

distinct linguistic disadvantage. In the course of sojourn, they are stripped of many of their cultural and familial ties and protective institutions and are exposed to new norms and expectations ... (2000: 380)

While Cheong and Miller (2000) note that the productive aspects of power that have led to the development of specific tourism **discourses** and professional specialities such as management and hospitality, the connections between power and knowledge still need to be explored in rather more detail. Hollinshead (1999) recognised the importance of analysing the norms and ideologies underpinning the policy platforms of various dominant groups in tourism. Crang (1999a) has also stressed that tourism is intimately involved in the production of knowledge and scientific credibility.

Edensor's (2000) differentiation between enclavic and heterogeneous tourist spaces is important here. Tourism often takes place exclusively in specific parts of towns and cities within which the tourist infrastructures are concentrated. Such spaces have been variously labelled as enclaves or tourist bubbles, indicating a sense in which the rest of life within a destination goes on outside that prescribed geographical area. Drawing upon Foucault's observations on surveillance, Edensor argues that:

In the tourism enclave, performances are monitored through surveillance and by what is considered 'appropriate' in dominant discourses. 'Undesirable elements' and social practices such as vigorous horseplay and loud music playing are likely to be deterred by guards, guides and managers Moreover, practices concerning what to photograph, how to gaze, how to modulate the voice, and what to wear are often subject to self-monitoring and the disciplinary gaze of the group. (2000: 328)

The **package tour** and the regimented resort (Lofgren, 1999) are perhaps extreme examples of the disciplined, enclavic space where tourists can find themselves 'quite literally imprisoned on buses and boats' (Cheong and Miller, 2000: 381). In contrast, heterogeneous tourist spaces emerge in a more unplanned and contingent fashion. They are multifunctional spaces with fewer social barriers. Nevertheless, specific power relations still operate: 'rather than security guards, video surveillance and policing, local power holders exercise policies of exclusion and control ... local power may be wielded according to ethnicity, caste, and religion unbeknown to the tourist' (Edensor, 2000: 332).

Although power is seemingly everywhere, Foucault also emphasised that every site of power is simultaneously also a site of resistance. Processes of tourism development are increasingly subject to forms of resistance

ranging from the verbal or written to direct action and physical violence. Warren (1998), for example, has examined the importance of the regional press in articulating resistance in her analysis of the control of resort development in Bali. Sometimes, even the **state** itself may resist the global omnipotence of tourism development (Shackley, 1995). The everyday experience and **performance** of tourism though can also be viewed as a subtle form of resistance to the power-knowledge regimes laid down at various scales by states, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), agents and guides (Edensor, 2001; see also Chapter 5).

Nevertheless, it should also be recognised that it is often the very same institutions of tourism development that make possible the emergence of oppositional discourses and practices within the same discursive space and field of power. Moreover, these counter-discourses can become co-opted into the dominant strategies of established institutions. For example, the professional academic bodies that control tourism knowledge production allow certain debates to speak within a limited terrain, such as sustainability, without any closure (see Chapter 8). Nevertheless, more radical and sustained projects may ultimately lead to the transformation of tourism.

THE MATERIAL AND MEDIATISED WORLDS OF TOURISM

Throughout this book, then, we are interested in the inter-play between metaphor and materiality in tourism and attempt to show that the ways in which people think about the world has implications for the ways in which they then experience tourism. However, we do not think that the very stuff of such experiences can be reduced to a simple reading of the materiality of the environment or landscapes of tourism; rather such experiences are fundamentally mediated by a whole host of contemporary media lenses. We thus draw upon conceptions of contemporary culture that emphasise the negotiated inter-subjectivity which allows different human beings to experience one another. Here, we may differentiate between needs, wants and desires in contemporary tourism (Shurmer-Smith and Hannam, 1994). Needs are clearly those things (material and immaterial) without which human beings could not exist. Both hosts and guests need to feed and house themselves for example. Wants, meanwhile, may be viewed as the things that we try to get to enhance our basic needs, when there is a situation of choice in the market. Tourists may want a particular type of accommodation and hosts may want a particular type of tourist, but both may have to settle for what they can get in a particular type of context. Most classical economic analysis in tourism textbooks is concerned with the various conflicts between the 'wants' to be found in particular market conditions. However,

desires are more problematic and in the contemporary economy, which favours experiences over simple satisfaction of needs and wants, they are also increasingly more prominent. Tourists may desire to visit an exotic destination and also wish that destination to fulfil their needs and wants. Hosts, meanwhile, may desire a level and type of development that may have to be deferred for generations.

Desires emerge from the sensory and imaginative aspects of human experience and it is questionable whether we can ever maximise our desires as they are always an incomplete project. Desires can be inherently selfish and thus depend on one's ethical position as to whether they are given into or not, as well as one's political, economic and social position as to whether they can be actualised or deferred. However, there does still tend to be a certain level of prioritisation between needs, wants and desires in different contemporary societies. In developing societies where household incomes may be relatively low, needs may be prioritised but people still retain their own wants and desires, which may often be enacted through migration. In post-industrial societies, meanwhile, desires reach prominence as needs and wants become satisfied and tourist experiences become hyper-valued. Symbolically, the expressive value of services become rated more than simple consumption and taste and preference are aspired to as markers of social identities. In such economies of experience and desire, the rational decision making inherent in much economic thought becomes rather obsolete. We emphasise this point because much tourism analysis has, until recently, been narrowly driven in its explanations of human behaviour. However, we also recognise that in the current global flux, contemporary economies are fundamentally connected and integrated and thus frequently the prioritisation of needs, wants and desires is never as simple as we have outlined above and nor do we wish to trivialise the often difficult impacts that tourism can have. Moreover, although prioritisation based on desires has become the norm in affluent Western societies, paradoxically the number of people worldwide who are locked into satisfying their basic needs has also increased as the global economic extremes have exacerbated. Nevertheless, due to the globalisation of mediascapes those in economic need are acutely aware of the desires of others around the world (Shurmer-Smith and Hannam, 1994).

As an example here we can note the growth of so-called 'slum tourism', whereby Western tourists visit developing countries and voyeuristically look in at slums as part of their touristic experience. Indeed, the success of the film *Slumdog Millionaire* has even increased media exposure of the slums in Mumbai, for instance, with the company Reality Tours and Travel arguing that: