

*Routledge Ethics of Tourism*

# **NEW MORAL NATURES IN TOURISM**

Edited by  
Bryan S. R. Grimwood, Kellee Caton, and  
Lisa Cooke



# New Moral Natures in Tourism

How do we understand human-nature relationships in tourism or determine the consequences of these relationships to be “good,” “bad,” “right,” “wrong,” “fair,” or “just”? What theoretical and philosophical perspectives can usefully orient us in the production and consumption of tourism towards living and enacting the “good life” with the more-than-human world?

This book addresses such questions by investigating relationships between nature and morality in tourism contexts. Recognizing that morality, much like nature, is embedded in histories and landscapes of power, the book engages with diverse theoretical and philosophical perspectives to critically review, appraise, and advance dialogue on the moral dimensions of natures. Contributing authors explore the very foundations of how we make sense of nature in tourism and leisure contexts – and how we might make sense of it differently.

The book will be essential reading for researchers, students, and practitioners grappling with questions about the moral values, frameworks, or practices best suited to mobilizing tourism natures. What will the future of tourism hold in terms of sustainability, justice, resilience, health, and well-being?

**Bryan S. R. Grimwood** is Associate Professor in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. His research analyzes human-nature relationships and advocates social justice and sustainability in contexts of tourism, leisure, and livelihoods.

**Kellee Caton** is Associate Professor of Tourism Studies at Thompson Rivers University and co-chair of the Critical Tourism Studies international network. Her work explores how we come to know tourism as a sociocultural phenomenon, and how we come to know and reshape the world through tourism.

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tourism relates to nature. Eric writes also about the politics of conservation and nature within neoliberalism and the place of nature-based tourism, culminating in a volume co-edited with Mary Mostafanezhad, Roger Norris, and Anna Carr entitled *Political Ecology of Tourism* (2016). Eric's thinking embraces the uncertainties of poststructuralism, the postcolonial, and, here, the implications of the associated moral relativism.

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# Foreword

One of the unexpected outcomes from a research project I conducted about 20 years ago, during which I interviewed tourists after they had arrived home from a three week “nature-tourism” experience on the island of Borneo, was that quite a few of them considered their “local natures” to be less interesting and appealing than they had prior to their trip. Their local natures were just not “spectacular enough” to quote one of the participants. After all, they had climbed the cloud-clad summit of the highest mountain in South-East Asia, Mt Kinabalu, explored the subterranean depths of Niah Caves, and watched in wonderment as semi-wild orangutans playfully chased each other at Sepilok Orang Utan Sanctuary. The natures that made up their local, everyday landscapes hardly stood up to the extravagant natures they had experienced on their tour. This finding placed in stark relief for me how the discursive and material structures and practices of the tourism industry framed, presented, and mediated nature, in effect constructing specific “tourism natures” for touristic consumption. It also taught me, early on in my career, to “expect the unexpected” when it comes to trying to understand tourist experiences of nature. It is the complex and often contradictory relationships that exist between tourism and nature scrutinised via the lenses of morality and ethics that are the focus of this excellent book, *New Moral Natures in Tourism*.

“Nature,” as the editors point out, is a difficult and slippery concept to grapple with philosophically and ontologically. Our understandings of it and the meanings that we attach to it are contested and vary across time, space, and culture. Nature is arguably as much a product of history and culture as it is a product of biophysical and ecological processes. However, this book’s central concern is not so much on definition but, importantly, on the “moral terrains” across which tourism and nature traverse, intersect, and overlap. How can tourism-nature relationships become more just and fair, taking into account the interests not just of tourists and the industry, but the more-than-human actors involved?

Tourism has a long-standing relationship with nature. Regardless of whether “mass tourism,” “ecotourism,” or somewhere in between, tourism harnesses, subdues, domesticates, exploits, co-creates, appropriates, and (re)configures nature in myriad ways. Destinations utilise nature, whether entire ecosystems, such as Australia’s Great Barrier Reef, or individual elements, such as a single tree, as tourist attractions, which subsequently drive tourism demand. Romantic, perhaps nostalgic discourses of pristine Edenic natures, seemingly devoid of any

influences of humanity, permeate destination marketing, thereby papering over ancient, intimate relationships that have existed and continue to exist between Indigenous Peoples and their lands. The tourism industry is an agent of change that can drastically affect nature and the ecological and social processes and systems that it comprises.

Concern for the effects of tourism on nature can be detected in the literature from the late 1970s. In 1976, the then Director General of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Gerardo Budowski, published an article in the journal, *Environmental Conservation*, in which he articulated relationships – which he termed co-existence, conflict, and symbiosis – between tourism and environmental conservation. He was generally optimistic in his outlook, arguing that tourism could develop a symbiotic relationship with nature conservation provided that appropriate planning and sound management practices were rigorously applied and that proper consideration be given to ecological processes which must guide resource use. In 1978, Erik Cohen published an article in *Annals of Tourism Research* that presented the first comprehensive analysis of the environmental impacts caused by tourism, while in 1982, Alister Mathieson and Geoff Wall published their book, *Tourism: Economic, Physical and Social Impacts*, which explored the tourism-environment relationship. Later in the decade came the first publications on ecotourism and sustainable tourism, which began to draw attention to the relationships between tourism and nature in a more critical and nuanced way, and which laid the foundation for a considerable amount of scholarship on ecologically sustainable tourism. As the editors of this volume point out, however, little attention was being given to ethics and morality at that stage.

The tourism industry and associated structures has also recognised the implications of tourism on nature and the environment. The UN World Tourism Organisation (WTO) has a dedicated focus on the sustainable development of tourism and heads up the 10 Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Tourism Development, launched in London in 2014. WTO is also actively engaged in programs on climate change and biodiversity conservation. The International Civil Aviation Organisation and the International Air Transport Association has set in place targets to reduce carbon emissions derived from aircraft through greater fuel efficiencies, with the latter also keenly interested in alternative fuels and carbon offsetting programs. And, within the accommodation sector, global hotel chains and individual owner-operators are implementing strategies to reduce carbon emissions from their properties.

But, as the contributors to this book clearly show, there is a raft of more fundamental questions that must be explored if we are to properly address the outcomes of tourism-nature relationships. How can we create tourisms that respect nature? How does tourism embrace moralities in regards to environmentalism, animal ethics, and Indigenous understandings of nature? How do we encourage and facilitate dialogues between scholars, practitioners, and tourists themselves to actively engage in moral questions about the nature of tourism and its relationships with nature? The editors have curated a diverse set of chapters that explore the contested moral terrains upon which tourism and its intersections with nature are embedded. Surely, the tourism industry's response to the impending spasm of

extinctions of species and ecosystems has to be more than simply the creation of “last-chance tourism”? What are the moral obligations of the tourism industry, and of the tourists the industry serves, towards nature?

We are facing a crisis in global biodiversity brought about by a plethora of factors but accelerated by global climate change. Biologist Eugene Stoermer began using the term “Anthropocene” in the 1980s to refer to the impact that human-induced change was having on the earth, and, in 2000, he and Nobel Prize-winning Dutch atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen published a paper defining the Anthropocene as the current geological epoch in which human interventions in the environment are having profound and globally significant impacts. These impacts include global climate change, the diversion or other significant interruptions to most of the world’s major rivers, the transformation of large swaths of the world’s land surface, and the removal of about a third of the ocean’s productivity per year.

The Anthropocene marks a new relationship between nature and humanity, to be sure. It signals the pervasive impact that humanity is having on global ecosystems, and it also marks a new understanding of the relationships between the human and non-human, including non-human animals, as well as plants, water, soils, and the atmosphere. Humans are now agents of environmental change at a global scale and at a geological time scale. And tourism structures and practices are well and truly implicated in these environmental changes.

Those of us in the social sciences must be willing to find common ground with our colleagues in the natural sciences and only through new intellectual and theoretical hybridities will resolutions be found to our most serious crises affecting nature. We must break down the silos that have tended to separate the natural sciences from the social sciences and aim for a much more genuine inter-disciplinarity. We must be willing to be open to learning from the natural scientists as much as we need to share our understandings and insights with them. Such creative collaborations must also be nurtured and strengthened with Indigenous Peoples and based on genuine respect for Indigenous knowledges. Indigenous cultures, lands, and livelihoods have so often been compromised, to say the least, by the tourism industry’s use of nature.

The theoretical and empirical insights that this book presents make a valuable contribution to the small but growing literature on the intersections of morality, tourism, and nature, and the book itself provides a way forward to the growing “moral turn” in tourism scholarship. The editors ask us to consider the “philosophical and theoretical perspectives [that] can usefully orient us in living and enacting better human-nature relationships through tourism” and the “opportunities and challenges” that tourism offers us in “relating more ethically to the more-than-human world.” The contributing authors take up such questions and explore what a socially and environmentally “just” tourism might look like. In doing so, the book challenges readers to interrogate their own touristic behaviours. There are, of course, uncomfortable implications and difficult challenges of such scrutiny, but such challenges must be faced if we are to work towards a more ethical and morally justifiable relationship between tourism and nature.

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# Introduction

## Tourism, nature, morality

*Bryan S. R. Grimwood, Kellee Caton,  
and Lisa Cooke*

On the surface, this book is about human-nature relationships in tourism. It is broadly concerned, in other words, with investigating tourism as a context that facilitates interactions between what is typically differentiated in Western thought as the human social world and the non-human (or more-than-human) natural world. Clearly, such interactions are not exclusive to tourism; humans and natures collide in all sorts of interesting and consequential ways through science, agriculture, resource extraction, education, politics, religion, sport, technology, among other domains. Tourism is, indeed, just one of countless contexts through which human-nature relationships are given shape, made meaningful, and explored.

But it is a rather significant one at that.

Tourism has become a world-making force that interacts with the more-than-human world in multifaceted and dynamic ways. Some of these interactions are decisively material and ecological and can affect life-sustaining systems upon which we all depend, the most extreme example being the role tourism has played over time in the anthropogenic global changes now depicted as part of the Anthropocene (Gren & Huijbens, 2016). To access the beach in the sun, for instance, many of us have contributed to the carbon emissions associated with air and automobile travel and helping to power climatic changes that intensify hurricanes or accelerate glacier melt. Several among us hope to offset or mitigate any pending apocalyptic futures by spending our tourism dollars and energies in ways that support nature conservation, whether that is at the scale of a landscape or individual species (Fennell, 2015). Here, our practices of ethical tourism consumption are intended to support the integrity of ecological systems and their diverse components, so essential to our being-in-the-world.

Other tourism-nature relationships are associated with contested values, meanings, and discourses that shape how people perceive or experience a particular nature place or more-than-human encounter. The gendered ideologies that script how tourists are intended to view polar bears through the lens of their digital cameras are a case in point. As Yudina and Grimwood (2016) expose, the promotion and representational capture of polar bears as wildlife “spectacles” reproduces not only anthropocentric and instrumental valuing of non-humans, but also the masculine systems of rationality upon which such valuing is contingent. Such contested values and meanings do not simply circulate at levels of abstraction.

They also become embedded in the making of tourism places, an observation that underpins Cooke's (2017) reading of Skwelkwew'welt/Sun Peaks. While this alpine place in interior British Columbia is at once part of the unceded ancestral lands of Secwépemc First Nations and the corporate site of Canada's first ski resort municipality, it is the latter that yields the economic, political, and discursive power to naturalize it for touristic purposes and disappear Indigenous relations and claims (Cooke, 2017). When we escape to find pleasure in nature, we do so with social-cultural baggage and effects in stow.

So, if these sort of issues, interactions, and consequences lie at the surface of this book, what then are our core intentions? What deeper aims captivate the more than a dozen scholars from different geographies and career stages who devoted their intellectual riches towards the preparation of the chapters in this collection? Well, as the book title implies, nature and morality have something to do with it. And, clearly, so does tourism. Accordingly – and in the spirit of keeping things straightforward – let's affirm that we have gathered this collection of papers with the purpose of examining relationships between nature and morality in tourism. In so doing, the book invites exploration into several questions that we feel are largely untapped in tourism studies: how do we understand and value tourism-nature relationships, or determine the consequences of these relationships to be “good,” “bad,” “right,” “wrong,” “fair,” “just,” or “unjust”? What philosophical and theoretical perspectives can usefully orient us in living and enacting better human-nature relationships through tourism? What opportunities and challenges does tourism present for relating more ethically to the more-than-human world? What tourism natures ought we be working to craft and create? This is complex territory that can be accessed from several different points of departure.

For now, let's begin with the premise that “nature” is both contested and promiscuous in an ontological sense (i.e., the reality of nature is hardly as obvious or static as we often make it out to be). This is an affront to contemporary popular discourses that conceptualize nature in one of three typical ways (Castree, 2001; Demeritt, 2002). *External* nature refers to what is perceived to be the original and inherent material aspects of the world – the self-evident and so-called natural environment, inclusive of non-living and living (albeit non-human) components. In this view, nature is raw and pristine, autonomous from society, and associated with conventional distinctions like rural/urban, country/city, and wilderness/civilization. *Intrinsic* nature refers to an unchanging essential quality or attribute that is more or less discernable in some thing or some being. This conception of nature finds expression in references to the inherent characteristics of an entity, such as human nature, or an event, such as a hurricane or earthquake, which tend to be cited as natural disasters dictated by physical processes. The third common meaning, *universal* nature, implies that nature is a holistic and integrated force guiding worldly processes. In this meaning, nature refers to the “natural” order of things and is represented in notions like “the laws of nature” or James Lovelock's widely debated Gaia hypothesis (Castree, 2001).

While the widespread use and familiarity of these contemporary meanings is not likely to fade, scholars from across the social sciences and humanities concur

that nature is not a timeless or universal idea, nor is it a politically innocent one. Indeed, scholars have traced how meanings of nature change over time, evolve from or are performed within particular contexts, and enact a great deal of worldly effects (e.g., Castree, 2005; Franklin, 2002; Glacken, 1967). For instance, the idea of nature as strictly biophysical space, which in its most pristine state stands for “wilderness,” is widely regarded as a product of Western Enlightenment tendencies to categorically distinguish human society from other environmental phenomena. Martin Heidegger provides some of the philosophical basis on this front. In his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger (1993) frames how the natural world is often experienced, encountered, or revealed to us as a “standing-reserve,” a tap of resources that humans draw on and from to serve our practical needs (Cooper, 2005). Nature, in this sense, is valued as a means for satisfying human ends. This instrumental relationship is not inherent to our being-in-the-world, according to Heidegger, but rather a function of epistemological establishments dating back to Rene Descartes that privilege knowledge in the “spectator sense.” As Cooper (2005) elaborates, this is a particular type of human understanding obtained through detached, objective observation and analysis and which leads to theoretical abstraction. It inevitably construes nature as “an objective, material realm standing over against us spectating subjects” (Cooper, p. 341). Our task, if we are to follow Ingold’s (2011) reading of Heidegger, is to rethink and renew how we inhabit the world such that “every thing or being is a certain gathering together of the threads of life” (xviii). Inhabiting in this way requires that we eschew those knowledge frameworks with entrenched divisions between object and subject and which underpin, and enable, human exploitation of the natural world.

Several trajectories of scholarship attend to this critical task of re-configuring conceptualizations of nature and our place within it. Much work has followed in the wake of Cronon’s (1995a) provocative essay, which effectively established the study of nature as a phenomenon that is inescapably social, cultural, and historical in its production. Broadly conceived as the social construction of nature, or as a *social nature* orientation, this body of literature attracts and incorporates various feminist, poststructural, postcolonial, Marxist, phenomenological, and relational perspectives (Castree & Braun, 2001; Cronon, 1995b; Fitzsimmons, 1989). Common amongst these theoretically informed accounts is a skeptical insistence that things are not as clear as they seem, “that what we once accepted as self-evidently pre-ordained and inevitable is in fact contingent and might conceivably be remade in some other way, if only we would try” (Demeritt, 2002, p. 776). Proponents thus identify with social nature for opening up analytical and political possibilities for a radical environmentalism (see, e.g., Latour, 2004; Smith, 2011). They find social nature useful because it implies that humans have the capacity to improve current environmental circumstances by understanding, producing, and practicing different versions of nature and in ways that are more responsible and socially just (Braun, 2002; Cronon, 1995a).

While such deliberations of nature are well developed within disciplinary domains of Geography, Sociology, Anthropology, and Environmental Philosophy,

their relevance to tourism studies has really only materialized in the last decade or so, a function perhaps of how in tourism we adopt and adapt knowledge from our disciplinary parents, or perhaps how tourism research has often leaned commitments towards satisfying industry interests. Several years ago, Franklin and Crang (2001) observed that in much tourism research, nature was “uncritically confused or conflated with ‘environment’” (p. 16) and that “both the object of ‘nature’ and the desire for ‘nature’” were taken up quite unproblematically and uncritically (p. 16). These tendencies were mirrors of those broader conventions and popular thought that situate nature as something static, universal, and purely external to social-cultural practices, ideologies, and values.

More recent accounts in tourism have helped destabilize hegemonic views of nature and fashion nature-society in non-dualistic, or relational, terms. There’s been some uptake on, and extension from, Franklin and Crang’s (2001) call to get more critical and get with the hybrids. In particular, tourism scholars have engaged metaphors – dwelling, production, hybridity, performance, multiplicity, networks, to name a few – that help articulate tourism natures in terms of emergent activity, social-material entanglements, and creative possibility (see, e.g., Cloke and Perkins, 2005; Grimwood & Doubleday, 2013; Mullins, 2009; Reis & Shelton, 2011; van der Duim, Ren, & Jóhannesson, 2013; Waitt & Cook, 2007). To borrow from Castree (2014), these projects have evinced the notion that “‘nature’ is not a given, waiting to be analysed, experienced or interacted with” (p. 34) through tourism. Rather – and using Waitt and Cook’s (2007) phrasing here – they have drawn attention in tourism studies to “how the human and the non-human worlds are always open to transformation, or in other words, an ontology of always being in a mode of becoming” (pp. 536–537).

If tourism natures are “in-the-making”, and these configurations are contingent upon human agency (at least in part), then it follows that we’d be wise to invest energy into thinking deeply about the natures we want, and how natures are represented, both to us and by us. Of interest to us in this book are the moral issues, perspectives, and opportunities that arise when we mull about, or aim collectively to bring into being, transformations necessary for just and sustainable tourism natures. In other words, we are less concerned in this book with asking what nature in tourism *is* and more in what nature *is considered to be*, or *ought to be*, as well as what the effects of these renderings are (Castree, 2014).

When it comes to nature and morality, tourism researchers and professionals often look to environmental ethics, an applied ethics that emerged in the 1970s with the tides of awareness about modernity’s environmental atrocities (Jamieson, 2008), including, no doubt, the impacts of tourism (Cohen, 1978). Environmental ethics is concerned with understanding humanity’s relationship to nature and defining human obligations and responsibilities to the environment. Holden’s (2003, 2014) attention to environmental ethics in tourism captures several fundamental issues and perspectives, including the range anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric orientations (the former implying an instrumental value of nature and the latter an intrinsic value in nature). As Holden observes, environmental ethicists are often concerned with constructing a non-anthropocentric ethics

based on a suitable theory of intrinsic value, theories such as ethical sentimentism, autopoietic or life-based ethics, ecocentrism, or cosmic purpose ethics (see, e.g., Fox, 1990; Fennell, 2006). Debates between pluralistic and monistic environmental ethics have also been prominent – for example, in the works of Oelschlaeger (1994) and Callicott (1994), respectively – while more recent attention has focused on operationalizing a relational environmental ethics based on relational values (see, e.g., Chan et al., 2016; Figueroa & Waitt, 2008; Grimwood, 2015). Central to most points within these debates is the recognized need to articulate an enlarged conception of humanity’s moral vision, something that Leopold (1966) was alert to in his eminent articulation of the “land ethic” and that we see finding form in tourism literature on animal ethics (Fennell, 2012) and ecofeminism (Yudina & Grimwood, 2016).

If, however, we are attentive to the sort of social, cultural, and critical theorizations of nature noted above, environmental ethics as conventionally put to use in tourism studies (as per Holden, 2003) is likely to be unhelpful. As Castree (2003) explains, most competing perspectives in environmental ethics (e.g., instrumental vs. intrinsic values, anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism) start from that divisive ontology that distinguishes nature from society or a deterministic ontology that collapses society into nature or subscribes to natural realism. Furthermore, as Whatmore (2002) argues, the ruling class of moral extensionist and ecocentric perspectives in environmental ethics are underscored by cognitive, linguistic, and rationalist competences as the basis for fashioning ethical subjectivity. They therefore tend to overlook and exclude corporeal embeddedness, intersubjectivity, and practical engagement in the world as dimensions in our moral complexion (Whatmore, 2002).

Recognizing that morality, much like nature, is embedded in histories, lived experiences in places, and landscapes of power (Mostafanezhad & Hannam, 2014), we are reminded of Smith’s (2009) perspective that:

ethics are not just socially imposed norms, they are also ways of composing who we are. . . [Ethics] provides a basis for questioning the way things are, informs how we might relate to others, and is a mode of being in which we exercise our individual responsibilities in concert, though not necessarily agreement, with others.

(pp. 270–271)

Perhaps the ethics we need in relation to tourism natures is not so much about following prescribed standards as it is about consciously reflecting on our moral beliefs and learning to perceive ourselves as responsible agents always seeking possibilities for individual, social, and ecological betterment (Smith, 2009). We might begin to think of this as a process of *becoming otherwise*; of taking the “moral turn” in tourism (Caton, 2012) to consistently imagine and craft our relations among self, collective, and world *anew*. Our hope with this book is to invite epistemological and experiential movements in this direction by compiling papers that critically review, appraise, and advance dialogue on the moral dimensions of