**Poverty Alleviation Through Tourism Development**

A Comprehensive and Integrated Approach

By Robertico Croes and Manuel Rivera

**Overview**

This is one of the most important books ever written about tourism development. Why is this? the starting point premise is that tourism has the potential to reduce poverty in developing countries and the book’s significance is that it addresses the gap left by most tourism studies that either ignore the issue of poverty or simply imply that economic benefits trickle-down to low income communities. The authors’ note that despite fifty years of modern tourism, this global industry has yet to secure evidence or even consensus of opinion on the role that tourism can and should be playing as a vehicle to help release the poorest from poverty.

In my professional role, I work with low income communities in countries that have or intend to base their model for economic development on tourism. An example of economic growth that comes to mind is Montego Bay, Jamaica – home of the all-inclusive luxury resort concept and now with so many gleaming new properties that it more closely resembles a modern city skyline. Yet, many in Jamaica’s rural communities no longer believe the oft repeated mantra that tourism is a route to greater prosperity for all. Inland communities say that the promised benefits of tourism have yet to materialize because tourists fly in, are transported to their resort and rarely leave their all-inclusive enclave. I have witnessed the transition in Montego Bay for more than a decade – from sleepy regional city with a small airport to a large modern airport complex that can handle thousands of tourists a day. Infrastructure growth and the spread of beach front properties has meant that local people no longer have access to their own beaches and in the rural communities high above Montego Bay, youngsters quickly realize that if they want to work, they will need to head to the coast. Here, traditional livelihoods are under threat as young people leave in droves and the communities themselves are threatened by urbanization based on continuing tourism development. An earlier stage example can be seen in Sri Lanka at the moment. In the aftermath of civil war, the Government is seeking to re-build the economy via inbound tourism and is deploying international loans to build its tourism infrastructure to facilitate this. Yet the rural communities that I visit have not been consulted about the ways in which they might participate and play a role in sharing Sri Lanka’s historic and cultural heritage with tourists and many of the people I have come to know in Sri Lanka feel that they have been by-passed.

These two examples are indicative of many developing nations where tourism is viewed as a panacea – especially given the narrow range of economic development options available to them. Yet if tourism really is to yield wider scale benefits, it is vitally important to understand how to engage with low income and subsistence communities. This book offers a comprehensive and integrated approach to the topic of tourism development and the various ways in which a more inclusive approach can contribute to the fight against poverty. Specifically, the book focuses on the plight of the world’s poorest by drawing on a decade of field experience in studying the effects of tourism development on poverty reduction. In this context, the central question is: Can tourism development deliver tangible benefits for the poorest in society? The authors build on prior work by exploring the relationships between growth-inequality-poverty reduction, investigating the conditions that could bring about simultaneous tourism development and poverty reduction; and by drawing on their own long-term empirical research to develop an innovative framework for securing these objectives - the *Poverty Obliteration Paradigm* (POP). This provides theoretical integration for key variables such as the pace of poverty reduction, the structure of the economy, macroeconomic policies, health and educational status among others.

The book also provides new insights on the dynamic relationship between tourism and poverty reduction. First, it explores poverty and its impact upon development at the macro and micro levels. Second, it focuses on tourism development, and its effects on growth, inequality and poverty reduction and how these dynamic relationships affect the most vulnerable groups of the society. Third, it documents whether the poor perceive tourism development as an important vehicle to help them escape from poverty. And fourth, it maps the conditions under which tourism reaches the poor and how the connectedness with tourism capacity defines the opportunities for the poor. The authoritative tone of the book arises from the evident commitment of its authors to this topic, the extensive range of supporting material and its case study-based empirical work. For example, chapter 4 examines the empirical relationship between tourism growth and poverty reduction. The working hypothesis is that economic growth related to tourism development has both direct and indirect effects on poverty. The authors explore their hypothesis by drawing on six cases: Five of the eight countries are from Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua) and the sixth case is drawn from Ecuador in South America.

**Key features**

This book is:

*A compelling read.* Anyone who travels widely will know that tourism development generates both benefits and problems and the reasons why traditional forms of tourism development are failing to help the poorest are very clearly and comprehensively explained.

*Authoritative.* It is written by expert researchers who live their research and who are passionately concerned about realities on the ground. The book is an eloquent voice that speaks on behalf of the poor – most of whom are still waiting to experience positive, tourism-related lifestyle change. The sad fact is that many experience the opposite and continue to struggle while inbound tourism benefits the wealthiest.

*Meticulously researched with convincing evidence.* The book is grounded in many years of empirical and participant research and this is reflected in the gathered voice of the poor.

*Thoughtful, with creative solutions.* The authors’ own *Poverty Obliteration Paradigm* draws on extensive secondary analysis, long-term empirical research and extensive community participation.

*Ideally suited to the needs of researchers, planners and policy-makers* because it addresses in depth the relationships between tourism development and its potential for poverty alleviation.

**Summary comments**

This ground-breaking book offers a truly innovative contribution to our understanding of the concept of sustainable and inclusive tourism development. Its authors argue that time spent thinking about our actions is needed if real change in tourism planning and development is to occur because a critical review of the traditional approach is urgently needed. The book explains why tourism development has to be collaborative, holistic and transformative and why critical reflection is so central to the process.

This book offers a comprehensive understanding of problems faced by the world’s poorest people and discusses ways of enabling them to participate in sustainable tourism development. It introduces innovative methodologies and approaches using interesting illustrations to systematically guide the reader through alternative approaches to responsible tourism development. This book is an engaging and compelling text. I enjoyed the flow of ideas and the key messages of need and solution that the introduction and application chapters provide. The authors are articulate and convincing in their crafted messages - as well as passionate. All in all, reading this book is time well spent and both enjoyable and instructional.

This is a significant and far reaching contribution to research and development on the global problem of exclusion from tourism development. It also offers a new framework – the *Poverty Obliteration Paradigm* (POP) to integrate philosophy, methodology, theory for development and to facilitate this process. It is a timely and valuable contribution to knowledge and it will appeal to a wide audience of readers from students, educators and researchers to practitioners, policy and planning advisers and governments.

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About the Reviewer: Prior to co-founding the Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL) Richard Teare was a career academic. Since 2007, GULL has been a source of self-help and encouragement to communities in many countries and Richard has accepted a number of awards on behalf of GULL. In 2010, he was initiated as an honorary Chief by the Masi sub-Clan, Lihir Islands, Papua New Guinea. He also received the Royal Award of the King of Surakata, Indonesia and was awarded the honorary Title of Gaurawacharya (Teacher of Honour) by the South Asian Academy for Good Governance in Sri Lanka. In 2012, he received a Knighthood from the Royal Order of the Noor of Buayan, Sultanate of Buayan, Philippines and in 2014 the Officer’s Cross of the Companionate of the White Swan, established by the Princely House of Kasperski to recognize (among other fields) service to the community.