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Indigenous Tourism in Australia. A Development Tool?

A Research Report
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of

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in Development Studies
at Massey University

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1998

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REPORT STATEMENT

I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the material presented in this Report is original, except where due reference has been made. I furthermore declare that this Report follows the guidelines established by Massey University for a work of this nature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the people and organisations that helped me during the compilation of this Report. Their assistance was invaluable. They, and their affiliations, are listed in the Methodology section of this Report. Additionally, I would like to sincerely thank Drs Barbara Nowak and John Overton for their encouragement and guidance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research Report examines tourism and its potential role in the development of Australia's Indigenous peoples, namely Aborigines and Torres Straight Islanders. It begins by examining the current situation of the Indigenous people to establish that there is indeed a need for development. This is followed by a general examination of both tourism and development, and how the two might interact. The current state of Indigenous tourism, particularly cultural tourism, in Australia is then explored, with an emphasis on the role of Government and possible modes of Indigenous involvement. The next sections, which constitute the main thrust of this Report, examine:

- barriers to Indigenous involvement in tourism,
- the negative impacts of tourism involvement
- the role of education and training in circumventing some of these problems

It is hoped that this document can provide a counterpoint to the predominantly positive material which has been produced by the Australian Government and the tourism industry. Finally, this Report seeks to place Indigenous tourism in the wider context of economic and social developments, and changing Government policy.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This Report examines the juxtaposition of tourism and Indigenous Australia. It aims to explore some of the costs and benefits, particularly in a cultural sense, of this interaction. It also seeks to place this interaction in the context of Government policy changes and social developments. A work of this size must necessarily be limited in its scope. These limitations are discussed below.

- Although there are two officially recognised Indigenous peoples in Australia, namely Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines, they are frequently considered together in research and in Government policies. The same will apply in this Report. Thus the term “Indigenous” is used instead of the phrase “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander”.
- There is no homogenous Indigenous society; rather there is an enormous diversity of circumstances, experiences, languages etc. It is not possible, in a Report of this size, to take account of all these differences.
- Similarly, size limitations means that the focus of this Report has had to be limited to the Australian experience, as opposed to an international overview.
- Socio-cultural impacts have taken precedence over the already well documented economic and environmental impacts.
- As the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism Industry Strategy and other Government publications emphasise the positive aspects of entry into the tourism industry, this Report concentrates on the real and potential negative aspects.
- The constraints and impacts of tourism have been studied in isolation without considering alternatives avenues to tourism.

- The Report focuses on the more remote, traditional Indigenous culture, as opposed to urban Indigenous culture.
- Gender issues have not been substantially considered in this Report.
- The examination of educational issues is biased towards research conducted at the primary and secondary school levels, as opposed to the tertiary level or vocational level. This is largely the result of the greater amount of available research for the first two levels.

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