

Extreme Tourism: Lessons from the World's Cold Water Islands

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Editorial Introduction
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“I try in vain to be persuaded that the Pole is the seat of frost and desolation;
it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight.”

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

Rationale

The picture gracing the cover of a typical text on island tourism is likely to include a handsome couple frolicking in knee-deep, crystal-clear water, with sun-drenched sand and a beach resort under cloudless blue skies. Conlin & Baum (1995) is one of many such texts. Only one out of the nine chapters dedicated to ‘management practice’ deals with a ‘cold water’ location (Corner Brook, in Newfoundland); out of 93 different islands or island regions listed in its index, only five at most could be considered as ‘cold water’ ones (Antarctica, Falklands, Newfoundland, New Zealand & Prince Edward Island).

Islands, it seems, could only be *warm* for tourism purposes. For example, Canada’s *Globe and Mail* thought fit to feature Barbados – “one of the top gourmet destinations in the Caribbean” – in its weekly travel supplement of October 16th 2004. Yet a feature on cold and windy Devon Island, Nunavut, located in the Canadian North, carried in the same issue of the tabloid, was relegated to the ‘focus’ section. It seems that Devon Island’s “Mars on Earth” climate renders it attractive only to “scientists” and “researchers”, *not* tourists (Ferguson 2004; Stevenson 2004).

It may prove difficult to identify the rationale behind the connection: islands are credited to offer that “something different” to tourists, as if there were “something special” about a place merely because people get to it by means of boat or plane. The island appeal has been related to feelings of separateness, of authenticity, of somehow being able to “do the place” or to “take it all in” in a short time (Baum 1993, 2000; Butler 1993). Whatever the link between the ultimate lure of islandness and tourism, the association between small (especially small and tropical) islands and the tourism industry has surely been one of the best branding exercises in the history of destination marketing. The island mystique forms an essential part of the millenary tradition of the West, dating back to such ancient Greek epics as the *Odyssey*, repackaged in Western Europe’s voyages of discovery and perpetuated by pioneer anthropologists like Margaret Mead (Baldacchino 1997:59; 2004; Gillis 2004; Patton 1996: 1). The image of islands as ‘Eden without apples’ lingers on (Pitt 1970: 1-3; Conlin & Baum 1995), and it is now exploited also by the media (in movies like *Cast Away* or in TV serial blockbusters like *Survivor*). Yet such popularity is not without its costs. Islands are amongst the world’s most ‘penetrated’ tourism locations (McElroy 2003); large scale hospitality and infrastructure constructions have filled in salt ponds, disfigured shorelines and polluted near-shore waters with sewage (Pearce 1987); mass tourism

has swamped local culture, contributed to domestic inflation and damaged insular ecosystems (Beller *et al.* 1990; Briguglio *et al.* 1996a, 1996b; Lanfant *et al.* 1995).

The image of tourist destinations as alluring undiscovered paradises has much to do with islands. But this trope is based on one crucial premise: a warm and arguably pleasant climate. So, for example, "...the natural beauty and attractive climate of many island states have enabled them to develop a relatively large tourist industry, by exploiting the advantages bestowed upon them by nature" (Briguglio 1996: xii). Nature does not always act or appear as benign: indeed, nature may present itself as the principal, insurmountable enemy to a tourism industry. The "mass market practice common in islands" (McElroy & de Albuquerque 1992) assumes that all islands are warm water islands. Not so.

Tourism Heats Up

The world is full of islands. Over 10 percent of the world's population today lives on islands: tropical, temperate, polar. Yet, the notion of a 'cold-water' island taunts us as if it were a myth, an impossibility, a contradiction-in-terms, an oxymoron. Have we been socialized into expecting islands (and islanders) to be only lush, malleable and exotic?: as represented, for example, in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Dean Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Johann Wyss' *Swiss Family Robinson*, Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island* (as texts) and *Blue Lagoon* and *Live and Let Die* (as films)? Moreover, most island *states* do happen to lie astride the world's temperate and tropical regions. They include both small sovereign states (the majority of which are to be found in the Caribbean Sea, South Pacific and Indian Oceans); and larger ones – like the sprawling and heavily populated archipelagos of Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, and of course, Great Britain.

If one of the star attractions of islandness is remoteness, then part of the island tourism mystique lies in the affirmation of distance (and therefore also difference) while still ensuring access. Cold water temperatures and inclement weather contribute to this sense of isolation. Remote locations, once identified and recognized as potential destinations for non-residents, generally tend to attract few visitors, each of whom however stays longer, justifying the time, effort and expense of travel. A 'cold water' scenario could be expected to exacerbate this trend. But remoteness is a relative term, and easily overcome by technology. One of the most noticeable characteristics of recent tourism growth has been the "continuous thrust to the periphery" (Butler 2002: 3). In this trend, space-as-marginal and low temperatures enter into an uncanny alliance since the movement from metropolitan to marginal could be easily compared to the transition from mature to frontier destinations, and from the tropical through the temperate to the frigid regions of the globe. Meanwhile, and as a sinister parallel, global warming may be steadily reducing the temperature differential, gradually rendering hitherto cold water islands more akin to their warm weather cousins. In this process, one could expect the standard island 'paradise myth' of the tourist package to become extended to ever-larger stretches of island candidates in higher latitudes. Will this be a lost opportunity for cold water islands and islanders to craft a different set of self-images as tourism destinations, where the challenges of cold and harsh surroundings (obvious obstacles to tourism marketing in warmer climes) are transformed into assets? Or would islands and islanders prefer to walk the well-trodden path, and be subject to the same

imagery, processes of market commoditization, but also environmental degradation, as their warmer counterparts?

This Book

Thus emerged the germ of an idea and structure for this volume. It builds on a track record of islands traditionally informing some of the best theoretically informed research in tourism due to more clearly identifiable impacts and effects, as in the case of Bryden (1973) for the Caribbean and Britton (1987) for the Pacific. The idea led to an investigation of the tourism practices in some of the world's cold water islands, located at or close to the northern and southern antipodes; followed by a conceptual analysis of what these experiences tell us with regard to key transversal themes. Moreover, touching base with the additional allure of islands as naturally framed and convenient laboratories (*e.g.* Evans 1973; Patton 1996: 2-5), the contents of this book could serve as lessons for other, non-island locations.

This collection goes to print with a representative set of case study chapters from Northern latitudes: Nunivak (Alaska, USA), Banks (Northwest Territories, Canada), Baffin (Nunavut, Canada), Greenland/ Kaalaalit Nunaat, Iceland, Luleå (Sweden), Svalbard (Norway) Solovetsky (Russia), plus the particular vantage point of Arctic cruise ship tourism. Another, smaller, set of case study chapters hails from Southern latitudes: Falklands (UK), the Antarctic Peninsula and South Shetlands, Macquarie (Australia), Stewart (New Zealand) and the Chatham Islands (New Zealand).

Five conceptual chapters are presented first, even though they were actually the last to be written. They have obliged their authors to examine the 14 case study chapters in so much as they provide insights into key tourism management issues: (a) *human resources* (labour market features; sourcing; recruitment; retention; training; career progression; flexible specialization); (b) *environment* (the representation of nature in island tourism profiling; ecological issues in typically fragile habitats; waste management policies and practices; sustainability concerns); (c) *promotion* (advancing destination difference and linking it with 'cold islandness'; developing tourism and linking it with 'islandness', location, size and 'island culture'; targeting and profiling actual and potential clients in terms of matching island attributes with the motivational needs of visitors; portraying 'friendly natives' living in a hostile natural environment; presenting the appropriate discourse on 'island' and 'extremeness'; (d) *seasonality* (should it be embraced, tolerated or challenged? Or does being cold all year round eliminate talk of seasonality altogether?); and (e) *access* (how change in access affects tourism quantities and qualities over time; how islandness could help preserve 'difference' and 'diversity' in an age of creeping and homogenizing globalization; how the boundedness of islands, with the obvious physical difficulties associated with access, act as a blessing rather than a barrier to long-term tourism development; and what happens to island tourism when islands become bridged to a 'mainland', or get an international airport or a cruise ship terminal).

In the sixth and final conceptual chapter, the intention is to bring together the various themes raised in this book into a unified and cohesive format, while suggesting future research and policy leads. This conclusion takes a sober look at the overall nature of cold water island tourism, and its relationship to 'islandness', space-time compression and globalization.

Literature

Unlike tourism in/on warm water islands, the literature on tourism in cold water islands, like these destinations themselves, is relatively hard to come by. (Hall & Johnston [1995] is one notable exception.) Part of the paucity could be explained by the absence of cold water island *jurisdictions* (with Iceland as the single and notable exception) – after all, political autonomy improves the likelihood of a location being regarded as the focus of a specific policy. Comments have already been made on the contents of Conlin & Baum (1995). A regional focus, as with Apostolopoulos & Gayle (2002), excludes cold water considerations completely. From their titles, Briguglio *et al.* (1996a, b) might suggest that they cover cold water islands too; but only 1 out of 29 chapters does so, with a focus on the Shetland Islands (Butler 1996). Lockhart & Drakakis-Smith (1997) do somewhat better: three (opening) chapters address themes largely relevant to islands beyond the tropical ‘pleasure periphery’. However, once the text goes into case study mode, only 3 out of 14 chapters are not sourced from warm climes: Butler on Orkney & Shetland; Royle on the South Atlantic Islands, which includes the Falklands; and Aronsson on Swedish islands. Gradus & Lithwick (1996); Krakover & Gradus (2002), Hall & Johnston (1995), in spite of promising titles that highlight frontier or polar regions, do not discuss islands at all. Royle (2001) is a commendable academic attempt at a multi-disciplinary review of islands on a global scale. His tourism chapter is sensitive to both non-tropical and non-sovereign locations, reviewing such islands as Heligoland (Germany) and Kulusuk (Greenland). There is a useful discussion of concepts and arguments that could be applied to cold water islands, but which are not specifically addressed in a limited and condensed, 20-page, chapter. Finally, as a singly authored text, King (1997) does tackle islands comparatively. However, the focus is (once again) restricted to Oceanic and Pacific territories. In other cases, the connection between tourism and islandness is not articulated or problematized, a common neglect amongst researchers who do not have an ‘island studies’ imagination.

A systematic initiative which has tried to redress this dearth of relevant research material has emerged from the North Atlantic Islands Programme, coordinated by the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada along with NordRefo (now NordRegio), the Nordic Centre for Spatial Development, based in Stockholm, Sweden (Baldacchino & Greenwood 1998; Baldacchino & Milne 2000; Baum 1993; Baum & Hagen 1999; Hagen 1998). Another cooperative effort between Canadian and Scandinavian researchers, coordinated by the European Tourism Research Institute (ETOUR) at the Mid-Sweden University in Östersund, has investigated *peripheral* (though not explicitly *island*) tourism in Northern Canada and Sweden (Sahlberg 2001). The latter product is part of a growing interest in extreme and adventure tourism (*e.g.*: Swarbrooke *et al.* 2003; Turner 2003; Grenier 2004), a fascination bolstered by popularized publications of tales of explorers from a bygone age (*e.g.*: Lundgren 2001: 12). Yet, none of these texts is so far known to consider islands in this context, let alone be specific to them.

Seven Research Themes

Seven distinct yet inter-related, fundamental research themes have inspired this book. They have been assembled from the sporadic literature on tourism in cold water island destinations. These themes, and the associated questions that they raise, are the ones to which the authors of the case

studies in the second section of this volume have been asked to respond, thus hopefully balancing the necessarily idiosyncratic descriptive aspects of each of their cases with themes that lend themselves to comparison and contrast *across* cases. In the process, some interesting conceptualizations about island tourism are suggested. It is the latter that have been grasped and commented upon by the more critical, analytic and comparative chapters that comprise the first section of the book.

1- Serving Paradise Cold

In spite of the huge amounts of text that have been devoted to the topic, understanding what is the island “lure” (Lockhart 1997), or what it is exactly that attracts visitors to islands and ‘islandness’ remains largely “speculative” (Baum 2000: 215). The physical separation from the mainland, necessitating a conscious decision to cross the water, the opportunity to get away from it all in a slower-paced environment, and the ability to seek out and take in the totality of a destination are presented as three explanations for the inherently distinct adventurism of a trip to an island, especially a *small* island (Baum 1997: 21; 2000: 215-216). How do islands on the extremities of the Earth’s geography and climate seek to promote themselves as tourism destinations, and develop a so-called tourism product? The myth of the island as paradise has been a powerful one (e.g. King 1993; Harrison 2001); so has the discourse of the frontier (Dann 1996). But could the two metaphors happily co-exist in a cold location? What happens when these images are combined? And is the result compatible with the type of tourism that is desirable and appropriate to the locality and its people?

2 - Remoteness: Blessing or Curse?

Given their extreme and insular location, and shorn of the ‘paradise’ hype of sun, sand, sea (and sex?), islands at the top and bottom of the world could be seen starkly as the most remote and forbidding destinations on the planet. Their appeal appears naturally limited with respect to the conventional mass market. The islanders themselves, of course, may beg to differ. Or do they? Is this condition actually a distinct advantage in (self-) regulating tourism flows and in preventing an often-irreversible trend towards mass tourism and the serious erosion of (often fragile) island ecosystems that so many other destinations have espoused, either by design or default? (McElroy & de Albuquerque 2002: 22). After all, “...while it may be desirable that access be improved for local benefit, such steps may well remove the greatest asset that an island may have in controlling the numbers, type and scale of tourism development” (Butler 1996: 16-17). Their appeal may relate to the “very real feeling of separateness and difference, caused in part to their being physically separate, and perhaps therefore different from adjoining mainlands” (Butler 1993: 71). Jurisdictional specificity (such as being a sovereign state or being a province) could be expected to enhance such a condition of differentiation and, therefore, of intrinsic appeal.

3-Planning or thwarting Access Improvement

The idea of ‘distance decay’ suggests that the extent of spatial interaction is inversely related to distance (Tobler 1970). Now, access to islands is usually “... complicated, expensive, hazardous, time-consuming, irregular and unreliable, or any combination of the above” (Butler 1996: 16) – leading to expectations of low tourism interest and presence. To what extent should access to

islands be remedied? (Of course, ease of access may be changing anyway, irrespective of human planning: for example, because of global warming.) What brand of economic development, inclusive of means of (air/land/sea) transportation and infrastructure (or mix thereof), lends itself to a sustainable tourism strategy? Or are such decisions taken with other concerns in mind, and tourism policy is only ‘muddled through’? Who actually takes these decisions, especially in the (most common) case of islands where political control is vested somewhere else?

4- Impact of Volatility

Small islands are characterized by “... resource and market scarcity and intense openness” (McElroy & de Albuquerque 2002: 17). This statement suggests that changes brought about by an exogenous variable such as tourism will be rapid, deep and intimate. Intense openness also means that a small island economy could quickly become dependent on the tourism industry with visitors from faraway, foreign lands, with often-fickle tastes: a hazardous proposition. Moreover, the policies and practices of just one tour operator, one airline, perhaps one hotel, could make or break tourism. Service providers in the industry, as with other enterprises in cold water locations, tend towards being oligopolies or monopolies. Is there such volatility and boom-bust orientation in the tourism industry of cold water islands? Is there a tendency towards concentration of capital, skill or service? With what effects?

5- Cold Tourists?

Specific tourist types are concerned with a search for the novel and the authentic (e.g. MacCannell 1989). Islands, like frontier regions, have a particular appeal to those tourist types keen on natural environments, traditional cultures and unorthodox scenarios. Moreover, prevailing and challenging weather conditions may be less significant features for visitors to cold water islands than to other locations, since most activities are not highly weather dependent and in some cases may actually depend on *adverse* weather conditions (Butler 1996: 23-24). To what extent do ‘cold water tourists’ exist as a special type of tourist (*after* Cohen 1972)? And how do they differ, if at all, from their warm water cousins? Are they, for example, more environmentally conscious?

6- Conflicting Models of Land Use and Development

If the tourism ‘area cycle’ evolutionary model generally holds (*after* Butler 1980), then the last ‘raw’ outposts of civilization to be discovered by the tourism industry (*after* King 1997) could be assumed to be cold water, island locations. As communities in destination regions face the downside of tourism, and as tourists become thwarted by the non-primitive and/or non-authentic character of the ‘natives’, the urge to seek out even more remote, genuine, pristine and extreme locations remains strong (Butler 2002: 5). It may be just a question of time before all corners of the world are fully integrated into a global tourism vice, as technology continues to make the planet smaller and more accessible. But, it is a big IF. What if a small, cold water island has a totally different competitive advantage which suggests its own evolutionary pattern? Can such a location develop its own response to the “changing spatial patterns of international tourism” (Williams 1998)? Is the ‘island as a prison’ its greatest, ultimate asset (Royle 2001: 224)? If this is the case, then its “relative inaccessibility, the absence of much development and the presence

of few other tourists” (Butler 2002: 5) have been features of the competitive tourism advantage of a cold water island. But this also means that the scale and type of tourism and its development must be closely managed. This task may be easier to carry out in frontier sites where the land area is typically large and population levels are minimal. In contrast, on small islands, land is finite and the contact between tourists and residents is impossible to avoid, and potentially tense. Locals may have needs that run counter to arguments about their own tourism industry’s sustainability; land use conflicts are also more likely (e.g. Latimer 1985).

7- Political Geography

Extreme island regions tend to lie on the political periphery, especially when they have small populations: un/under-represented in the corridors of power; largely forgotten by centralized policy makers suffering from ‘the urban bias’; dismissed as insignificant backwaters other than, perhaps, in strategic (military and resource) terms (Butler 1993; Wilkinson 1994). A weak local political influence may, in turn, suggest a precarious status that attracts a bold entrepreneurial tourism elite (Butler 2002). However, such a frontier mentality may also bring about the haphazard and dependent development of a tourism industry that suffers from benign domestic neglect: with non-domestic tourist visitors being catered for by non-local businesses, resulting in massive economic leakages; and with common resources liable to over-use and erosion (Getz 1983). The long-term consequences of such a condition may not be pleasant. In contrast, sound local management could conspire with climate and relative inaccessibility to limit tourism to small scale, low-impact, dispersed and genuinely sustainable development (e.g. Butler 1997: 78).

Islands are Cool

Every island is unique. Yet, a comparative ‘island studies’ perspective alerts us to some underlying patterns lurking within the diversity of cold water islands reviewed in this text: apart from the obvious pronouncement that the water is too cold to swim in. Our profiled, cold water island locations tend to have harsh as well as pristine and fragile natural environments, characterized by wide open spaces; this makes them support low populations at best. They become contexts for an exceptional and expensive form of vigorous, outdoor, adventure or cultural tourism, and direct encounters with nature (observing penguins, bears or wild flowers; hunting wild game; visiting parks); history (whaling stations, abandoned mines, battle sites, research stations, explorer routes); and local culture (indigenous people, their lifestyle and artifacts): definitely not places to laze about and relax in hotel precincts. Indeed, there may not even *be* a hotel. The locals, where they exist, are not particularly enthusiastic about visitors; few of the locals owe their livelihoods to tourism anyway, and they are usually in agreement that visitor numbers must remain low – and especially so if the locals happen to be a bunch of scientists. Specific local interests - a company, a monastery, a corporation, apart from the scientific community – can have inordinate influences on local public policy, since there is a tighter, more compact and more identifiable resident elite. The anomaly in our set remains Iceland, since 1944 the world’s coolest sovereign state: it has by far the largest population, highest tourism numbers and strongest tourism infrastructure in our set.

In Andrea Barrett's novel *The Voyage of the Narwhal*, a despondent, unmarried naturalist from the metropolitan USA sees an opportunity to both make his reputation and redeem himself by

signing on for a voyage to the Arctic in 1855, in search of Sir John Franklin's lost expedition (Barrett 1999). Personal and territorial exploration, along with their hazards and tribulations, are deftly intertwined. Similarly, the travails of visitors to the white island expanses of the north and south today could be felt to recreate the journeys of the Vikings and other intrepid explorers. The personal audacity of these pioneers, their awe and wonder at the marvels of nature they stumbled upon, and their encounters with natives, seem to capture the imagination of those contemporary tourists who wish, and could afford, to reach beyond the typical vacation and travel periphery (Lundgren 2001: 12), while, thereby claiming some of the glory of 'doing' these harsh yet seductive island environments for themselves. Before global warming thaws it all away. Truly chilling.

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