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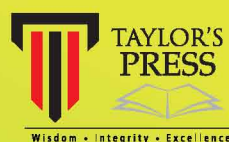


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Book Review

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by Jeetesh Kumar & Kashif Hussain, Taylor's University, Malaysia

A desire to explore, find and become enriched still drives individuals to travel nowadays. The need for travel has made tourism the number one industry in several countries worldwide. The travel and business industry is one among the few industries contributing to a positive trade balance for the world's economy. It is among the most important employers, developing workers in the least levels and areas of experience. According to World Tourism Organisation, tourism is one of the world's largest industries today; it is a key to development, prosperity and well-being for nations. By 2012, it had generated 9% of direct, indirect and induced impact on GDP, employed 1 person in every 11 jobs and expended USD 1.3 trillion in exports with 6% of worldwide exports. Moreover, it had grown from 25 million international tourists in 1950 to 1,035 million in 2012 while having 5-6 million of domestic tourists generating USD 1,075 billion international tourism receipts and further it is forecasted that there will be 1.8 billion international tourists in 2030 (UNWTO, 2012).

When the global recession hit a few years back, it was travel and tourism that pulled many countries out of their crisis. Praised by *The New York Times* for its "meticulous reporting and often disturbing expose", *Overbooked* shows how travel and tourism is having a profound impact on countries, the environment, and cultural heritage. Whether pollution left in the wake of cruise ships or the millions of tourists overwhelming the city of Venice, Elizabeth Becker offers anecdotes to illustrate her investigation. Costa Rica pioneered ecotourism to protect its natural resources while the Cambodian temples at Angkor are sinking because too many tourist establishments are draining the water table, just one of the precious cultural sites in jeopardy due to over tourism. From France to China to Brazil to Dubai to Zambia, her investigation is a first hand examination of one of the largest enterprises in the world.

This award winning author of several books has organised this book into six parts as follows:

Part I, "The Tourism Become an Industry", focuses on all positive effects of this industry and how it is so important currently for the development of a country. The

decreasing cost of long-distance flights has placed exotic destinations within the reach of people who could not have indulged their wanderlust after reading the National Geographic.

Part II is on “Cultural Tourism” where the author specifically has given an overview of a few destinations like such as France, Venice and Cambodia. In the face of the traveler onslaught, some governments have acted with foresight and sensitivity. Becker lavishes praise on France that has protected its coasts and its cottage industries as well as winemaking and cheese production, through a combination of subsidies and strict environmental laws. At the other end of the spectrum is the Kingdom of Cambodia, which has pursued tourist dollars with very little concern for the environmental or human consequences. The temples of Angkor Wat are being degraded, and therefore the mystical atmosphere, Becker writes, has been lost “in a beginning of foreigners with guides shouting in competing languages.” Fueled by government corruption, sex tourism has flourished in Phnom Penh and in other Asian cities.

Part III is on “Consumer Tourism”. Here Becker aims her sharpest barbs at the cruise ship industry that claims to add some USD 40 billion a year to the United States economy. Giants like Royal Caribbean and Carnival Cruise Lines avoid paying pay and exempt themselves from environmental scrutiny by registering their vessels under the flags of countries with lax or non-existent regulations. They lure cruise passengers into making expensive purchases of diamonds and art from firms that supply dubious money-back guarantees. They have turned bound ports of decision into crowded bazaars stuffed with tacky merchandise and traveler hordes. “They’re like transportable low-rent Hiltons.” Becker mentions that one of the tour guides said, “They go everywhere with very little concern for the garbage they leave behind or the disturbance they create within the short time they invade an area.” Dubai, transformed by oil wealth into an oasis of conspicuous consumerism, condemns its labourers to the equivalent of indentured servitude and expends huge amounts of energy air-conditioning its skyscrapers, hotels and shopping malls. Dubai and Abu Dhabi, in Becker’s view, “are currently global cities with very little left of their desert heritage, their environment or their hold on the future should all those foreigners leave.”

In Part IV which deals with “Nature Tourism”, Becker says Costa Rica has become the world’s pioneer of “ecotourism,” turning cloud forests into nature reserves and inspiring hotels to go green. The Costa Rican government even refused to sign a free-trade pact that would have forced it to admit developers from the United States and thus jeopardize control of its coastline. Looking for a safari, Becker avoids Kenya and South Africa, which have increasingly become “Out of Africa” theme parks. Instead she heads to Zambia, where the safari industry is just beginning to be

built up. Here she finds conservationists, government officials and tour operators seeking a balance between encouraging tourism and safeguarding the country's wildlife. "Zambia is still wide open," she observes, "with more than a hint of the Africa that the Europeans fell in love with a century ago". The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union opened regions that had been once off limits. Before 1990, Becker reports, 60% of the world's international tourists visited Western European countries. "Afterwards, the holidaymaker map was redrawn" to incorporate the former eastern bloc and "vast swaths of Africa and Asia." The result, she says, was a remarkable surge within the overall variety of foreign visits, from 25 million in 1960 to at least one billion in 2012. Today, "in gross economic power," the business enterprise of tourism "is in the same company as oil, energy, finance and agriculture."

The author devotes Part V to "The New Giant" to refer to China, the huge industry. She shares her experience while she was on travel to China with her husband where she experienced the local Chinese traditional hotel and became angry with one of the tour guides who said that if the government hadn't moved down pro-democracy demonstrators at Tiananmen square. "China would have folded".

The last part of the book, Part VI, is the end of Becker's investigation. Here, she takes a look at tourism within the United States which took an idiosyncratic path after 9/11. While the rest of the world was opening its doors to foreign guests, the State Department tightened visa necessities and foreigners were subjected to imprisoned interrogations at entry points, even jailed after they inadvertently overstayed their welcomes. "Travel to America? No Thanks," ran the headline on a scathing article within the *Sunday Times of London*. American tour operators call the period a "lost decade," claiming the industry lost USD94 billion and 200,000 jobs within the initial five years after the attacks. Given the horrors Becker vividly documents in "Overbooked," it might be time for places like Cambodia and Dubai to adopt the same approach.

Overall the book is well written and well structured. As mentioned above, the author shares her personal travel experience of several countries and summarises how tourism is currently very important to the world. End notes are given at the end of all parts of the book, which serve to provide a clear structure to the discussion.

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UNWTO (2012). *Tourism highlights: Facts and figures*. Madrid: WTO Press.



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