

## Indigenous identity – Global grasp: The Road Not Taken Tours

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The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries benefit from the growing tourism market but there are also detrimental effects, including a large influx of tourists, the oversupply or duplication of tourism businesses, and the deterioration of local cultures. The latter, sustaining local cultural identity, is the issue herein addressed with a distinctive tourism tactic. The Road Not Taken Tours (RNTT) pilot project in Lombok, Indonesia, offers new opportunities for tourism destinations and a potential model for tourism innovations in ASEAN partner countries. RNTT provides face-to-face exchanges between locals with meagre means and relatively affluent foreign tourists for short visits with simple activities. The pursuit preserves cultural identities locally and creates understandings and friendships globally. These unique excursions provide meaningful experiences transcending economic and cultural differences. A real-life experience in all its richness could be the best story of an exotic vacation where authentic experiences are esteemed. It is a lesson learned and social responsibility shared. It is the sustaining joy found in simple friendships. World peace is made in such ways. Furthermore, local underprivileged communities develop as local status changes from those who serve to those who lead. Additionally, local communities preserve cultural identity and develop from sustainable economic opportunities. This endeavour, RNTT, contrasts with existing cultural and social tourism excursions exemplified by a multitude of sightseeing centres, schools and villages that provide tourists with opportunities to experience indigenous cultures. These established enterprises, common in emerging economies catering to foreign guests, are tidy, but the experiences are essentially voyeuristic exhibits. RNTT's authentic approach offers new opportunities and solutions in tourism destinations, addressing the need to preserve local cultural identities together with long-term business strategies. The objective of this paper is to explain the driving force behind this idea developed in Lombok Indonesia, define the type of tour and elucidate the marketing issues. This paper will provide a brief literature review of sustainable social tourism, and describe the objectives, scope and marketing plan of RNTT.

**Keywords:** cultural identity, sustainable development, social tourism marketing, Indonesia

### Introduction

Tourism is a growing market but business booms go bust. Successful tourism impacts communities positively and also brings problems related to the large influx of tourists, the oversupply or duplication of tourism businesses and the deterioration of local cultures. While all these issues deserve consideration, a unique solution for the preservation of cultural identity is described here. The Road Not Taken Tours (RNTT) offers new opportunities for local residents and tourists. RNTT presents authentic encounters by providing face-to-face exchanges with natives with meagre means and relatively affluent foreign tourists for short visits with simple activities. Locals become leaders whose cultural identity is sustained and supplemented by long-term business strategies. The pursuit preserves cultural identities locally and creates understandings and friendships globally. These unique excursions provide meaningful experiences transcending economic and cultural differences. The paradox is that when tourism is personal, everyday experiences are powerful. Providing tourists with unique and authentic opportunities in foreign or alien settings is an amenity not to be forgotten.

World travels reveal different cultures, social structures, and economic situations, yet tourism can be impersonal for

travellers and demeaning for local residents, especially in developing countries. Those personal encounters became stories told that have been assimilated and moulded in the persons' inner realm based on his/her perception of the world and cultural background (Denning, 2005). Stories communicate knowledge, inspiration and also provide a memory frame that gives life meaning. RNTT are everyday tourism events that preserve cultural identities, whether a game, or a simple meal, or coffee on the *berugak*. Through the simple acts of sharing everyday local activities with a stranger to the culture, lessons can be learned and social responsibility shared. Moreover, a joyful sentiment and valued experience are precursors for a repeat business.

Bali, Indonesia, is a world-renowned tourist destination, and just to the east is Lombok Island. Lombok has recently been designated one of the best places to visit in Indonesia and a tourism corridor has been established for development, bringing more benefits and its own set of problems. Radiant blue oceans, opulent resorts, restaurants, crafts centres and a plethora of tourism providers flank the narrow tourism corridor. And just off this beaten path, along roads not often taken by tourists, local people live in poverty, without opportunity. West Nusa Tenggara Province ranked 28 out of 34 provinces on poverty levels in 2015 (Hatuina, 2015). North Lombok Regency, for example, is where the infamous Three Gilis or islets can be

found, namely Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno and Gili Air, as well as the third highest active volcano in Indonesia, i.e. Mount Rinjani. Most tourists, domestic and foreign, that visit West Nusa Tenggara Province flock to the northern part of Lombok Island. It is estimated that 447 797 foreign tourists and 55 544 domestic tourists stayed in North Lombok Regency in 2014, bringing in 75% of the regency's internal revenue from tourism (BPS KLU, 2015). Nevertheless, North Lombok Regency is the poorest regency in West Nusa Tenggara Province, with 36% of its community living in poverty (BPS NTB, 2016), seemingly untouched by the profit of tourism (NTB Province, 2016).

Locals beat a path to tourism opportunities, leaving cultural identity behind. There is no value or esteem for indigenous culture by locals or tourists. Furthermore excursions into local communities are rare or voyeuristic in nature, with indigenous identities objectified or relegated to subservient social status. There are many problems with prosperity. Tourism can propel the deterioration of local culture and as such programmes that preserve cultural identity and provide direct economic benefits are needed now.

While conducting leadership research in Lombok, Indonesia, personal encounters with local, poor people revealed the scope and depth of the dilemmas facing local residents. From these circumstances emerged the concept and pilot project, RNTT, whose goals are to elevate the status of locals to leaders and preserve indigenous cultural identities through a sustainable tourism business. This is a solution addressing the need to preserve indigenous culture and simultaneously provide sustainable development.

This paper will provide a brief review of sustainable tourism, explain the driving force behind the RNTT idea developed in Lombok, Indonesia, and define the project's endeavour, scope and marketing strategies.

## Discussion

### *Sustainable tourism*

In the growing tourism market, themed tourism models are readily part of the leisure lexicon. Additionally, *sustainability*, *eco* and *green* tourism are increasingly considered. Examples of search categories range from alternative to zoological tours and feature special interests, activities and places. There are quests for beaches, outdoors adventures, cultural and historic interests and ecotourism. The range of options reflects the growing interests in unique experiences as well as socio-environmental responsibility and sustainability.

There is a plethora of resources available in the literature. Valuable reviews can be found in Battilana et al. (2012); Cheriakova (2013); Foster, Kim, and Christiansen (2009); Graci, and Dodds (2010); Hall, and Richards (2003); and Mowforth, and Munt (2008). Any literature review must include work by Yunus (2009, 2010; Yunus Center, n.d.), who pioneered the social business model. Because of the volume of relevant research, there are also a variety of definitions and instructional information available on sustainable tourism. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) has established criteria and a common language with the intent of establishing and managing standards for sustainable tourism. The GSTC has named four topics relative to responsibility tourism impacts: sustainable management; socioeconomic impacts; cultural impacts; and environmental impacts.

The long-term relevance of this is evident from the UNESCO teaching module designed to explore the characteristics and objectives of sustainable tourism through examples. This provides a way to introduce the topic to students, with four objectives: first, to appreciate the benefits and problems arising from various forms of tourism, especially in terms of social equity and the environment; second, to develop a critical awareness of the ways in which tourism can enhance the welfare of people and protect natural and cultural heritage; third, to promote a personal commitment to forms of tourism that maximise rather than detract from sustainable human development and environmental quality; fourth, to plan ways of teaching about sustainable tourism.

In summary, resources or resorts are not limitless. Consequently, sustainable management of tourism is a concurrent concept with development strategies. Ultimately, sustainability serves all stakeholders. Respecting resources and cultures, both tangible and conceptual, provides clean environments, satisfying experiences and most of all a kind of prosperity whose long-term business strategies creating responsible and successful futures. This is something we all embrace.

### *Driving force – Inspiration in Lombok, Indonesia*

Research conducted in 2014 was the RNTT seed, planted in the rich green of Lombok Island, Indonesia. This grew into the concept of a sustainable tourism model and the RNTT pilot project. It was the very nature of this research that was both the inspiration and model for RNTT.

The initial research was a historical investigation of the leadership legacy from 1973–1976 in Lombok, Indonesia. Armed with a few anecdotes, some photos and hoping to get lucky, the Lombok research search began in 2014. While there was no direct evidence of a forty-year old leadership legacy, other realities were revealed.

Two research methods were employed: snowball sampling and wait-and-see. These research techniques allowed for a local perspective of people, places and food. Observing the local cattle market, wandering in old Ampanan, the Suranadi Hotel and the Port of Lembar discovered friendly helpful people without money or means. Invitations for coffee or a meal or just simple conversations were common.

The willingness of the locals to share their time, conversation and activity is a cultural value that are not generally possessed by other cultures. This shared experience triggered a sense of pleasure through simple gestures such as a smile. The grace and ease of the Lombok people was charming. Yet their circumstances were disarming. These face-to-face encounters were not only memorable, they were inspirational.

This, then, was the stimulus to create a tourism venture providing similar authentic experiences. Framed in a sustainable tourism business model, the concept was to develop local leadership and in doing so to preserve ingenious cultures. Additionally, by providing long-term business solutions, community development would also be served.

### **Road Not Taken Tours (RNTT)**

#### *RNTT pilot project*

RNTT offers new opportunities for tourism destinations through authentic encounters. Essentially the endeavour seeks to create face-to-face exchanges with locals with

meagre means and relatively affluent foreign tourists for short visits with simple activities. A testament to the validity of this concept is the popularity of television programmes such as Anthony Bourdain's production, "Parts Unknown" (2013) where discovery in common places, but off the beaten path, are great stories. These kinds of experiences put people together, one-on-one. Unique and common at the same time, meaningful experiences transcend economic and cultural differences. The pursuit preserves cultural identities locally and creates understandings and friendships globally.

The pilot project RNTT will serve as a model that can be implemented and can be adapted globally. RNTT offers a simple, local and authentic experience with universal appeal and application. What is needed is a plan. The aim of the RNTT pilot project is to provide a plan and template to be replicated in other communities in Indonesia and throughout ASEAN countries.

The objectives of RNTT are to create new opportunities in tourism destinations; preserve local culture; develop local leadership; sustain cultural identity; community development; provide jobs; greening the community, including cleaning up the garbage and general upkeep; international exchanges and friendships; and ultimately world peace.

RNTT will accomplish these objectives by providing personal small-guided tours for two to six tourists from opulent beach resorts into poor communities, which skirt these resort developments. Tours will last about 2–3 hours and will have a variety of activities to choose from. For example, a tour will start with shopping in the local market and learning about indigenous food. Then there is a visit to the home of a local to prepare and eat a simple meal. Other tours will experience simple crafts with a snack and drink. Others will visit a preschool for games and treats. Creativity, seasonal considerations and leadership from the local people will provide inspiration for a myriad of these activity-based tours. RNTT will incorporate transportation, guides, and translators. But most of all, tours will include smiles with memories made and stories to be told.

This is a simple plan designed to attain a complex and crucial set of outcomes. When diametrically opposed people, the poor and the rich, come together, a spark will ignite a path to sustainable development.

### **RNTT scope**

The scope of the RNTT pilot project consists of several levels: as a distinct local business; support and collaborate with existing tourism businesses; and as a model programme available to implement in other regions and ASEAN countries. Each of these will be discussed.

As local endeavour, RNTT aims to be a broad-based sustainable tourism business that integrates stakeholders: local residences; community leaders; and the local university. Local residents with modest means will host visits. Community leaders provide pivotal roles in training, coordinating and managing community improvements. It is important that local residents fully understand the concept and that an equitable sharing of business and hosting is implemented and maintained. The university will be a valuable resource in training and education for both local providers and in educational programmes for students. The benefits from single tours will grow into a sustainable community improvements as well as nurturing

cultural identities. Additional communities will be added to increase the impact in other tourist destinations.

RNTT will offer tours to existing tour operators. Rather than competing with an already saturated market, RNTT can collaborate, creating a win-win scenario for existing tourism business. This also increases the range of the services and options. The excursions are authentic alternatives in tourist vacations and, as such, having options near these markets allows for a wide range of destinations near to the beach resorts.

The RNTT pilot project implemented in Lombok, Indonesia, will serve as the template tourism business, which can be implemented in other ASEAN countries. Additionally, the model can be exported worldwide. The Starbucks of sustainable tourism, authentic, simple experiences are appreciated in all circumstances, and the value added to long-term development for communities and indigenous cultures is clear.

### **RNTT marketing strategies**

Tourism is a significant business and according to ASEAN, the market will increase by 30% on average per year. The tourism market contributed 5% of ASEAN GDP and 3.5 % employment in 2011. More specifically, the number of both domestic and foreign tourists to West Nusa Tenggara Province continues to increase every year. Visitors have more than doubled from 619 370 in 2009 to more than 1.3 million in 2013 (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi NTB, 2016). Clearly there is a growing market.

The RNTT pilot project is essentially set up to help communities thus distinguish it from the profit-driven tour operators. Nevertheless to make it sustainable, a strategic plan of action is called for. In setting up the most appropriate marketing strategy for RNTT, we visited the theory of Kotler et al. (2016) on segmentation, targeting and positioning (STP). The purpose of applying STP as marketing strategy is to efficiently allocate resources and effectively target the customers. It is understood that STP is a customer-driven market strategy.

### **Segmentation**

Segmentation is essentially grouping customers based on some criteria. Each group will have its own sets of stimuli and respond differently to a marketing action. An important consideration in tourism is why people travel and what benefits are gained. The established ideas of relaxation and adventure are commonplace. Hence, tourism searches readily provide options catering to adventure, unique locations or activities. Essentially what are sought are personal experiences in beautiful and unique locations. However, according to Hamblin (2014), making happy memories is about experiences and not things. Authentic experiences are the best story told after an exotic vacation.

The customers can be segmented based on geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioural segmentation. Motivations and behaviour are indicative of certain potential groups of visitors of RNTT. A number of emerging trends in visitors' motivations and behaviour (ATSM, 2012) that can be identified as RNTT potential customers are experiential travel, tourism as experience and memory, and interest/activity-based tourism.

Many tourists may not be interested in experiencing the meagre side of life, authentic or not. However there is

significant interest in “roads less travelled” experiences, as evidenced in many television programmes such as Bourdain’s “Parts Unknown”, and other full-fledged tour providers such as “Insider Journeys.”

RNTT offers a unique approach to authentic tourism in significant ways: the tours are simple, lead by local residences, and last only two to three hours. The tours are designed to be simple, easy, flexible and safe. In this way the niche market is expanded to serendipitous adventure seekers.

#### Targeting

As mentioned above, the market segment identified as potential RNTT customers are those grouped with specific motivations and behaviour. The next step is to establish this particular segment as the target market. However, more information and research is necessary to determine this target market. Prior research has established a rapid growth of niche markets based on interest-based dimensions (ATMS, 2012). This growth provides visitors with a significant number of alternatives in tourism destinations to create those memorable experiences they seek.

A concentrated marketing strategy is preferable when targeting a niche market. To accurately aim at the potential target market, further research is needed to determine the origin, size, age, gender, status, educational background, and financial background, among others. Visitors’ points of entry have to be established as well, in order to obtain wider, clearer and more comprehensive data. The drawback of such comprehensive research is funding. Many start-up tour operators shy away from conducting the necessary market research, based on financial restraints. However, such research will eventually cut down on marketing efforts and thus the associated costs of marketing activities when the right market is targeted.

#### Positioning

RNTT has the objectives of creating new opportunities in tourism destinations; preserving local culture; developing local leadership; sustaining cultural identity; community development; providing jobs; greening the community including cleaning up the garbage and general upkeep; international exchanges and friendships; and ultimately world peace. RNTT is essentially a community-based activity that taps into the emotions and behaviour of customers seeking to create memorable experiences through real and authentic connections with the local community. These are the positions that RNTT wish to elicit in its customers’ minds when they think of RNTT. Positioning is important because it differentiates a service or product in the customer’s mind, which ultimately leads to purchase with the right target market.

The desired marketing strategy to promote RNTT effectively, in the absence of market research on the target market, is to first establish a web presence ([www.the-road-not-taken-tours.org](http://www.the-road-not-taken-tours.org); [www.the-road-not-taken-tours.com](http://www.the-road-not-taken-tours.com)) for online reference, booking and purchases. Online links with government tourism websites, eco-tourism websites, and tourism applications will be established. Social media coverage is also essential. Endorsement by social media celebrities can be pursued through Instagram, YouTube, and others. Secondly, the tours will be promoted through more a conventional marketing activity, spreading leaflets at selected hotels, and tourism

destinations. Finally, cooperation will be sought with existing tour operators and hotels to offer RNTT as part of their holiday packages.

#### Conclusion

The market growth is clear, but the future is blurred. In the rush for economic development, consideration of indigenous cultures is disregarded. The RNTT project pursues and preserves cultural identities locally and creates understandings and friendships globally. These unique excursions provide meaningful experiences transcending economic and cultural differences. Furthermore, local underprivileged communities develop, and local status changes from those who serve to those who lead and in the process acquire cultural pride, preserve cultural identity by providing sustaining and long-term economic and community development.

RNTT is the quintessential personal experience. More profoundly, it is in these everyday moments of shared compassion and connection where happy memories reside. Everyday life becomes a rich institution of resources communicated across cultures.

In the context of exotic cultures, core aesthetics are shared in the RNTT experience. Expanding the influence to protecting cultural heritages, the endeavour also provides pride in economic opportunities for local residents. The RNTT intends to elevate the status of locals as leaders and to preserve culture with long-term sustainable economic benefits.

RNTT offers new opportunities for tourism destinations by presenting authentic encounters in face-to-face exchanges between locals with meagre means and relatively affluent foreign tourists for short visits with simple activities. A real life experience in all its richness could be the best story of an exotic vacation. It is a lesson learned and social responsibility shared. It is the sustaining joy found in simple friendships. World peace is made in such ways.

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