

2017

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Recommended Citation

Choi, Suh-hee (2017) "What Tourists Seek in Fair Travel: A Case of Korean Participants of Good Travel Programmes to Asian Destinations," *Critical Tourism Studies Proceedings*: Vol. 2017 , Article 141.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.tru.ca/cts-proceedings/vol2017/iss1/141>

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**WHAT TOURISTS SEEK IN FAIR TRAVEL:
A CASE OF KOREAN PARTICIPANTS OF GOOD TRAVEL PROGRAMMES TO
ASIAN DESTINATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

This case study about Good Travel—a community-based tourism enterprise—focuses on the organization of alternative tourism programmes and explores how one of its targeted and the most loyal demographic group—Korean middle-aged alternative tourists—is motivated to participate in and experience such an alternative form of tourism. Interviews with the repeat participants showed that, rather than consuming the host community's unique tourism offering, the tourists considered interactions with the host community and feelings of compassion as the most memorable components of their experience.

Key words: Alternative tourism experience, Korean middle-aged tourist, community-based tourism, fair travel, Good Travel

INTRODUCTION

Increased awareness of problems with traditional mass tourism and efforts to overcome limitations have intensified interest in alternative forms of tourism—characterized as visiting unusual destinations, sustaining the environment, business, and the local culture, and interacting more with local hosts (Novelli, 2005). Alternative organized group travel activities that involve rather extensive interactions with the host communities are framed, in many cases, as community-based tourism, volunteer tourism, fair travel, or humanitarian-oriented travel (McKenna, 2016). Recent academic interest in this type of travel has been geographically biased towards the context of Western tourists visiting developing countries mostly in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and African countries. Few studies have focused on understanding the Asian tourist experience and Asian-Pacific models of community-based tourism (Ong, Lockstone-Binney, King, & Smith, 2014), where the participating tourists are not necessarily from developed countries and the destination community may or may not be located in a less developed country.

This case study focuses on the experiences of and the values sought by the participants of programmes offered by Good Travel, a tourism enterprise in Korea. The study considers both the travel participants and the travel organizer, from whose perspective, its travel programming structure and the underlying business philosophy are explored. The study further examines how the participants experience the community-based tourism programmes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community-traveller encounters in community-based tourism

Whether it is widely or narrowly defined, genuine community participation and benefiting the community are considered as two components of community-based tourism (Mann, 2000). Its definitions acknowledge a variety of community-based tourism activities which contribute to sustainable economic and social development of a community. Its narrow definitions confine it to the activities which are managed by the community and for their benefit. Although many activities found in the context of community-based tourism involves volunteering or voluntourism, many other forms can be found, such as home-staying, guided tours by the villagers, and various activities held in the village such as performances and cooking classes. Most studies about community-based tourism have focused on community development issues, stakeholder involvement, the level and methods of community participation, and the benefit of community-based approaches to sustainable tourism (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Okazaki, 2008). Furthermore, studies have attempted to link community-based tourism to sustainability in many different aspects—environmental, social, and economic. A research gap exists in studies about community members' and visitors' motivations for participation and experiences. New studies may provide implications on the values needed for sustainable community-based tourism management.

Among those who select a community-based tourism experience, studies have reported various motivations—something more meaningful than self-indulgence and relaxation (Ooi & Laing, 2010). Diverse motivations for participating in this type of alternative tourism include personal growth (Benson & Seibert, 2009), escapism (Lo & Lee, 2011), new cultural understanding (Brown, 2005; Lo & Lee, 2011; Ooi & Laing, 2010), sense of community (Brown, 2005), and social development (Brown, 2005). While altruism has been acknowledged as the primary motive for volunteer community-based tourism (Ong et al.,

2014), the spectrum of volunteer community-based tourism motivation ranges from pure altruism to egotism (McGehee, 2014). Studies have criticized that promotion and experience of volunteer community-based tourism are simplified as first-world tourists experiencing third world others out of good intentions (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015).

Studies have examined demographic variables, types of activities in the destination communities, and length of stay in predicting experiential outcomes such as personal growth and personality change (Alexander, 2012). For example, middle-aged or older volunteer community-based tourists have been reported as having motivations for relationship development with the local community, helping others, and a sense of connectedness (Lo & Lee, 2011).

The outcomes of interactions from the perspectives of reciprocity suggest three different types of orientations. Exchange reciprocity highlights give and take of benefits, resources, and activities; influence reciprocity emphasizes personal, social, and environmental collaboration; and generativity reciprocity concerns long-term achievement of solidarity and understanding (Hartman, Paris, & Blache-Cohen, 2014). As a crucial part of the volunteer community-based tourism experience, Hammersley (2014) addressed interactions and relationship building with the community and mutual learning. Petric and Pivcevic (2016) concluded that cultural understanding and cultural exchange also appear to benefit the communities.

A CASE OF GOOD TRAVEL

Methods

Interviews with two of the most important actors—the organizer and the tourists—were conducted. First, unstructured interviews with the CEO of Good Travel were conducted to investigate the procedures of travel programme development and the organization's philosophical approaches. The researcher then participated in an annual workshop which was organized by the members of Chakbansa. This workshop has been regularly organized by the members for multiple purposes, including socializing, recalling previous Good Travel experience, getting updates from the CEO about the host communities and Good Travel staff, and discussing future Good Travel programmes. Therefore, the purpose of the workshop was not for the present study. As the observation and the interviews had exploratory nature, the interviews were totally unstructured, and no interview questions were constructed in order to minimize preconceptions. Reflections and opinions from experienced participants of Good Travel programmes were recorded and synthesized to yield insights about their motivations and experiences. Conversations with a few of the participants during the workshop revealed how they first heard about this travel organization, their motivation for continued support of the business, and the most memorable component of the entire experience for them. Thematic analysis was conducted to reveal common features and experience of the study subjects. Themes were derived after the close examination of the interview notes and field notes. Recurring expressions and related examples were highlighted by reviewing the notes. As there was a single researcher who was involved with all the process and observation, comparison of identified themes across different coders who are not experienced in this topic was deemed inefficient. Therefore, instead of inviting multiple coders, the author chose to control the bias by sharing the identified themes and the draft of the manuscript with Good Travel staff as well as Chakbansa members and hearing comments from them.

The organization

Good Travel was established in July 2009 with travel programmes offered by the organization characterized as customized, small-scale, and community-based. The organization has mainly assisted with developing and organizing travel programmes for Korean NGOs, teachers and students, and companies as forms of incentive travel. Affected mainly by the CEO's personal network, main destinations have included Asian regions, such as Taiwan, the Philippines, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, and Nepal; additionally, the destination regions are being expanded to domestic local communities (Good Travel, 2017). Nevertheless, Good Travel still attempts to extend the destinations from Asia to the Americas.

The CEO revealed that one priority was considering both the host community and the participating travellers. Additionally, the CEO has taken care of both the destination and the programme and has tried to organize so that tourists can have unique experiences. The CEO has kept in mind offering what cannot be offered with virtual experiences—meeting the local people in person. Also, he has focused on travellers' own serendipitous discoveries rather than experiences offered by the travel programme. In other words, what can be experienced at the destination may not be what the operator intends depending on how tourists experience what is offered.

Good Travel was registered as a social enterprise, and the CEO, for whom being a social entrepreneur is also a tool—not a purpose, acknowledged that there are barriers in incorporating the concept of the Korean model of social enterprise into small-scale tourism enterprises. An additional business approach originating from Good Travel's common philosophy is the concept of providing space as well as time to enable people to experience the slow pace of life. To that end, Good Travel has provided guesthouses for their customers. In sum, instead of using tourism only for generating revenue, Good Travel appears to have aimed at using tourism and travel as a tool to pursue meaningfulness in one's life.

Chakbansa

In January 2013, after returning to Korea, participants in a Good Travel trip to Nepal formed Chakbansa, a social community. Chakbansa members tend to be relatively non-sensitive to price when they participate in Good Travel's programme. They are very loyal to Good Travel rather than the destinations they visited. Intent to participate in the Good Travel programme again was shown as joining Good Travel's programme to other destinations rather than to revisit the same destination. The CEO revealed that for every travel package offered by Good Travel, Chakbansa members account for about a half of the entire customer base.

As one example, Ms. Oh started to travel internationally when she was 42-years-old. All her international travel experience since then has been with Good Travel. For her first experience, she selected the destination first and then chose Good Travel's package. However, since then, she has always used Good Travel for all international travel. She became a huge supporter of this organization through its trip to Camino de Santiago. Previously, she thought that it was a good travel agency. However, after joining the Camino de Santiago package, she thought that "this is more than just a travel agency." Afterwards, she used other Good Travel programmes such as the one to Coron Island. She had frequently thought about how travel experience is commodified and commercialized, and although she had felt the need to help children from poor countries, she was sceptical about commodifying such initiatives as tourism products. Thus, Good Travel's pursuits meshed with her tourism pursuits.

Many customers join for the first time through word-of-mouth recommendation. For instance, Mr. Choi started participating in Good Travel's program in 2009, in part because Good Travel's style matched with his travel dream. Later, Mr. Choi introduced Good Travel to Mr. Cho who signed up for his first Good Travel trip without any strong motivation, simply persuaded by Mr. Choi with information about the destination and a rough profile of the participants. Half were returning participants, having participated in the Good Travel program one to three times, and most of them married couples.

Motivations for participation

Good Travel users were aware of the characteristics of the travel programmes that offer a semi-encapsulated experience as a hybrid of package travel and backpacking. Many participants, such as Mr. Cho, joined Good Travel's programmes instead of travelling independently because they understood such tourism offerings as a balance between traditional package tours—a fixed schedule without interactions with local hosts and other tourists—and individual backpacking. Some middle-age travellers like Mr. Cho desire a backpacker experience while, at the same time facing fewer language barriers and spending time efficiently. In addition, Good Travel programmes can be differentiated from most individual travel, as perceived by Mr. Cho, in that it is hard to visit the local community individually while Good Travel offers and emphasizes the opportunities to do so. Good Travel fulfilled participants' needs in this aspect.

Another noticeable motivation for participants was to travel with previous Good Travel participants. According to Ms. Oh, the value of this social network is that travelling with good travel partners is guaranteed.

Experience of interacting with the local community

Whenever the participants reflected on memorable components of their experiences, strong impressions from interactions with the local community were repeatedly mentioned. Transactions and interactions, both material and immaterial, with the local community, were emphasized as valuable components of the tourism programme. Furthermore, the participants exuded a sense of benefitting the community and satisfaction originating from such a sense. Moreover, participants expressed the meaningfulness of helping the local community by purchasing goods and sharing items as gifts for the community. Immaterial interactions of shared experiences with the hosts enabled the travel participants to feel that they were immersed in each other's lives. The travellers also valued feeling hospitality and discovering commonness during the homestay experiences.

In particular, related to their interactions with the local community, the participants' statements reflected the feeling that both parties experienced genuine, deep interactions and fulfilment through such interactions. Mr. Lee repeatedly expressed that during the visit to Kumamoto, Japan, he was impressed by the hospitality of the young village head: "The village head who invited us cut all the grass to make a road to the village. I was very impressed." He also expressed that he wanted to do something for the village in return. According to the perception of the travel participants, authentic local experience was achieved through the homestay, the interactions with the locals at the homestay, and experiencing the culture inside the house. Mr. Cho and others even considered as memorable a centipede that appeared during the homestay because such an incident enhanced authenticity in experience of the host village. Mr. Cho also recalled the homestay experience

as the most memorable one. He felt special about being his first time staying in a Japanese traditional house and talking with the head of the village. Mr. Cho's core expectation before visiting the community involved communicating with the head of the community and genuine interactions with the hosts. Also, during the trip to Hokkaido, Japan, he heard stories about the community from the village head. He believed that hearing directly about the community from the village head reflected a differentiated aspect of what Good Travel offered. Mr. Park, another repeat Good Travel programme participant and Chakbansa member, also recalled homestay in Kumamoto, Japan, as a memorable experience: "It was meaningful that we experienced its food culture in the hosts' houses, and thus we experienced the culture of the local community."

During the trip to Nepal, porters enabled interactions with the local hosts. For this trip, the group hired eight porters for the eleven team members. The travel participants thought they were immersed in each other's lives and eventually felt strong empathy with the porters. Mr. Cho expressed the feeling that the hosts (i.e., the porters) and the guests could communicate despite the existence of a language difference. He said that the feeling of being able to communicate with them and the sense of empathy contributed to the memorable experience. Mr. Cho reported that he got not only service from the porters but also hospitality, which he felt in the morning when they brought morning tea.

One particular feeling to note is that, Chakbansa members expressed that they felt they were representing Korea when they met the Japanese community. "We prepared Korean yam noodle and made Japchae. The Japanese host community prepared mochi." The participants recalled the scene during the village visit. They were sitting together, like a summit meeting, and then went to the 100-to-200-year-old houses by teams of two, talking with each other while drinking local *sake* (Japanese alcoholic drinks) until late at night and had meals made with local products.

The participants appeared to perceive that their material interactions helped the community, and they expressed satisfaction with their behaviors. In joining a trip to Japan, Mr. Cho felt it valuable to participate in the activities that he thought would contribute to the community, such as activities of economic help to the hosts. Mr. Cho stressed the transactional aspect of the interaction experience. He understood travelling as the process of transactions. He was mindful that the process of interactions in the community were part of the tourism programme. From his perspective, purchasing souvenirs and spending on local products were important parts of Good Travel's offering. Thus, the tourism programme appealed to the targeted group of tourists in that it tries to include programmes at the destination communities. The tourists considered it very special to stay with the local community, have a meal together, and talk with them.

Empathy

Shared emotions were described as "empathy" and "the common way of life as a human being." Emotional arousal was enhanced by revealing "the commonness of people living on the same planet." In this process, the role of the travel leader is important in showing how to interact with the local communities and guiding what to do for a better experience.

The notion of empathy, Mr. Cho described, is not the sense of superiority—the sense that Korea is more well-off than Nepal. Rather, Mr. Cho described the nature of such

empathy as the common way of life as a human being. What he felt was the commonness of people living on the same planet despite the differences in countries and the natural and social environments. So, the stories from the local Nepalese porters about their lives and the sense of empathy originating from the conversations became an important part of the tourism experience. The communication was enabled with the help of the Nepalese guide who spoke Korean because of his previous working experience in Korea.

With regards to the interactions with the porters during the trip to Nepal, one noticeable characteristic is that the tourists felt that the porters for their trip were well treated especially based on the way the tour leader—the CEO—interacted with the porters. The tourists observed the CEO's interactions with the locals during the trip because they assumed that the CEO was more experienced interacting with locals. Mr. Cho recalled that the mind-set in hiring the porters was more than transactions. The CEO enabled the tourists to socialize with the porters in humanistic ways. For example, Mr. Cho was impressed by the positive attitude of the CEO and the fellow experienced travellers towards the local hosts. He was able to see the business philosophy in practice. By learning the skills to interact with the hosts from the tour leader and other experienced travel participants, less experienced participants also enhanced emotional bonding with the hosts. The travel participants expressed such a learning experience as the element which was differentiated from other trekking trips.

Post-trip interactions and emotions

Different degrees of post-trip interactions were offered to the tourists mainly because of the characteristics of the destinations and the programme. For the trip to Nepal, the opportunity for the travel participants to continue interacting with the hosts was limited because of a relatively weak communication infrastructure at the destination; Nepalese hosts had limited internet connection. So, the pictures taken during the trip functioned as memoirs instead. Mr. Cho said that he keeps thinking about how the porters are doing. He also said, with regards to post-trip feeling, rather than feeling happier after the trip, he felt the comfort of his current life at home. Such a perceptual pattern conforms to other cases, such as Freidus (2016), which addressed the tourists' sense of being lucky to have been born in a richer home country. Last, but not least, Good Travel facilitated ongoing interactions. For example, with the facilitation of Good Travel, previous participants of the Good Travel programme to Kumamoto financially supported the earthquake-stricken community after the trip.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Understanding tourists' main motivations

A usual approach in community-based tourism may be to find the potential of the community based on the unique tourism assets offered by the community. However, this case study showed that the uniqueness of the community offering may not be a determinant factor for community-based tourism participants' satisfaction. As the value of cultural exchange opportunities has been pointed out in other similar studies (Broad, 2003; Brown & Morrison, 2003; Simpson, 2004), the travel participants repeatedly reflected the moments-of-truth during interactions with the hosts as memorable components. Travel product developers might be concerned about which products to offer, but it may be much more crucial to consider emotional experience from the customers' perspectives—especially with the targeted market in this study, or as is addressed in other studies emphasizing this type of tourism (Malone, McCabe, & Smith, 2014), or as is emphasized in general tourism

experiences (Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013). As was found in similar studies, a sense of emotional bond and solidarity in addition to the sense of helping the local community appeared as valuable components of the participants in this case. Compassion, which originates from emotions that lead to the desire to help others and reduce anguish and suffering, is a newly-emerging consideration for the future of tourism (Weaver & Jin, 2016) and was reflected in this study in that empathy was expressed continuously by the prior participants. The focus of this notion in tourism also has been on actual humanitarian assistance in disaster-stricken regions, and diversified contexts, conditions, and outcomes have been developed (Weaver & Jin, 2016). One example of behavioral outcomes of the compassion found in this case study was the financial assistance to the earthquake-stricken Kumamoto community.

This case study reflects that core activities in building compassion include diversified personal interactions before, during, and after the trip. Raymond and Hall (2008) also proposed that cross-cultural understanding can be achieved not only by the interactions with host communities but also among participants. In this case, homogeneity among the participants was found. Social relationship building was observed in this case study; however, the pattern of in-group (i.e., among tourists) relationship building was different from that of outgroup (between hosts and guests). Personal relationship building and ongoing connection were more emphasized between tourists while understanding the other party and seeking compassion were observed in the interaction between the hosts and the guests. In this type of community-based tourism model, host-guest interactions may be rather temporary (Glover & Filep, 2015). Therefore, more research is required to understand how tourists' attitudes towards the hosts develop through transient interactions.

Additionally, future studies can be done on the effect of demographic variation in the participants' preference. This case showed that the participants pursued a certain level of comfort by staying encapsulated within the Good Travel programme, different from western gap year volunteer tourists, while they strongly desired and valued interactions with the host communities.

Role of the organization

As can be seen from many other special interest tourism cases, the leadership of the CEO as well as the role of the organizational identity in the customers' choice of service and experience were deemed very crucial. Palacios (2010) pointed out that the students tended to choose volunteer tourism programmes offered by universities because of the perceived legitimacy of the travel programme provider. He called for attention to sensitivity about delivering neo-colonial messages in such university programmes. In the case of Good Travel, revealing and further promoting the background of the CEO appeared to be helpful for the customers to choose the programme. Not only in travel programming but also during the trip the organizational philosophy was visualized and experienced by tourists and thus enabled the tourists to feel that the travel embodied the concept of fair, community-based tourism. In this case, through the organization, an ongoing relationship was being built between the organization and the loyal customers as well as the host community and the customers. Evidence was found that the participants trusted the CEO's previous work experience at NGOs, and the CEO's intention to advance the concept of travel was understood by the participating travellers.

Literature in volunteer community-based tourism has pointed out the role of an organization as the mediator in understanding how volunteer community-based tourists can be involved in assisting host communities and also in developing a volunteer community-based tourism programme with the host community—especially to avoid a wrong allocation of human resources, which may lead locals to lose their jobs (Forstner, 2004; Raymond & Hall, 2008). This case study addresses what such previous studies emphasized—the importance of intermediaries in providing the host communities with market information and market access through personal networks and marketing skills. This case study may provide solutions to the problems addressed by Manyara and Jones (2007), who looked at Kenya where the local communities' needs were not adequately addressed, and outsiders controlled the community-based resources, thus reinforcing a neo-colonial model.

This study also revealed the role of the organization in leading the decision-making process of what to offer to the community and the tourists and influencing them in forming attitudes during the encounter. Other studies also have pointed out the influence of the discourse created and shaped by the organization (McKenna, 2016). In this particular case, what is worth noticing is that transmitting the discourse from organizer to tourists was done not only orally but also through the learning process—learning by observing how the travel leader interacted with the local hosts during the trip.

Furthermore, what enhanced the tourism experience was the entrepreneur's effort to deliver the core value of the programme—respecting the needs of the local community—effectively to their customers. For example, interviewees reflected that the CEO, guiding a travel programme to Nepal, enabled the tourists to socialize with the Nepalese porters in a “humanistic way.” The feeling originating from the interaction described by the participants is not superiority—the sense that Korea is more well-off than Nepal—but empathy. As the CEO tried to incorporate his business philosophy into tourism programming, and as there was a consensus among the participants about understanding what the tourism programmes pursued, such an atmosphere was maximized.

From the researcher's observation of the participating tourists and their narratives, it is easy to discern the humanitarian gaze (Mostafanezhad, 2014), which naturalizes the dichotomy of north-south relations and takes for granted the inequality between the home and the destination regions. As can be seen from other similar forms of tourism, it is possible that Good Travel's middle-aged Korean participants cannot escape from their life of experiencing development in an economically developing country to life in a developed country. Moreover, they cannot escape their self-awareness as a citizen of a developed country. Reflecting on positive interactions and excluding reports of the destination community as a poverty-stricken region may mirror Mostafanezhad's (2013) argument that travellers' own illusion of their interaction experience is authentic and that host communities are glamorized. However, what can be noted in this case study is that the participating travellers emphasized that they did not express superiority or glamorization of the community and that they most valued the hosts' compassion and hospitality.

Future studies

This study provides implications in understanding the experience of Asian community-based travel participants. Recently, in a similar context, Ong et al. (2014) called for attention to understanding volunteer community-based tourism between developing countries and between developed countries. The current case study showed that, in

developing a generalized model for community-based tourism programme development, the developed level of a destination may not be critical, and excluding communities in developed countries may deprive us of ascertaining some of the critical emotional values and benefits not only for the tourists but also for the hosts. The sustainable business model that Good Travel had struggled to discover conformed to that of previous studies that called for the community-based tourism enterprises' effort to seek economic sustainability.

Last, investigations of more diverse actors would enable a more comprehensive understanding of how each group perceives and experiences. This study focused on the organizers and tourists rather than the host communities. Future studies can focus additionally on the hosts in this research context to elicit their motivation, participation, and experience in hosting visitors. More importantly, it is crucial to reveal if Good Travel programmes really equally benefit the hosts as well as the organization and the tourists. In fact, this also was the concern that the CEO and the staff at Good Travel expressed during the follow-up interview with them in April 2017. Although they believed in the utility of the current system, they acknowledged the gap between the ideal and the reality. In that sense, follow-up field studies and interviews with diverse actors in the destination regions are crucial to understand the holistic situation.

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