

Beyond Backpacker Tourism

TOURISM AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Series Editors: Professor Mike Robinson, *Centre for Tourism and Cultural Change, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, UK* and Dr Alison Phipps, *University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK*

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Beyond Backpacker Tourism

Mobilities and Experiences

Edited by

Kevin Hannam and Anya Diekmann

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To all of our children, may they all be able to travel

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Preface

This is the third volume of the on-going research programme on backpacking developed by the Backpacker Research Group (BRG) of the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS). The BRG aims to act as a platform for the discussion and debate between researchers of backpacker travel worldwide. It follows on from the success of the first volume *The Global Nomad* (Richards & Wilson, 2004) and the second volume *Backpacker Tourism* (Hannam & Ateljevic, 2007) and seeks to further shape this area of tourism research.

The idea for this particular book was initiated at a meeting at Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, India, in March 2008, attended by members of the BRG, including researchers from the UK, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Finland, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Malaysia. Drafts of some of the chapters contained in this volume were presented at this three-day meeting and these generated continued discussion and updates on the nature, meaning and significance of backpacker tourism. The meeting also enabled feedback to be given to the contributors of this volume and help to develop the concept of the book. Subsequently, other authors who could not attend the meeting also submitted chapters that were refereed and accepted. At the time of writing, new meetings of the BRG are being planned and further information about ATLAS BRG activities can be found on the internet (www.atlas-euro.org).

Kevin Hannam and Anya Diekmann
Sunderland and Brussels, July 2009

Chapter 1

From Backpacking to Flashpacking: Developments in Backpacker Tourism Research

KEVIN HANNAM and ANYA DIEKMANN

Introduction

The present volume is the third in a series of books that have discussed research into the development of the backpacker tourism market over the last 10 years. From drifters to backpackers, travellers to flashpackers, this introductory chapter will examine the recent research into backpacker tourism. This book, however, is not an exhaustive account of backpacker tourism research, nor is it meant to be. However, we believe that this particular volume adds significantly to the academic literature on backpacker tourism and independent travel more generally by enhancing the theoretical, methodological and geographical research on the subject. As we shall see, some of the key issues are the changing profile of the backpacker market segment, the adoption of new means of travel, the use of new technologies, as well as the creation of new spaces or enclaves.

While it is not the aim of the present collection to provide a comprehensive literature review of the research to date on backpacker tourism (see Richards & Wilson, 2004), this introduction firstly seeks to outline some of the conceptual developments in backpacker tourism since *Backpacker Tourism* was published (Hannam & Ateljevic, 2007a). Secondly, this introduction provides a summary of the contributions in the present collection.

Flashpackers, Backpackers and Travellers

One of the key developments in backpacker tourism, in recent years, has been in terms of the notion of the 'flashpacker'. The so called flashpacker has emerged as a new and key constituent of contemporary travel and exemplifies the changing demographics in western societies

where older age at marriage, older age having children, increased affluence and new technological developments, alongside increased holiday and leisure time have all come together.

The flashpacker has thus been variously defined as the older twenty to thirty-something backpacker, who travels with an expensive backpack or a trolley-type case, stays in a variety of accommodation depending on location, has greater disposable income, visits more 'off the beaten track' locations, carries a laptop, or at least a 'flashdrive' and a mobile phone, but who engages with the mainstream backpacker culture. Or more simply defined on Travelblogs.com (2009) as, backpacking 'with style' or even, backpacking with 'bucks and toys'. It is also seen as 'doable' with children in tow – with one flashpacker couple recently advertising the birth of their 'flashbaby' while on their travels (Flashpackingwife.com).

Indeed, Jarvis and Peel (this volume) cite *The Future Laboratory*, who in 2004 identified 'flashpackers' as older travellers on career breaks who 'can afford to splash out on some of life's luxuries when the going on the road gets tough' (The Future Laboratory, 2004: 13). More recently, this phenomenon has been explicitly highlighted by the backpacker industry, as a major hostel company advertises: 'Looking to treat yourself but, considering the current economic climate, afraid to splash out? With some of the luxury hostels listed you can pamper yourself without breaking the bank...' (Hostelworld.com, 2009).

By contrast, the work by Cohen (this volume) also reminds us of a different phenomenon – the lifestyle tourist who, like the earlier 'drifter', still spends the majority of his or her life indefinitely 'on the road' engaged in the backpacker culture. For both the flashbacker and the lifestyle traveller, however, it has to be recognised that new technologies have transformed the ways in which they travel and engage with their home-place and their social ties, as Paris (this volume) demonstrates. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that the backpacker tourism market is still dominated by many younger and less affluent tourists who spend most of their time in what have become mainstream and even institutionalised backpacker enclaves in 'traditional' destinations.

Structure of the Volume

The present volume, thus, complements the aforementioned two previous books. It adds new theoretical dimensions in terms of a focus on mobilities and experiences and also broadens the scope of the research geographically. Indeed the present volume includes, alongside the traditional backpacker destinations of Australia, New Zealand and

South Africa, research in lesser known backpacker destinations, such as Norway, Tanzania and Mongolia. The book also engages present research of how backpacker tourism feeds into other forms of tourism, such as volunteer tourism (Chapter 9) and heritage tourism (Chapter 11).

Many of the chapters draw upon ethnographic field research methodologies, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews with travellers or a combination of these methods with documentary sources. However, some chapters use quantitative survey methods to identify specific sub-segments and behaviours of travellers (Chapters 3 and 4). While the first five chapters set the broader conceptual framework, the subsequent chapters deliver mainly empirical profiles with a particular focus on experiences in different countries and continents.

Following this introduction, in Chapter 2, Mark Hampton critically reflects upon his own experiences of being a backpacker himself, as well as researching other backpackers. In so doing, he charts the development of backpacker tourism from the 1980s up to the present with the appearance of 'flashpackers'. In the first section of his chapter, he explores his own experiences of two major trips through Asia as a backpacker and in the second part, he reflects on himself as an academic tourist – who actually gets paid to travel – through the prism of several research trips to South East Asia as a researcher doing fieldwork.

In Chapter 3, Jarvis and Peel focus explicitly upon the flashpacker phenomena, which they define in terms of older backpackers with higher levels of disposable income, travelling on a career break. In their study, they describe how 'upmarket backpacking' has developed through changing demographics and motivations. Furthermore, they seek to examine the ways in which the flashpacker market segment, with their particular travel behaviour and expenditure patterns, may present a niche opportunity for sustainable tourism development in the Fiji Islands. They conclude that policy makers within host destinations such as Fiji need to recognise the emergent diversity within the general backpacker market segment and to find ways of supporting the local industry in addressing the new demands associated with 'flashpacking'.

In Chapter 4, Cody Paris approaches the flashpacker phenomena from another perspective. He looks into how backpacker tourism has harnessed recent innovations in communication technology and, in particular, how online social communities have added a virtual component to the diverse mobilities of backpackers. While the physical mobilities of backpackers are still as important to the backpacking experience, new virtual moorings have developed that allow backpackers to be fully integrated in their multiple networks and also to maintain a