

**Stroma Cole. *Tourism, Culture, and Development: Hopes, Dreams, and Realities in East Indonesia*. Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2008 (Tourism and Cultural Change series). 252 pages.**

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Governments and local leaders in developing countries continue to embrace tourism as a panacea for mitigating poverty, and as a means of pursuing economic growth. In Indonesia, it is probably safe to assume that all *kabupaten* (regencies) and *kota* (municipality) regional plans (*Rencana Tata Ruang Wilayah*, RTRW) include a tourism strategy. Yet tourism can be an unreliable income source. Moreover, it may benefit primarily the elite, and it may be negatively affected by external events, including international terrorism and natural disasters, as well as internal political and civil instability.

The title of Cole's book suggests an exploration of tourism as a development pathway, although the term "development" is used principally to examine the way in which tourism has been established and maintained in several small communities in eastern Indonesia. In particular, this book studies the cultural engagement arising from tourism's effects. Beginning in 1989, Cole spent six years leading tour groups to the Ngadha region of central Flores, and elsewhere in Indonesia; thereafter she supplemented her experience with doctoral research. She discusses twenty years of tourism in the area, through an anthropological focus on two villages where intensive fieldwork was carried out in 1998–99, with subsequent visits up to 2005.

The book documents ways in which cultural tourism encourages the construction and utilization of ethnic identity and heritage to suit various people, situations, and agendas. These include the tourist search for unique experiences, local interpretations of tradition, and competition for government resources. As has happened elsewhere in Indonesia and, indeed, throughout the world, interest shown by tourists has boosted the self-esteem of the ethnic minority and helped to overcome the state-imposed stigma of being backward and primitive. The book also discusses the management of tourism by various levels of government and explores some of the mechanisms of local tourism—for example, decisions about entry fees to designated tourist villages.

In the Ngadha region, a comparatively out-of-the-way place, spectacular scenery, traditional thatch-roofed architecture, megaliths, and clan posts attract adventurous visitors, most of whom are international. Cole examines this phenomenon through the people who mediate the tourism experience (guides, government officials, and guidebook authors), and through those who experience it directly—tourists and those visited. The latter are described as "tourates" (p. 5), a somewhat ungainly term coined in 2003 by another tourism scholar to indicate people in destination areas who actively participate in tourism.<sup>1</sup>

Cole advises readers that her book is not an exhaustive ethnographic study, yet it does contain much detailed material that gives the reader a strong sense of the people, their history and cultural life, and local values in Ngadha villages. These sections are

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Causey, *Hard Bargaining in Sumatra: Western Travelers and Toba Bataks in the Marketplace of Souvenirs* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003).

an interesting and effective introduction to the Ngadha and their world, and would serve good purpose in anthropology classes. Nevertheless, the book also stays firmly within the realms of tourism. Wider socio-economic development issues are not explored in depth, and although one of Cole's stated aims is to highlight "how globalisation can be about powerlessness and a lack of change" (p. 5), this is addressed only briefly, to explain the impacts of global events on local tourist industries. Cole's wide-ranging discussion is, however, an effective overview or survey of micro-level activities and issues that arise as small communities engage with tourism. As such, it will be useful as a tourism textbook, and appears to have been structured and written in this way.

In most of the discussion, tourism development is assumed to be beneficial, and expansion is unquestioned. For example, Cole writes of her travel company establishing group tours to a particular village, then "when independent tourists showed up to watch cultural shows that our company had sponsored, I realised that our competitive advantage depended on finding a remoter village" (p. 180). Tourism in the original village subsequently declined, although this is attributed to local elite politics, and the social impacts of this change are not examined. Nor are the impacts of expanding group travel into more-remote villages, apart from registering complaints about inappropriate dress and behavior by tourists. Studies from Bali have shown that tourism can open opportunities and increase regional incomes, and Cole describes how the industry in Flores is bringing some benefits. She concludes, however, that for most people, tourism "has changed the economic realities of their lives very little indeed" (p. 252). The book would be enhanced if we also learned more about the difficulties and disadvantages implied in that statement.

One dilemma for scholars of Indonesia is that research conducted during the Suharto era may be outdated, or the findings no longer meaningful, by the time of publication. Although democratic change and bureaucratic reform is slow, especially in rural areas, there have been attitudinal changes that can influence the decision-making process, even in many small, isolated communities. In post-Suharto publications, the new political environment needs to be recognized and discussed because, although still in its infancy, it reaches into some surprising places and activities. In her examination of government and tourism, Cole makes frequent references to the "highly centralised" Indonesian state (for example, p. 103). Apart from structural change to the Department of Tourism and Culture, increased post-Suharto regional autonomy is not acknowledged until a brief one-page discussion from secondary sources towards the end of the book, linked to ethnic identity and localization.

Cole rightly points out that "any tourism development strategy must be part of an integrated development strategy" (p. 61), and it would be helpful if the reader could evaluate this in the context of decentralized decision-making. The book also includes an interesting discussion of community participation in tourism planning, although, again, the interactions discussed here predate decentralization and the political transition. It is possible—and very likely—that little has changed, but Indonesianists studying reform in the outer islands would find it interesting to know more about the extent of modern democratic practices in a local context.