

Authenticity and Cultural Representation

A Case Study of Maori Tourism Operators

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The operation of Maori cultural heritage tourism is growing in New Zealand. This is perhaps a reflection of a worldwide trend towards the increasing tourist demand for cultural experiences, led by demonstrated demand and encouragement by tourist authorities (Edwards 1992; Weiler & Hall 1992). No longer are tourists offered only the 'song and dance' of native peoples; the choice of 'experience' has moved on to include the packaging of many cultural rituals for tourist consumption, often with the approval of ethnic groups themselves seeking to benefit economically and socially from a greater involvement in the industry.

The expansion of Maori cultural heritage tourism has taken place in the context of major inbound tourism growth in New Zealand since the early 1980s, with the country currently attracting 1.3 million tourists annually, and experiencing a 14.3 per cent expansion in inbound tourism in 1994. The New Zealand Tourism Board (NZTB) has a target of 3 million international tourists by 2000. In order to attract the international tourism market the NZTB (1991, 1993) highlights a range of products in its promotional activities, a key feature of which is indigenous Maori culture.

Indigenous Control of Tourism in New Zealand

The increasing involvement of Maori in the control and development of Maori cultural heritage tourism in New Zealand has come about through Maori themselves wanting to take greater control of how their culture is presented to tourists, and to gain more of the direct economic and social benefits from involvement in the industry. Access to marae (Maori tribal meeting place) and the associated negotiations needed to bring about the hosting of tourists have been developed by Maori taking advantage of their positions, understanding and contacts with other Maori, as well as their own tribal links. As O'Regan (1993) noted, the increasing sense of proprietorship of the Maori heritage is matched by an increasing sense of confidence in knowing and managing it. As one Maori tourism operator put it:

It's more than just tourism, it's the economic and social development of a people — lifting them up to a level of feeling proud about themselves, restoring their faith in themselves. Certainly around the 1880s Maori were involved in banking and shipping and all those things, but through the structures at the time much of that was taken away from them and we've not properly recovered as business people in our own right. Tourism is one of the areas that our people can fit quite comfortably (interview, Marsh 1993 in Walsh 1994).

The interaction between Maori and tourists has most typically featured as packaged participation in the welcome ritual of the Maori culture. This ceremony has particular appeal to tourists and operators because as well as being distinctly 'cultural', it also has 'entertaining' elements. It is a very symbolic and colourful ceremony with a 'warrior' issuing a challenge, and tourists being welcomed to a marae (tribal meeting place) in a way not normally accessible to them.

The New Zealand Ministry of Tourism (1992) has seen the choice between concert party performances and a more substantial expression of Maori culture such as the interpretive experiences of marae etiquette, as the choice between culturally non-sustainable and sustainable tourism. Such sustainable development, it stated, needed the endorsement and participation of the Maori community:

The choice between concert party performances, and a more substantial expression of Maori culture, through, for example, interpretation experiences of marae etiquette and of myths and legends, traditional arts and crafts, use of natural resources for medicinal purposes, and methods of food preparation, may well be the choice between culturally non-sustainable and sustainable tourism (Ministry of Tourism 1992).

This chapter is based upon a study of the endorsement and participation by Maori in Maori cultural heritage tourism (Walsh 1994). The goal of the research was to explore the packaging of Maori cultural ritual by Maori for tourist consumption, in the context of issues such as motivation for involvement, cultural integrity and concepts of authenticity. Seven different Maori tour operations were studied, with research methods including observation of, and participation in, tour operations, as well as in-depth interviews with the operators. Although the number of Maori operators examined in this study is relatively small, it should be noted that they constituted approximately half the operations listed in the NZTB's (1993) *New Zealand Maori Cultural Heritage Guide*.

Case Studies:

Balancing Visitor and Maori Expectations

For the operators studied, the motivation to become involved in packaging Maori cultural tours for tourists and the industry came primarily because of a need to provide employment for themselves, their families and other Maori. Other significant motivating factors were the appeal of contact with people, and the notion of offering a more substantial expression of the depth of their culture, along with the need for Maori control of such products. There was also the strong feeling that these reasons were justifying an underlying feeling that others were already 'selling' their culture, so why shouldn't they do it too?

I look at it from this point of view. Maoris make up the greatest numbers in prison, we make up the longest dole queues, we live in the lowest socio-economic circumstances of all the people in New Zealand. Pakeha or ethnic. We're right at the bottom of the heap. If our indigenous culture can in some way help and benefit us as a people without compromising its integrity, then what is wrong with that. That my personal feeling about it. So I will use it any way that I possibly can to the social and economic benefit of my children firstly, my extended family next, and any other Maori who wants to hook on to it (interview, Panoho 1993 in Walsh 1994).

Operators were shaping Maori cultural products to suit a range of desired tourist experiences, while at the same time looking to maintain cultural integrity on a tribal and personal basis. A number of performers and operators were proud of the interest and respect they received from tourists when they performed or shared their knowledge. There was also a feeling of superiority gained from seeing how ignorant many of the tourists were of their culture. An operator who ran guided cultural tours also spoke of gaining some mana (status) through his involvement in conducting tourists, stating the tours had wairua (spirit).

An important aspect of the operators' motivation for developing their tours was the need to convey to tourists some of the less tangible aspects of their culture such as the loving, emotional, spiritual side, and their feelings for family, elders, the land and their heritage. Many used the opportunity of conducting tours to speak personally about how much they valued their culture and were proud of the way it had survived. One tour guide expressed this as the need to show tourists 'we're not freaks' and for tourists to have the opportunity to meet Maori not only as performers in costume, but as ordinary people.

Some of the operators believed that most tourists were not interested in the 'really serious' side of Maori culture, and argued that this justified simplifying and adapting the welcome ritual in order to provide an enjoyable visitor experience. In a 'real welcome' situation speeches, for instance, could go on for hours and, said one operator, be 'very boring'. Operators believed they created a package that still retained the essential elements of the ritual that was in line with Maori protocol and allowances had to be made because the audience were tourists. Hence, the option of a hongī greeting (pressing noses), and various restrictions lifted for tourists to wear shoes inside the meeting house and take photos and bring video cameras.

Adaptation to perceived tourist needs was also related to the fact that the operators had to survive financially in an industry that was based on the selling of packages, with value judged in terms of time, content and money. A cultural experience had to be slotted into travellers' itineraries, whether they were independent tourists or part of a group tour. As such, it was necessary to offer something that had reliable timing and content. The aim of the operators seemed to be centred on satisfying the tourists' idea of a cultural experience or an overseas group's requirements.

In general though, most operators felt their culture had already been commercialised and was constantly being sold around the world by others, so why shouldn't they sell it too? One operator said he was aware he was making cultural compromises,

and 'you must be aware that it's Maori you're selling and if you make too many changes, you may not be selling your product properly' (in Walsh 1994).

Operators were using their control to define authenticity in their own way in an effort to produce a marketable, profitable product for tourists, but also within acceptable tribal kawa (protocol) limits. In many instances, this appeared to be successful. However, there have been problems with some tourists not treating the ritual as 'real', and causing offence. Allowances had been made by Maori because of an understanding of 'tourist' ignorance. Nevertheless, the possibility that Maori operators could become purely motivated by profit, with little concern for tribal elders' views, was clearly recognised.

Implications

The development of Maori cultural heritage tourism cannot be explained in the simple terms of the Ministry of Tourism (1992) as the choice between 'non-sustainable' concert party performances and the 'sustainable' more substantial expression of Maori culture. For example, a Canadian tourist described his marae tour as a 'cultural demonstration' rather than a 'cultural performance'. Similarly, an operator said his marae tours 'are not a show, but can be like an entertainment show'. This is a crucial point. Rather than performing, the cultural groups in a Maori-controlled tour situation were seen to be demonstrating, which is an important distinction in relation to cultural integrity. Perhaps this is indicative of the notion of 'sustainable' tourism as outlined by the Ministry of Tourism. However, the comments also show how similar the two types of experience can be and the difficulty in classifying one form of Maori cultural product as superficial, and another as not.

The nature of international tourism plays an important role in determining what type of cultural experiences are offered to tourists. Maori and other indigenous cultures might be gaining more direct control of the presentation and content of cultural heritage tourism operations, with the possibility that this involvement could be seen to be giving a deeper cultural experience to many tourists. It should be noted that this is not greatly affecting the nature of cultural heritage tourism, but providing more choice of product in order to cater for an expanding range of tourist preferences, or 'aspired touristic experience' as Cohen (1988) put it.

One operator maintained that running a successful Maori tourism operation depended on being able to understand and create a Maori product that could work in an international tourism industry: 'If you want to run a business in the Pakeha system, you have to use that system' (in Walsh 1994). Although many operators believed they were controlling the product, and strived to do so, it was the international tourism system that was actually shaping the nature of their business and influencing the motivations of the tourists that were determining the product they offered. Therefore, a key issue is whether the product supplied can have real integrity and authenticity in a situation where paying customers essentially decide whether it will exist in a free market. Customers, after all, decide the nature of the product they wish to consume.

As indigenous cultures and countries seek involvement in the industry for economic and employment reasons, the need arises to respond from within rather than from outside the industry. But they cannot significantly challenge the system they are seeking to profit from, although they may strive to develop products in a sustainable way. However, such challenges may emerge as Maori attain greater control over resources and develop their status within the industry. These issues lead to the questions of whether it is possible to simply label cultural heritage tourism experiences as 'superficial' or 'authentic', and whether the concentration of interest should be on the nature of the experience and its consequences in the context of tourists' quest for authenticity (MacCannell 1976, 1992) and the extraordinary (Urry 1990), and the search for a culturally sustainable product.

Tauroa and Tauroa (1986), in their guide to customs and protocol, *Te Marae*, noted that the marae represented people and 'it takestime to get to know people and to appreciate their feelings and beliefs'. They observed that it was essential that visitors' desire to learn be genuine, not just an inquisitive wish to see what happened on the marae. They also argued that true understanding and appreciation could only come from first-hand experience, and that Maori people were making special efforts to give Pakeha the opportunity to learn by participation in marae activities. However, they warned that it was essential that Maori maintain the integrity of their culture rather than permit adjustments that are simply intended to make it easier for the non-Maori to fit in.

From the case studies there was evidence that in commercial tourism operations such adjustments are already taking place, and are being accepted by many Maori. Does that make such operations sustainable or non-sustainable, authentic or inauthentic? According to Urry (1990) and Graburn (1989), tourists need there to be something 'extraordinary' about the tourist experience. If so, then the adjustments by Maori operators may not be in the long-term interest of product sustainability Making it easier for tourists to fit in could, in the long run, turn them away in search of something less similar to their everyday life.

Conclusion

The Aotearoa Maori Tourism Federation has stated in its strategy that it wants to ensure ownership of Maori tourism is retained by the people and that integrity is retained through the development of standards. It states that it will encourage the identification of regional differentiation of Maori tourism and develop management and service standards for Maori operators (in Walsh 1994). However, the federation's goal is also to market the generic product to the travel trade and wider industry, and it is clear that balancing the different aspirations will not be possible without certain cultural compromises and implications.

As Picard (1993) found, a touristic culture can develop in which the actors themselves participate in the processes, and there is evidence in the Maori situation of groups attempting to accommodate and profit from the cultural and economic experience of tourism. There is a danger that cultural heritage tourism is being built up by the tourism

industry in order to maintain global growth, and promoted as something that can be operated 'profitably, but without exploitation' (MacCannell 1992). Indeed, the real issue for the tourist industry of avoiding exploitation is largely concerned with avoiding exclusion and hostility among those that must play a part in delivering the tourist product. Participation by Maori in New Zealand, therefore, is necessary in forestalling such a problem.

The accommodation between the culturally pure and the practical involvement is a dynamic relationship. It is difficult to develop and define sustainable and authentic products in the operation of cultural heritage tourism. Operators gave their own understanding of authenticity to the product being manufactured for tourists. This may be acceptable to more Maori than an international hotel's product, but not to all Maori nor to all tourists. Culture is an active participant, rather than a passive one, in the process of cultural representation. It is also a complex participant.

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