ABSTRACT

In the same way that the Ogasawara Islands have been able to utilize their natural assets as tourist resources, many hope the islands may be able to use their unique cultural heritage to their commercial advantage as a tourism resource well. But the harnessing of local culture as a tourism resource involves many problems. Cultural tourism may negatively impact the natural environment if visitors have to traverse nature areas to view points of cultural interest. Cultural resources themselves have to be protected from destructive visitor activities such as vandalism or graffiti. Furthermore, the feelings of locals must be considered in taking tourist to sensitive sites like graveyards, and privacy concerns are magnified in island communities with small populations. Much more so than with nature interpretation, consideration must be given to the way in which culture is interpreted and presented to visitors as well. Similarly, while an important objective of cultural ecotourism (along with educating tourists about island culture) is bringing tourist money to the island so that the local community can support itself financially, related players must be careful that local culture does not start to alter itself to make it more palatable, accessible or pleasing to the tourists, and in doing so lose its authenticity.

Keywords: Cultural contamination · Cultural sensitivity · Cultural tourism · Cultural protection · Ecotourism

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism can briefly be described as protecting the natural environment in a region while maintaining a tourism industry. In other words, it means minimizing the damage to the ecosystem while promoting tourism. Here, we would like to propose a "cultural ecotourism" approach that parallels the concept of ecotourism. Cultural ecotourism can be defined as tourists visiting a region, coming into contact with the regional culture, learning and enjoying it, all without causing it harm. In other words this is tourism that does not cause friction with the local inhabitants who embody the culture. The current situation in the Bonin Islands has the potential for causing cultural friction between tourists and local inhabitants. Cases of such friction have actually been observed
(even though they have been quite minor) and we can say that cultural ecotourism is being satisfactorily practiced at present. In this chapter, issues related to cultural ecotourism in the Bonin Islands will be organized, examined and the application of a theoretical framework considered.

IMPACT ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

First, one issue for cultural ecotourism is when the behavior of tourists enjoying the culture results in damage to the natural environment. For example, there are many war relics in the Bonin Islands. Viewing these in their natural setting enables tourists to gain a realistic understanding of the history of World War II in the Bonins. However, many of the relics are bunkers and pill boxes hidden in the mountains and forests of the Bonins and cannot be observed without treading on natural areas. If tourists enter natural areas unthinkingly to tour such relics, their lack of care may adversely affect the natural environment. Watching the Ogasawara Buzzard (*Buteo buteo toyoshimai*), a member of the hawk family native to the Bonins, circle elegantly in the sky above the islands is impressive. However, they are extremely wary, and if humans approach their nests, they may abandon their eggs or chicks. They may even avoid returning to the location in subsequent nesting seasons as well. Thus, if tourists entering natural areas unknowingly approach nests, there may be an adverse impact on the Ogasawara Buzzard’s ecosystem.

CULTURAL PROPERTIES AND TOURISM: ISSUES OF DESTRUCTION AND PROTECTION

Next, there is the issue of protecting cultural properties. There are individuals who deface battlefields and other tangible cultural properties in the Bonins with graffiti. This behavior towards these cultural assets is destructive. Similarly, defacing ancient aboriginal relics with graffiti has become a serious problem in Australia as well in recent years. Protection of intangible culture is even more difficult than protecting tangible cultural properties. Performances (enactments) of intangible cultural properties such as songs and dances are necessary. Furthermore, in order to experience dialects and other linguistic aspects of culture, communication between tourists and local inhabitants is necessary. In Scandinavia, there are houses that have roofs created by turning boats upside down. In southern Mexico, many indigenous tribes each have their own characteristic costumes. These types of “material” culture are used to appeal to tourists and are one of the sales points for these regions. On the other hand, there is little such “visual” culture on the Bonins which tour guides can point to. Tourists’ visual experience with the material of the islands is largely limited to displays in the Ogasawara Visitor’s Center, such as the one recreating a dwelling of the original settlers in Fig. 1.
Fig. 1. Visitor’s Center display of the lifestyle of the original settlers

ISSUES RELATED TO CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND EMOTIONS OF LOCAL RESIDENTS

While it has not been widely recognized, conflicts between tourists and the feelings of local residents can become a serious issue. Several years ago I experienced this for myself while travelling in Mexico. A few weeks before I arrived in a Southern village, a visiting Italian tourist had photographed a funeral that he encountered. The family and villagers reacted violently to what they considered a violation of a private and sacred ritual, stoning him to death. Although the cultural differences between the local residents of the Bonin Islands and tourists are probably not that great, emotional friction can occur there as well. For example, if tourists visited a war site, and treat it as they would a movie set, local residents who experienced the battle would likely be hurt by this behavior. Local residents would undoubtedly criticize the insensitivity of such tourists. Although I have no specific examples of this type of trouble occurring on the Bonins, I have heard first-hand accounts concerning local elders in Okinawa who have scolded tourists from mainland Japan for their flippant behavior when exploring war sites that are not generally open to tourists. There are also issues related to religion. There are churches, temples, mosques, etc. worldwide that, while open to tourists, are used by believers for worship and prayer. On the Bonins, there is St. George Church which welcomes visits by tourists and participation in worship services. The potential for misunderstanding occurs when individuals who are not Christians attend services. While this issue is not unique to the Bonins, there are cases when
uninformed tourists attempt to participate in Holy Communion. Such tourists are probably simply trying to follow the lead of other worshipers and not stand out, but if they are unaware that this sacrament is limited to baptized Christians, this can lead to uncomfortable snags in the service. The Oneyama Cemetery in the Bonins is mentioned in visitor guides, but it is hallowed ground and the final resting place of the ancestors and relatives of the islanders. The grave of first generation pioneer Nathaniel Savory is designated a cultural property by the Tokyo Metropolitan government and thus is naturally a point of interest for tourists. However, care must be taken to conduct oneself in a manner that takes into consideration the feelings of the islanders during graveyard tours. Appropriate behavior includes customs brought from Euro-American culture by the original settlers, customs less well-known in Asia, such as men removing their hats (Fig. 2). An example is that unlike Japan where almost all people are cremated, Ogasawaranis are buried in ground plots and one should avoid walking directly on top of them.

Fig. 2. Study tour of Oneyama Cemetery conducted by the author (male students remove and hold their hats out of respect)

One could think of numerous other cases where differences in cultural values between tourists and local inhabitants surface. For example, some tourists find the eating of sea turtle or goat meat or hatchling sea birds to be cruel, but these are important facets of the traditional culinary culture of the islanders.

ISSUES RELATED TO CULTURAL TOURISM AND THE PRIVACY OF ISLANDERS
On islands with small populations like the Bonins, conflicts may arise between cultural tourism and individual privacy. In one guidebook that is often purchased and read by tourists, there is a photograph of a gravestone for some lovers who committed suicide. The description tells a romantic story, and includes the names (given names, but thankfully not family names) of the lovers, along with the information that they were cousins. Although there would be problems in any society if such a private incident were made public like this, the problem is magnified on the Bonins because the total island population is extremely small which means that casual tourists may well encounter close relatives of the couple mentioned. Privacy is not a problem with conventional ecotourism that focuses on nature. Birds might become wary for a variety of reasons if the number of bird-watching tourists increases, but birds do not feel “embarrassed” about being observed. On the other hand, privacy is an issue with cultural ecotourism because culture is a human trait. Herein lies the dilemma. From the standpoint of the local residents, cultural tourism can succeed economically only if tourists regard their culture as unusual and become interested. On the other hand, residents dislike being observed like exotic animals in a zoo. The Bonins have also been the subject of studies by researchers who ignored the privacy of the islanders. Since these infringements are well known among the islanders and since their severity warrants debate, we will deal with them here. Before World War II, a German anthropologist who specialized in anthropometric measurements came to Chichijima to conduct his research on the islanders. Islanders of European-American lineage who had ancestors from both the Pacific islands and from Western countries took great pride in their roots, but there were problems with the insensitive approach of this researcher. Frontal and side profile photographs (similar to criminal mug shots taken by police) were taken of each islander and the heritage of each person was indexed in detail (5/16 European, 9/16 Pacific islander, 2/16 ... ). Furthermore, a report with photographs was published (Goldschmidt 1927, Wagenseil 1962). Even after nearly a century, the islanders remember hearing from their grandparents about the humiliation of being forcibly photographed in this manner. Norfolk Island in the South Pacific has issues similar to those of the Bonin Islands in that islanders have both European and Pacific Island ancestors. Residents of this island have also suffered the same type of academic humiliation (Shapiro 1936). The islanders on Tristan da Cunha, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, have had a similar experience (Schreier and Lavarello-Schreier 2002). These anthropometrists were not the only time the Bonin Islanders have received such insensitive treatment. After the return of the islands to Japan, reporters from the mainland chased children on the islands to obtain comments. Islanders at the time referred to reporters and other mass media interviewers as “gadflies” because they were so irritatingly persistent (Fig. 3).
ISSUES IN CULTURAL INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION

Guides must provide proper explanations to tourists. However, subtle interpretation issues arise when explaining culture and history. Although anyone would agree with the opinions that accurate history and proper approaches to culture should be introduced, opinions diverge when it comes to the substantive details. On Chichijima, there is a statue of Kinjiro Ninomiya which has had its head chopped off (Fig. 4). This much is unarguable fact. An engraved plate subsequently attached to the base of the statue dated 1998 and posted in the name of the Ogasawara Village Board of Education states in Japanese that “An American military person stationed on the island apparently cut off the head and took it back to America before the Bonin Islands were returned to Japan in 1968.” The English explanation on the statue’s base includes a more explicit example of hearsay evidence with the wording, "It is said that one of American sailors or marines cut its head off." One could question whether it is appropriate for local government agencies to provide an explanation based on hearsay on a permanent engraved plate.
The argument can be made that some information, regardless of being fact, is inappropriate to tell to tourists. Of course, the opposing argument can be made as well. For example, there is a location named Nigger’s Head on maps of Norfolk Island (Edgecombe 1999:102). On the one hand this name would now be considered discriminatory language. On the other hand, this is a name that was used in the past and the point could be made that history should not be edited. Since the island was a penal colony during the 19th century, it has a dark past. Cheerless place names like Bloody Bridge, where prison guards were killed and buried, and Suicide Rock have attracted attention as having a negative impact on tourism, but erasing the past would also be problematic. On the Bonins, the traditional dance known nowadays on Chichijima “Nanyo Odori (Pacific Island Dance)” was called “Dojin Odori (native dance)” before the war (and it is still known by that name on Hahajima). The name was changed because the term came to be considered discriminatory as times changed. In such cases there are those who take a stance against cultural revisionism, noting that the name should not be changed because this is a traditional dance; that this is an old term coined before social attitudes changed. If necessary, this explanation could be provided to visitors. But as with many complex problems, there is an opposing opinion. The case can also be made that tourists would get a negative impression without understanding the history behind such traditional expressions and thus that the expression should be changed to one that is harmless and inoffensive, just as the current term was inoffensive when it was first coined. When all is said and done, we find that there is no simple solution
to this type of problem. So far we have examined the issue of appropriate approaches to islanders explaining their own culture to tourists. The opposite issues exist as well, that is, those of how tourists and travel writers interpret the culture of a sightseeing area and introduce it to others. However, a large proportion of this information cannot be controlled. When the Olympics were held in Atlanta and Peking, for example, local authorities had problems with how the media portrayed the city’s image to the world.

ISSUES IN COMMERCIALIZING CULTURE

Cultural tourism is not simply a question of visitors gaining an “understanding” or “appreciation” of local culture. Unless money can be made from that culture, the cultural tourism will have no economic (commercial) benefits for the islanders. The expression "commercializing culture" may have a negative ring to it, but it is extremely important. In various parts of Japan, local residents are using their local dialects for souvenirs (Inoue 2000). In the Bonin Islands, commercializing the complex linguistic culture is not impossible. Methods for this can take various forms. As in other parts of Japan, key chains with local island expressions could be sold as souvenirs. On a larger scale, Japanese high school students from the mainland could come to the islands for short term English immersion training rather than going off to homestay programs in Canada or New Zealand. These are just a couple of tangible ways that the language resources of Ogasawara (and language is one facet of culture) could be used as a way to bring income from visitors to the island. However, while language can be a cultural resource, it can be the source of friction as well. For reference, let us look at some examples of “linguistic friction” in some other island communities. Ocracoke Island off the south-east coast of the United States uses a local dialect that is very different from that of the mainland. In recent years tourism has increased as transportation infrastructure (ferries, bridges) improved. Even though tourists are important in supporting the island economy, the islanders are irritated by what they see as excessive interest in their dialect. Linguists Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes (1997: 122-124) relate an episode where a tourist approached a local clerk in a general store and suddenly said, “Speak!”. Perplexed and offended, the clerk sarcastically replied, “Do I get a biscuit?” Other islanders deal with such requests by coming up with stock phrases like “it’s high tide on the sound side” (it’s high tide on the sound side) to satisfy the curiosity of mainlanders. The local language on Norfolk Island (a type of creole) functioned as a secret “ingroup” language for many years. In order to accentuate the difference between themselves and growing numbers of outsiders, islanders continue to use the traditional island language even now. This is not just characteristic of Norfolk Island, it is a trend observed in island language varieties around the world. The most famous example is Martha's Vineyard in the northeast United
States. A survey of the island dialect revealed the opposite of what was expected. The dialect of middle-aged men had grown more different from mainland English, not less. Additionally, it was found that the stronger an islander’s sense of island identity, the stronger his accent was. Elderly speakers could maintain their unique identity just by the fact that they lived on an island, but for middle-aged speakers, increasing mobility between the island and the mainland made island-identity more critical. Far from starting to talk like mainlanders, they were subconsciously making their accents even thicker to avoid being mistaken for the mainlanders whose values they did not share (Labov 1973).

Using culture as a tourism resource for economic gain can be tricky. Just as Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima use their World War II history as a tourism resource, so too could Ogasawara. But attempting to cash in on the islands history could be seen as crass. The question of the authenticity of cultural icons is also an issue. On Ogasawara some souvenir shops sell masks labeled "coconut masks" (Suzuki 2001). These may look “exotic” and perhaps fit the stereotypes held by some tourists of what the material culture of “south sea islands” should look like, but there is no indication that such masks were ever a traditional part of island culture. In any case, tourists do buy souvenirs to take home. On a more positive note, for the traveler, cultural souvenirs provide a chance to think about the culture of the place visited after returning home and play a valuable role in explaining the culture to people who have not been there. There are few cultural souvenirs of this type in the Bonins. In the past there was a souvenir store that had custom plastic models of the Bonin canoe made (Suzuki 2003). Since sales were not very good, it was discontinued. Overall the number of souvenirs featuring local cultural is far smaller than those that capitalize on nature tourism icons such as whales or dolphins. Some rare examples of cultural icons appearing on souvenirs include a 2003 t-shirts commemorating the 150th anniversary Commodore Perry coming to the islands, and a 2007 t-shirt commemorating the 10th anniversary of Ogasawara hula with examples of three languages which figure prominently in the island’s history: “see you again” in English, “a hui hou” in Hawaiian and “mata miru yo” in the Ogasawara Mixed Language (Long 2007).
Issues may occur with usage rights (ownership) of the intellectual property for cultural souvenirs. For example, if a commemorative t-shirt for Nathaniel Savory, a pioneer in the Bonins, were made, it would seem appropriate to get the approval of the Savory family. Even if this were not legally required, such common courtesy would be essential to maintain good relationships within the Bonin Island society. Lastly, there is the issue of returning economic benefits to their source. With ecotourism of nature sites, a portion of the profits is often applied to nature conservation. Some portion of profits from cultural souvenirs could be used for projects supporting cultural preservation.

CULTURAL DRIFT AND CONTAMINATION ISSUES

There are some who are concerned about cultural contamination and cultural drift caused by tourism. The former term refers to the phenomenon of a given region being impacted from outside and coming to more closely resemble the outside world. The latter term refers to the phenomenon of local society changing not necessarily to resemble the outside, but as a result of its desire to attract tourists. For example, the musical culture of a place could evolve in a direction that locals think would be more appealing to tourists. However, cultural drift is certainly a natural occurrence and attempting to forcibly stop drift would in and of itself be seen as problematic meddling. Currently, one finds many cases where something deeply linked to a regional culture has been introduced from a different region. The ukulele associated with Hawaii or kasutera cakes of Nagasaki both originate in Portuguese culture. The Russian matryoshka dolls actually have theirs origin in Japan. Pasta was brought from China to Italy by Marco Polo. The Okinawa Shisa (Foo Dogs) is from China. And the all-American musical genres known as jazz and bluegrass have their roots in the musical traditions of West Africa and Celtic cultures. On the Bonins, which had no permanent inhabitants until 1830, there is less worry about cultural contamination and change because in some sense the islands have no
traditional culture in the first place. Because of this, Bonin Islanders are more open to the idea of new cultural ideas being introduced to the island. In the musical arts, for example, steel pan drumming (from the Caribbean culture of Trinidad and Tobago) has been included as a feature of island culture in the Ogasawara Tourist Bureau’s pamphlet since 2005. Ogasawara hula (Fig. 6) dancing dates back to 1997 and the day long ‘Ohana dance festival is given the full support of local government as an important cultural tourism asset. The acceptance that these performing arts have achieved in a relatively short time frame surely is related to the fact that the Nanyo Odori, embraced as the most indicative performance asset on the islands, did not itself come to the Bonins (from Micronesia) until the 1920’s or 30’s (Konishi 2001).

Fig. 6. Young Bonin Islanders teach the male and female steps of Ogasawara hula to mainland visitors, August 2010

All of these island performance arts can definitely be said to have evolved into unique Bonin Island forms independent of their Caribbean, Hawaii or Micronesia roots. Whether or not they have culturally drifted to make them more commercially viable as “products” to sell to tourists is a question requiring the attention of another separate research paper.

DIRECTIONS FOR OGASAWARA CULTURAL ECOTOURISM AND RESEARCH

In this chapter, we have briefly outlined some issues related to the use of cultural resources for tourism in the Bonin Islands. The unique natural environments of the islands and their scholarly value have been recognized for decades. Since the 1980s, there has been a growing awareness both on and off
the islands that what was needed was not only protection on the island’s natural environment but also an infrastructure which allowed its usage to provide economic support for the local residents. Regrettably few attached the same importance to the unique history and culture of the islands, either as a heritage to be protected or a resource to be developed for tourism. In the future, the manner in which cultural ecotourism is implemented and the exploration of scientific approaches for developing related policy will both only gain in importance.

REFERENCES


