
Understand Richter’s essay in terms of:
- Exotic
- Heritage
- Interpretation
- Orientalism
- Sustainable Tourism

The definitions of these concepts can be found in the *Glossary of Terms* borrowed from:

Tourism in Southeast Asia
Challenges and New Directions

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Tourism Policy-Making in Southeast Asia: A Twenty-First Century Perspective

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Introduction

In the early 1990s I attempted to describe policy-making on tourism in Southeast Asia and, although a chapter eventually emerged (Richter, 1993: 179–199), I was mostly forced to write charts that summarized the basic facts for each country. In the last five years, however, several books have emerged that focus on tourism in Southeast Asia. Still, broad comparative studies of policy-making in the region are rare.

Part of this problem hinges on how one defines policy-making. Some consider it to be what governments agree to do, but plans are often little more than creative writing. Others say policy is what the government actually attempts, which is often quite different, reflecting altered circumstances, new administrations, changes in political costs and benefits, and budgetary realities. This comes closer, I think, but I consider public policy as being what the government both decides to do and not to do. I shall return to this later as I discuss specific policies. However we define it, whatever stakeholders we include, the topic is extremely complex. The central problem for discussing public policy in Southeast Asia is that it is incredibly varied – politically, economically, linguistically, geographically, religiously, historically and in terms of the factors and processes by which tourism is being developed (Hitchcock, King and Parnwell, 1993).

A few examples make my point. Politically, the nations of Southeast Asia range from communist Vietnam and Laos to the despotic military junta which renamed Burma ‘Myanmar’ in 1989. There has been alternating civil-military
rule in Thailand with a king offering royal continuity. There are strongly controlled 'Asian-style' democracies in Malaysia and the tiny island state of Singapore. There are rowdy and often inept democracies in Indonesia and the Philippines complete with home-grown insurgencies, and arguably constitutional monarchies in Brunei and Cambodia. East Timor's (Timor Leste's) political system is still a work in progress (Richter, 1999; Williams, 2004: 120). Economic systems range from socialist-lite, to state-controlled governments like Myanmar, to varying degrees of capitalist societies in the rest of the region. Languages and scripts are numerous within nations and among them.

Geographically, the range is from land-locked Laos to archipelagoes like the Philippines and Indonesia with most of the nations having both mainland and islands. Active volcanoes offer both striking attractions and potentially lethal dangers in several countries. The 26 December 2004 tsunami made clear that even tectonic plates can alter policy-making dramatically for both nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In the case of Indonesia it even led to the end of a decades-long insurgency on Sumatra. Old goals were rendered obsolete by the staggering new needs for both the government and the insurgents.

Islam is the dominant religion of the maritime or island region whilst the major religion in mainland Southeast Asia is Theravada Buddhism, with Mahayana Buddhism in Vietnam, and as part of the complex mix of elements in the religion of immigrant Chinese. Hinduism as a practised religion survives on the Indonesian island of Bali, and is also found among Indian immigrant communities. Roman Catholicism is the main religion in the Philippines, although Islam is dominant in some of the southern Philippine islands. There are several varieties of Christianity among minority groups, especially the upland populations of both mainland and island Southeast Asia. There are also followers of numerous sects and animist believers.

Historically, most of the nations except Thailand have also experienced long periods of colonialism (up to 400 years) from a variety of European powers. Britain colonized what is now Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Burma; the French conquered Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos; and the Dutch ruled Indonesia. East Timor was a Portuguese colony from 1556–1974, and under Indonesian misuse until 1999. The Philippines endured 350 years of Spanish conquest and another 50 by the Americans. Portugal created a seaborne empire from the sixteenth century and until the mid-1970s held on to its remaining territory of East Timor. It is no wonder that their public bureaucracies and political cultures vary so much. Nor are their boundaries undisputed (Richter, 1993; Musa, 2003).

Thus, finding patterns of tourism policy-making in the midst of this variety of governmental experiences is very challenging. Still, some characteristics are obvious: top-down policy-making, some national planning, belated attention to environmental and indigenous factors and much corruption. Singapore, while rather authoritarian
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by Western democratic standards, is unusual in its political stability, economic and social discipline and successful development of both the economy in general and tourism in particular (Chang, 2004).

In the next section I provide a broad analysis of tourism public policy-making across three stages of development. Included are several policy decisions these nations confronted in their decision-making. Then in the subsequent section of the chapter several sustainability challenges to policy-makers will be examined. These problems are complicated by tourism but threaten the nations as a whole. Finally, some of the aspects of the region’s tourism will be noted that encourage cautious optimism.

Stages of Tourism Policy-Making

Colonial Tourism and Its Aftermath

Traditional rulers in these nations may have visited religious shrines or sought seasonal respite from the heat, but it was not until European conquests and colonization that discretionary travel as opposed to trading and pilgrimage flourished in Southeast Asia (Stockwell, 1993; Saunders, 1993; Douglas and Douglas, 2000). In her book, The Great Hill Stations of Asia, Barbara Crossette (1999) explains how highland retreats became tourist summer homes and in some cases the eventual locations of colonial administrations during the hottest seasons. Thus, it appears that one of the earliest public policy decisions was for the civil administration to head for the hills! Then, as now, a failure of the outsider to adapt to the climate led many to succumb to illness. For example, the British and Dutch were particularly notorious for signalling their superiority by refusing to ‘go native’ and dress for the tropics. This often cost them their lives. Rudyard Kipling, in his poem ‘Padgett M.P.’, gives a withering critique of those ‘who tried to hurry the East’.

Crossette’s book details life in the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia, Dalat in Vietnam, Maymyo in Burma, Baguio in the Philippines and Bogor in Indonesia. These colonial outposts continued after the independence of these nations and have evolved into resorts of differing success and character. Some like Maymyo have been almost abandoned as hated relics of colonialism. Others have become improbable recreation centres at variance with the local cultural values. For example, the largest casino in the world is in the highlands of Malaysia. Linkages to that early era still persist in place names, museums, and in the histories. Today tourists continue to come to the hill stations, though some, like Bogor, have become virtual suburbs, given the sprawl of the major cities.

Modern tourism existed from the post-World War I era but it was not until the independence of these countries (the Vietnam War in Thailand’s case) and the arrival of the wide-bodied jet in the 1960s that international tourism became significant. Still, most of these nations were unable to attract many tourists because of their political situation. Xenophobia kept Burma off limits until much later. Today, the illegitimate junta that rules the country desperately wants tourism but now it is the tourist that is considering the political meaning of such visits (Henderson, 2003; Hall, 2000).
Militancy and unrest led Indonesia to refrain from promoting tourism until after 1969. Crime, corruption, insurgencies and martial law from 1972–1986 discouraged Philippine tourism. This, despite the presence of major American bases in the country and a Philippine dictatorship obsessed with its image and eager to promote tourism. The government sought to lure former Filipinos back with its Balikbayan programme and former World War II soldiers and their families with their Reunion for Peace incentives, but success eluded President Marcos (Richter, 1982; 1989; 2001).

The Vietnam War and its spill-over impacts delayed the development of tourism throughout Indochina. This was before the recent penchant some have for danger-zone travel (Adams, 2001; Pelton, Aral and Dulles, 1998; Pelton, 1999). The Federation of Malaya got independence in 1957, delayed because of communist insurgencies, and found its link to Singapore intolerable after only two years, following the formation of the wider Federation of Malaysia in 1963, when Singapore and the two former British crown colonies of Sarawak and British North Borneo (Sabah) were brought together with the former Malayan Federation. Malaysia divorced from the largely Chinese Singapore in 1965, but still faced devastating ethnic riots in 1969 which poisoned its tourism prospects for some time. The Indian, Chinese and other minorities in the Malay-controlled country chaffed at the pro-Malay government policies. Heritage sites also continue to emphasize Malay experiences (personal observation from 1969 and 1999).

Tiny, flat Singapore, devoid of much natural beauty and relentlessly modernist had destroyed much of its cultural and historic sights in favour of commercial and block housing. However, following its short-lived association with Malaysia (1963–1965), it developed into an amazing tourist success based on challenging Hong Kong as a shopping and commercial centre and providing a level of cleanliness and political stability that was the envy of the region (Hall and Oehlers, 2000). Today, nearly three times as many tourists visit annually as there are residents and Singapore continues to forge a tourism success as the ‘Gateway to Southeast Asia’ (Chang, 2004: Henderson, 2001; Timothy, 2000; Lew, 1999).

Thailand, never colonized, has seldom had democratic government for very long but its many coups have been largely bloodless and so tourism has not been deterred. Tourism has grown from less than 60,000 in 1961 to more than eleven million in 2000 (Travel Industry Yearbook, 2001: 162). The Vietnam War spurred much of the early, and often unsavoury, sex tourism to Thailand (Hall, 1992; Lim, 1998; Richter, 1989). As the rest and recreation base, hundreds of thousands of Americans and other allies poured through Thailand from 1963 to 1975. Tourism became the largest source of revenue for Thailand after 1980 as commercial travel supplanted the American military (Richter, 1993).

Planned Tourism/Unplanned Implementation
From 1970 on tourism in Southeast Asia stopped being something that just happened to being something consciously planned (Burma and Brunei would be exceptions for another 15 years). To some extent many of the countries developed similar top-down
strategies: national plans, government developed infrastructure and/or incentives for development of tourism facilities (Bramwell, 1998; Wanhil, 1998).

Most nations built on some of their colonial-based seasonal resorts (Crossette, 1999). These countries had several policy decisions to make (Richter and Richter, 1985). First, did they want a centralized or decentralized tourism development plan? Most opted for a national level plan often with a Ministry of Tourism or something similar. This was consistent with the governmental structure of most of the nations in Southeast Asia.

A second decision was to determine the target of tourism promotion. In most cases it was the international tourist over the domestic tourist, reflecting the relatively small middle class in each nation with the financial security to travel. This would change slightly with growing affluence. Also, the Western tourist was initially preferred over the Asian tourist. At the beginning of major tourism development only Japan had a sizeable tourism-generating population in Asia and the scars of its wartime influence in Southeast Asia made Japanese travellers unwelcome in the early years. Also, such tourists were overwhelmingly male and often involved in sex tourism. Boycotts and demonstrations against Japan took place (Richter, 1989; Lim, 1998). As other nations became involved in trafficking and sex tourism and as Japan became more affluent, marketing to Japan was accelerated.

A third and related question of policy was the type of tourist clientele. The overall strategy of promotion and infrastructure development was designed to attract luxury-seeking tourists, not pilgrims, students, backpackers or individual travellers. This decision was reached not because of research but rather because of the personal tastes of the governing elites. Not all nations were as celebrity-seeking in their orientation as the Philippines, but of those active in tourism, there was no push for camp sites, but rather golf courses. This decision to cater to the up-scale tourist would result in massive foreign exchange leakage (Richter, 1989).

Tourism was always advanced as an economic bonanza, but job maximization was not a high priority in the national plans, nor were the training institutes that developed in some countries like the Philippines really geared to assuring national control of tourism. Even today, much of the infrastructure is controlled by transnational companies through their management contracts or franchises (Cukier, 2002).

There was an attempt, if only for patronage or counter-insurgency reasons, to develop tourism in many parts of the countries. A major policy question attached to tourism distribution was whether tourists themselves should be clustered in almost self-contained tourist belts and enclaves or integrated as much as possible into the population. A case could be made for both strategies. In conservative Muslim societies, enclaves were seen as separating the polluting impacts of the tourist from the rest of the population. For example, gambling could be put out of major Malaysian cities and Muslims banned from participating (Crossette, 1999). Tourists could be lured to
Hindu Bali in Indonesia and on that island further encouraged with World Bank aid to stay in the enclave of Nusa Dua. Outside of Yogyakarta, tourists were guided to the World Heritage Sites of Borobodur and Prambanan, not Islamic shrines. In fact, residents near many of the Hindu and Buddhist sites were explicitly not permitted to hold religious ceremonies there (Kagami, 1997).

Enclave tourism was also practised in Burma, the Philippines and Thailand. Restrictions on itineraries and access in Myanmar persist to this day. In martial law Philippines every effort was made to keep tourists in a few areas. There was even a wall built from the Manila airport covered with pictures by schoolchildren so the real poverty was hidden. Crimes against tourists were met with stiffer sentences. In Thailand and the Philippines special tourist police protected the visitors. By shielding visitors from the poverty and the consumption patterns of the tourist from the population, it was thought all would go more smoothly. Erik Cohen has in fact argued that such a strategy is probably wise since it protects the naive tourist from the more unsavoury and dangerous elements of the local population (Cohen, 1996). Unfortunately, no one is protecting the naive residents from the more destructive tourists.

Moreover, the problems of enclave tourism grew obvious. Very little money, services or benefits trickled out of the enclaves to the local population and often whole settlements of residents were removed for the resorts built for the tourists (Henderson, 2003; Richter, 1989). Enclave tourism tended not to defuse insurgencies but to radicalize ordinary people, as the Philippine 'Light a Fire Movement' illustrated in the early 1980s and the Bali bombings may do once more (Richter and Waugh, 1991; Richter, 1992; Hitchcock and Darma Putra, 2005). Though Michael Hitchcock claims that the bombers' statements demonstrate that tourists were not the primary target, his own sources note that tourists were seen by the assailants as depraved (see also Chapter 4 in this volume). Also, the tourist enclaves allowed the bombers to murder primarily Westerners, especially Australians, with less collateral damage to Muslims than another target might have meant (Hitchcock and Darma Putra, 2005).

Government-sponsored tourism led the private sector in the early days and there was little if any consideration of how tourism could be made accessible to the local people or how their input could be valued. Governments tended to have their own national airlines and assumed control of most of the national marketing. Pre-internet, the chief players were the government and a few multinational hotel, tour, and financial service companies.

To most, it must have seemed as if the only policy objective was 'more', the only implementation schedule was 'as soon as possible', and the only evaluation was in terms of arrivals and gross receipts. More information was in fact available, but political considerations too often trumped more considered analysis. Frequently, planned development was accelerated or changed at the behest of powerful stakeholders.
The Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos was a classic example (Richter, 1982; 1989; 1999). Tourism infrastructure that would not be viable under any scenario for another decade was built in Manila to impress the World Bank–IMF financiers to continue aid to the government following martial law. It worked. The presence of tourists was also designed to legitimize the Philippine government, something present-day Myanmar apparently seeks to do (Henderson, 2003). President Marcos was able to convert hotel financing into patronage of key supporters while foreclosing on opponents. After his overthrow in 1986, the People Power revolution that ousted him would itself be an attraction and the President’s home with all its excesses was made into a temporary museum (Richter, 1999; 2001). Ironically, the President’s Palace was closed as a museum after a few years when it was discovered that the lavish spending it represented actually instilled awe rather than revulsion in some of the visitors.

Indonesia at first confined tourism to largely non-Muslim areas but as those areas flourished the government developed Bali Plus – a plan to broaden the tourism attractions to other parts of the country. This was to defuse critics worried more about the few gains Muslims were getting from tourism than the potential for polluting effects.

Myanmar desperately needed foreign exchange – so much so that it has used slave labour and the relocation of millions to build new resorts and encourage foreign investment. It has not worked. Henderson (2003) describes the external efforts to lead a boycott of the country and the efforts of its most famous prisoner, Nobel Peace Prize winner and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, to put pressure on the regime to liberalize. Neither side has much to show for its efforts to use tourism as a policy tool.

Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos are at a disadvantage in developing tourism given the war-torn character of some of their landscape. Also, a socialist outlook finds tourism a mixed blessing with its demonstration effect and aggravated inequality. Still, in recent years, travel to Vietnam has soared. It is based on the fascination of a beautiful land so long off-limits, but also the country has promoted heritage tourism around what some call ‘thanatourism’ – the Viet Cong tunnels, China Beach and other war sites so familiar to hundreds of thousands of French, American and Australian troops (Laske and Herold, 2004; Mok and Lam, 2000).

As in Vietnam, but thirty years earlier the Philippines utilized thanatourism – the Reunion for Peace promotion – in its efforts to lure both Japanese and Allied soldiers and their families back to World War II sites like Corregidor, the Bataan Death March route and the Leyte Landing that heralded General Douglas MacArthur’s return. In both nations, there is an effort to contrast the memories of war-torn societies with the triumph of nationalism over the oppressor. The governments now in power cannot help but look better than when under siege. Also with time, foreign exchange earned from former enemies is scarcely less welcome than that of allies.

Malaysia has had to neutralize its multi-ethnic heritage against an overwhelming Malay political control and tourism has offered a way simply to move around or
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beyond it. Malaysia has concentrated primarily on recreational attractions, and more recently ecotourism, over its contested cultural mix. Yet it also promotes an image of cultural harmony, a balanced combination of cultural traits from the three major ethnic categories, and the more exotic character of Borneo longhouse dwellers. Non-Muslim gambling also fits this political agenda (Kadir Din, 1997; Dowling, 2000).

Despite all the overt decisions reflected in special plans, five year goals and so on, the political objectives are seldom acknowledged. They have to be teased from the use of tourism by the presses which are often controlled to convey legitimacy to the government. They are sometimes reflected in the budget but all financial decisions are not always clearly identified – making Harold Lasswell’s injunction to look at who gets what, when and how rather difficult (Lasswell, 1936).

This leads to another point – what does not happen?. The decision not to let certain issues even get on the agenda, not to do something planned, not to budget for some articulated goal, or not to acknowledge unpleasant or embarrassing side effects of the policy process are just as important to understand but much harder to research than decisions publicly implemented. ‘Non-decisions’ have resulted in several nations being notorious for their sex tourism, paedophilia tours and trafficking in women and children despite the fact that prostitution is officially illegal in all the countries (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963; Richter, 1989; 2003; 2004; 2005; Lim, 1998; Hall, 1992; WTO News, 2004, 4th quarter: 6; and Richter and Richter, 2003).

In fact, the situation which accelerated but did not start during the Vietnam War is now so widespread and aggravated by the internet that some tourist-generating countries are choosing to prosecute sex tourists who go to Southeast Asia since the Southeast Asian nations too rarely can be depended upon to enforce their own laws (Richter, 2005). A Kuta Beach in Bali is not overtly planned; a Pattaya in Thailand does not happen overnight but flourishes because of official corruption, and the notorious motels in Manila became ubiquitous when the Minister of Tourism owned many and exempted them from the martial law curfew (Richter, 1982).

In a region where smoothly ordered relationships are highly valued, serious government or elite attentions to the seamy or criminal side of tourism is considered indiscreet. Cohen explains this process further: ‘Even in contemporary Thailand, whenever a new emergency occurs, the government tends to respond by the establishment of a new agency to deal with it or by promulgation of a new law or regulation after which (. . .) little effective action is taken. Thus, while prostitution was outlawed by Marshal Sarit in the 1960s, the number of prostitutes increased, openly and virtually unhindered (. . .) even as Bangkok came to be known as the “Brothel of Asia”, a commander of the Bangkok police in the 1980s announced with a straight face that there is no prostitution in Thailand since it is an outlawed activity’ (Cohen, 1996: 79). Until very recently, there has been a similar pattern of inactivity in much of
Southeast Asia with respect to AIDS despite the fact that it was clear what a threat the disease posed. Implementation, be it with AIDS, prostitution or job-creation, is not a priority if it alters elite control or reflects badly on the nation.

Tourism in the Twenty-First Century

Several of the countries of Southeast Asia today have what tourism analysts might refer to as 'mature' tourism infrastructures, though Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, East Timor and Brunei might still be characterized as emerging. Facilities are well-developed in most countries for the up-scale and middle class tourist. Until 2001, arrivals grew dramatically as a per cent of global tourism with Singapore and Thailand leading the way (Tourism Industry Yearbook, 2001). The growth of terrorism globally, the emergence of SARS, and the looming threat of an avian flu pandemic have cost the region greatly despite the greater sophistication of policy-makers and priorities focused on tourism.

There is a growing wealth in the region which has encouraged more domestic travel and a more deliberately regional tourism development approach. This has long been a goal of organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), but internal competition has inhibited much progress. Now collaboration and co-ordination seems to be occurring both as a consequence of planned and unplanned developments (Henderson, 2001; Teflen, 2002; Timothy, 2000; 2003; Teo, Chang and Ho, 2001c).

Attractions are being developed but are increasingly geared to the regional traveller, such as golf and gambling. Ecotourism is becoming a more important component of the tourist scene as its appeal to up-scale travellers is noted. Thus, it is not great planning and political will, but more a recognition of traveller tastes that is encouraging such development (Dowling, 2000; Kadir Din, 1993; 1997).

Public policy continues to guide tourism development, but the private sector is playing an ever more important role. Most of the government-owned accommodations have been privatized, as have the airlines. The latter are increasingly exposed to internal competition (Kua and Baum, 2004). Deregulation of the industry is uneven, but all to some degree are adopting freer trade, foreign ownership and other features of globalization once considered intolerable.

Niche tourism is also on the up-swing and fortunately is not confined to the still active sex tourism industry. Spa tourism in particular and luxury tourism in general are on the increase. Worries about the effects of such conspicuous consumption seem to have faded before the lure of hard currency. A special and growing niche in the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand is health-related tourism. Many of the finest doctors in those nations were trained in the United States and Europe yet the costs for even the most pampered care there are a fraction of American costs (PBS, February 21, 2005). In 2000, one Bangkok hospital had more than 165,000 foreign patients. Package tours for health care are being promoted by the Tourism Authority of Thailand and by Thai Air (The Travel Industry Yearbook: 162).
Another growing niche is cruise-ship tourism, although the receipts from cruise ships typically are far less to the host country since housing and most services are provided on board (Singh, 2000). Public policy seems to have been less a factor in the growth of cruising than the overcapacity of cruise ships following the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States.

The attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center also highlighted the vulnerability of many of the predominantly Muslim Southeast Asian countries, the Southern Philippines and more recently Southern Thailand to radical Islamic plots against tourists and the countries from which they come. The Bali bombings, the kidnappings in the Philippines and the capture of terrorist suspects in several of these nations served to depress tourism.

There is increasing research on the efforts policy-makers are making through international bodies like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Among other things, ASEAN has made promotional sketches of all member nations which are rather revealing in what they both include and exclude. While describing in detail the political structure of most of the member nations, ASEAN promotional materials conveniently eschew descriptions of the governments of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar and are totally uncritical of any nation’s tourism product. This is perhaps to be expected, but it is nevertheless illuminating. There are also more limited efforts to forge so-called ‘growth triangles’ that encourage regional promotion and co-ordination of tourism itineraries and transport (Henderson, 2001; Teo, Chang and Ho, 2001c; Dallen, 2000; 2002). However, these fledgling attempts suffered a major setback with the global recession of the late 1990s and the severe Japanese financial crisis during the 1990s (Lew, 1999).

**Sustainability Issues for the Public Sector**

Many public policy issues can be considered sustainability issues. The literature is replete with discussions of reef protection, the problems of deforestation, issues of water and energy supplies. Social issues also are increasingly noted as central to keeping tourist attractions from being terrorist targets or centres of ordinary crime. The issues I examine all concern aspects of health, yet they are often neglected in discussions of sustainability (*WTO News*, 2004: 7). They are also issues which cannot be dealt with on a country-by-country basis but must be taken up regionally and globally. They are expensive to deal with, require unprecedented co-ordination and political will and are absolutely vital to the protection of tourism but also national stability and prosperity.

I highlight only four of these health and sustainability issues. First, consider the 26 December 2004 tsunami. This and other natural disasters require a region-wide seismic and general weather monitoring system. While the presence of tourists and victims from so many nations explains the unprecedented outpouring of aid, the poorest citizens in its wake are the least apt to recover their livelihoods. Also, tourism – so much of it
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costal in nature — may be a long time recovering. Thus, the once considered optional linkages with ASEAN and PATA are now seen as more critical if they help link Southeast Asia to Pacific monitoring systems in Japan and Hawai’i (PBS, March 29, 2005). The first anniversary of this disaster found tourism severely depressed in Indonesia and Thailand. However, significant progress has been made in infrastructure development and education for health and weather disasters. The co-ordination of NGOs, all levels of government and international assistance from the United Nations and member nations illustrate significant advances in crisis policy-making and implementation.

The second major regional health issue is ‘smaze’ [smog-haze], the unhealthy thick smoke that blanketed much of the region for months following uncontrolled burning in Indonesia in the late 1990s. It may also have been responsible for the crash of a Garuda Airlines flight that killed all aboard (Causey, 2005). Smaze caused many deaths, countless respiratory problems and was an undisputed tourism disaster for a region already struggling with polluted cities. Though some years are worse than others, smaze has become a chronic environmental and economic problem. Clearly, ASEAN members must act to prevent and if necessary sanction countries whose practices threaten the water and air of other nations. (I say this as a citizen fully aware of the failings of my own government to reduce acid rain both within the United States and in Canada, or to combat the global warming to which the United States is the largest contributor).

A third and present threat is the terrible trafficking in women and children. Paedophilia tours, the rise of sexual slavery and with it AIDS has allowed a belated but deadly scourge to infect the region (Richter, 2003; 2004; 2005). As noted earlier, the response of the Southeast Asian nations involved has been inadequate. This situation raises issues of enforcement, criminality, and disease that few governments are willing to acknowledge (Richter and Richter, 2003; Cockburn, 2003: 2–29).

After the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines was overthrown, the government of President Cory Aquino greatly cleaned up the government advertising involving women. No more was a ‘fresh peach on every beach’ a government promise (Richter, 1982; 1989). Moreover, the town of Pagsanjan Falls which was a major paedophilia setting was removed from tourist maps put out by the government. Still, much more needs to be done. Critics of American bases in the Philippines predicted that their ousting would remove much of the nation’s prostitution, but that has not happened. Tourism has always attracted much more prostitution than the bases (Richter, 1989).

Trafficking is a threat both to women and children and to clients especially with the soaring AIDS rates. Many clients assume younger victims will be disease-free, but that is not the case. They just may be more vulnerable. The World Tourism Organization, the United Nations, the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization have all been involved in efforts to deal with these problems. Countries have in recent years sought to assure that trafficking across their borders does not limit the right of victims to get police help. More nations also are attempting
to prosecute those of their own citizens who commit crimes against children in other nations. The non-governmental organizations of the region have done more than the affected governments to curb this problem. Still today, girls and women from Myanmar are trafficked to the brothels of Bangkok and then abroad as are women from the northern hill tribes of Thailand (Meyer, 2001; Richter, 2003; 2005; East–West Center Conference on Trafficking in Women and Children in Asia and the Pacific, October, 2003). So-called ‘entertainers’ and their families in the Philippines are coerced or lured to Japan and Europe. Lao and Cambodian women are also trafficked abroad.

The fourth health-linked public policy issue for Southeast Asian tourism is also the most open-ended and challenging. It reflects the powerful twin pressures for both deregulation and globalization: international public health. As such, it extends from terrorist threats to a myriad of health issues brought on by the travel of millions to countries whose citizens may lack the necessary immunity to the diseases the tourists bring. Deliberate bio-terrorism gets the most attention and clearly it has daunting implications for tourism, but inadvertent bio-terrorism is just as lethal and more likely (Smith, 1995; Richter and Waugh, 1991; Richter, 1992; 2003).

Tourists are going to places of considerable risk from accidents and disease. They are doing so without adequate warnings by their governments who want smooth relations with Southeast Asian nations. Those host nations are similarly not taking precautions to warn tourists or indeed their own citizens of the health risks they may face. As virgin jungles are cleared for resorts and golf courses, diseases once confined to animals far from inhabited areas are now riding home with tourists (Richter, 2003).

A staggering fifty per cent of international travellers are estimated to have some type of accident or illness, some resulting in death (Edgell, 1999), yet tourist-receiving countries and tourist-generating countries pay much more attention to the condition of pets and agricultural products than to the tourist (Richter, 2003). Dogs must have up-to-date shots and in many destinations face quarantine. Yet, studies I have done of endemic disease – specifically malaria – show no correlation between prevalence and morbidity statistics and the requirements for entry into a country. More amazing has been the decline in requirements for re-entry. In less than a day a disease anywhere in the world can be across the globe. Some are the result of ordinary exposure, and the drop in mosquito eradication regimens. Now many deadly parasites are hopping a ride anywhere: Lassa fever in Germany, malaria in Canada, West Nile fever in the United States and dengue fever throughout much of Southeast Asia (Richter, 2003). The threat in spring of 2005 was Marburg Disease from Angola for which there is no treatment or protection. As Harvey Fineberg of the Institute of Medicine (Washington, D.C.) put it: ‘nature is the worst terrorist you can imagine’ (Shute, 2005: 42).

The most recent tourist-related threats to public health have come from East and Southeast Asia. SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in 2003–2004 inflicted a dramatic toll on tourism, although it fortunately killed relatively few people due
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to an unprecedented effort by governments throughout the world to keep the threat contained. The epidemic became a global menace when an elderly man staying at a Hong Kong hotel infected fellow guests at a wedding (Fidler, 2004: 187). Hundreds of millions of chickens were killed in China and Hong Kong as well as in other nations to keep the disease in check. However, China's reluctance to admit to the initial problem and take an immediate proactive role allowed the disease to spread as far as Toronto. The tourist industry globally is estimated to have had losses of $40 billion from SARS, much of that in airline, convention and hotel cancellations in Southeast Asia (Shute, April 4, 2005: 40-47; Puska, 2005: 85-134).

Now we are faced with an even deadlier disease - avian flu from Vietnam. The World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and other bodies have warned repeatedly that a pandemic is entirely possible. They argue that the threat is probable because pandemics come in cycles and we are overdue for a major one. Moreover, although avian flu has appeared before, it is unusual in already jumping from chickens and other birds to a variety of mammals including humans. Morbidity is 72 per cent and we have no vaccine to confront it (Shute, 2005). With relatively little fanfare we could be facing a pandemic comparable in scope and morbidity to the Black Death, the bubonic plague that stalked and killed a quarter of all Europeans in the fourteenth century (Kansas City Star, 22 February 2005). Already the toll on tourism is dramatic, especially in Thailand, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Indonesia where bird flu has already killed some people. As other nations wait for what some see as an inevitable spread, travel is cancelled or postponed.

Sustainability has thus moved from being a buzzword illustrating an awareness of environmental and social problems associated with tourism to a much larger question of public global health, co-ordinated regional and global decision-making, and sophisticated monitoring of issues from terrorism and crime to heritage protection and facilitation of the travel of hundreds of millions.

A Wary, Weary, but Hopeful Forecast

Despite these challenges, several new characteristics of Southeast Asian policy-making with respect to tourism are encouraging. First, there is a growing, although still limited, regional effort to address not just promotional and marketing issues but also questions of disease, trafficking and pollution. There is a recognition that no one nation can deal with these problems alone and they will only be addressed if none of the nations is put at a comparative disadvantage in confronting them. In spite of the regional cultural mores, AIDS, trafficking, and environmental concerns are on the policy agendas about which governments are actually taking some basic steps. In general, the push for this action has come from NGOs both inside and outside each individual country and through international groups like ASEAN, the WTO and the United Nations.
Secondly, although tourism has soared in the region and has grown to be a much more important sector to virtually all these economies, the countries have retained relatively diversified economies and diversified sources of tourists. It is critical to maintain this diversity. The Japanese recession hurt but it did not destroy Southeast Asian tourism. Hopefully, SARS and avian flu will not either.

Thirdly, also encouraging is the fact that domestic tourism is increasing, heritage protection is growing and regional travel is strong — all factors that would seem to broaden the distribution of political and economic benefits from tourism. The justification for international tourism can never be to furnish a cheap playground for the elites of the world. Governments can and must do more to make opportunities for their own people to travel and have recreation. Some governments, as in Britain, have almost an automatic policy response to achieve needed balance. Parks and recreational facilities are opened as the population in certain communities reach a critical mass. Other countries have promoted work camp tourism and socially responsible travel both within and outside their borders. Models for responsible tourism do exist. The will to look at them and develop others depends on the political strength of the society at large and on how much groups insist on a role in the governments’ plans. Even small ethnic groups and local populations have some clout and they also have important international NGOs that, as in ecotourism, can take up their cause (Causey, 2003; Kadir Din, 1993; 1997).

Still, no critique of tourism should be allowed to blame tourism policies alone for the social ills of society. Tourism is but one among many forces bringing profound social changes. There is much reason for optimism that future tourism policy-making will be better integrated with the environment and local public if only because governments have learned all too painfully what a fragile industry it can be — subject to disease, terrorism, sabotage, environmental decay and corruption. They have also come to appreciate tourism’s contribution to job growth, preserving built and natural heritage and contributing to an important constituency for health and resource protection.

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