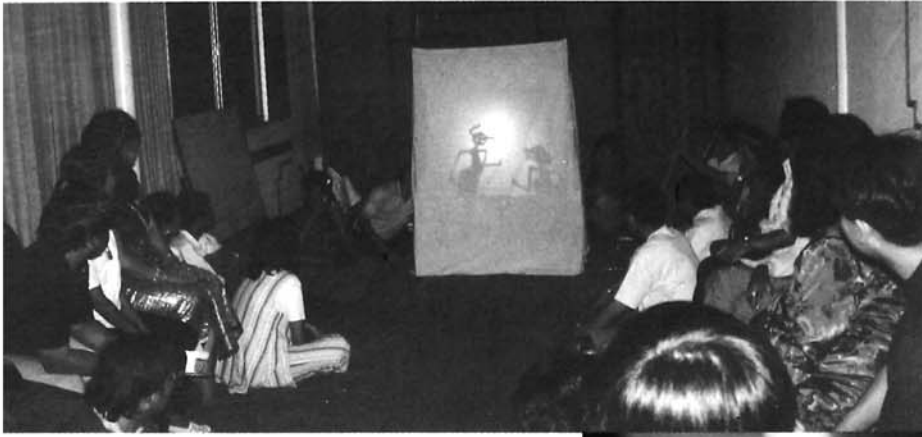


# Cultural Tourism and its Impact





*"Wayang Kulit" (Shadow puppet)  
show of Indonesia  
Photo by Nipon Sud-Ngam*



*Left : Pha That Luang,  
Vientiane, Laos  
Photo by Florence Pichon  
Right : Photo by Ean Lee*



*Artifacts and Cultural Exhibits  
Photo by Nipon Sud-Ngam*

# Cultural Tourism and its Impact

**H**umans have been travelling since prehistoric time, exploring new territories for food, and out of curiosity. Today, we travel to discover different ways of life in environments other than the ones we are used to.

The aeroplane can now take one to the “other end of the world” within a short time. Long distance travelling is no longer an uncommon practice, and more people are visiting the most remote of places on earth. As touring (visiting for short period of time) becomes immensely popular, tourism has established itself as a part of contemporary life.

Southeast Asia, with its array of sites, temples, architecture, cuisine, handicrafts, festivals, and traditions, among other things, has been a tourism attraction for the last few decades. Tourists come seeking different experiences in the varied and fascinating cultures of the region.

In efforts to draw more tourists and generate higher tourism incomes, cultural symbols, artifacts, and activities are increasingly being given paramount importance. This emphasis on offering culture in tourism has led to the development of what is known as cultural tourism. What really is cultural tourism? And what are the impacts of its development? These are some of the questions which motivated the SEAMEO\* Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SPAFA) to organise two related programmes: a Training Course on Cultural Tourism, and the Workshop on Cultural Tourism and its Impact. Both programmes took place within the same year. The training course was held in Bangkok between February 15 and March 15, 1995 while the workshop

was conducted in Luang Prabang, Laos on 20-26 September.

Mrs Leticia C Tan, a Community Affairs Officer of a local government unit in the Philippines said that it was important to establish what cultural tourism basically meant. In her paper presented at the workshop, she attempted to define it:

“It is the practice of promoting or encouraging people to travel to places for pleasure as well as for learning the integrated pattern of human knowledge, customary belief, social forms, historical heritage and material traits of a racial, religious or social



*Photo by Nipon Sud-Ngam*

group as a means for transmitting these treasures to succeeding generations.”

In a joint report, Mr Awang Othman bin Haji Salleh (Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports), and Ms Hajah Hartini binti Haji Saban (Ministry of Industry & Primary Resources) of Brunei, defined cultural tourism as a travel experience that would provide appreciation and understanding of culture as “the

totality of human behaviour patterns, characteristics of people, embodied in thought, speech and action [which encompass] particular system of ideas, beliefs, values, customs and other knowledge and deeds.”

Many participants at the workshop on cultural tourism and its impact shared similar views on the advantages of cultural tourism in their countries. Some of these advantages cited are:



*Balinese dance/Photo by Ean Lee*

- the creation of jobs, and increase in the income of the local people living near tourist sites through a variety of business, such as souvenir shops, restaurants, hotels, transportation, etc.;
- the generation of better cultural understanding between societies with cultural differences; and
- revival, preservation, and protection of cultural heritage, activities and art forms.

While there are advantages in cultural tourism, there are also negative impacts. The changes that

inevitably accompany tourism are often too drastic for communities which have survived for a long time with slow and cautious evolution of their traditions and customs. Some of the modern values, which may influence whole communities (particularly their youth), lack integrity and substance to contribute towards its sustenance.

Many participants observed that natural environments, historic monuments and ancient sites are affected by the visits of large number of tourists, or are destroyed in the development of tourist facilities, hotels, etc..

Another change brought about by cultural tourism is the commercialisation of culture, in which cultural activities and resources are sold or served to visitors. Due to the emphasis on the commercial aspects, authenticity suffers and values depreciate. In a paper presented at the workshop on cultural tourism, Mr Bounhom Chanthamath, Deputy Director of the Department of Museums and Archaeology, Laos, likened tourism to a fire: “It can cook the food or burn the house, depending on how it is controlled.”

Key areas in managing sustainable development of cultural tourism are in the control of planning, and the conservation of resources. As the competition in the business of organising tours and travel increases, the trend now is toward “more significant and meaningful travel wherein culture plays the main role”, says Jovita Menez-Napao, Senior Museum Researcher at the National Museum of the Philippines. While several participants accepted the growing role of cultural tourism within their countries and the region, they also called for cautious planning and co-operation between the private sector and governmental organisations to prevent “the house from burning down”. The following are excerpts of some of the papers presented in SPAFA’s recent programmes on cultural tourism.

\* Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation