



INDIGENOUS/ABORIGINAL TOURISM RESEARCH IN AUSTRALIA (2000–2008): Industry lessons and future research needs Pascal Tremblay and Aggie Wegner

Objectives of Study

Research on Indigenous/ Aboriginal tourism (IAT) is highly heterogeneous and difficult to organise for the purpose of over-viewing and synthesising. In order to gain an overview of completed research, and be able to identify benefits, gaps and directions of IAT research in the Australian context, this research project had three main objectives:

- to review IAT research
 - produced by Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC)
 - undertaken by others in Australia
 - describe and critique IAT research
 - develop a matrix of elements that make up IAT
- use this review to identify lessons learned for industry
- identify gaps, future opportunities and possible directions for IAT research.

Methodology

The approach adopted to review the literature on Indigenous/ Aboriginal tourism (IAT) research (published as well as unpublished documents) involved an in-depth review of reports, documents, book chapters, journal publications, government documentation, including previous reviews and scoping documents. The aim was to gain familiarity and a thorough understanding of the scope of research undertaken.

To provide an overview of previous research a matrix containing elements that make up Indigenous/ Aboriginal tourism was developed with research conducted between 2000 and 2008 categorised accordingly. Furthermore, this project provides an overview and presents the main findings from IAT research projects.

The review was then used to critically analyse the undertaken research direction with the aim to identify benefits, gaps and directions of IAT research in the Australian context.

Key Findings

- It is noticeable that definitions of IAT differ considerably between states, and it can be assumed that it will change through time. These definitions reflect the priorities of various jurisdictions, and will affect and influence perceptions of research needs. It is evident that some of the strategies identify or suggest general research directions (other than better consumer knowledge).
- The major considerations or components found in the strategies are somewhat predictable—and a large proportion of the latter would apply to any business development attempting to integrate Indigenous/Aboriginal interests with a mainstream economic sector. Much of what is discussed is not specific to tourism.
- Most strategies endorse a general belief of high interest or growing demand in IAT, but this is rarely backed up by references (sources) or explicit/convincing evidence.
- Some of these strategies discussed above are recent and have benefited from research and strategic directions suggested by STCRC (discussed in the next chapter) as well as other research (some strategies have cited these documents).
- There is a complex and invisible background relationship between the proposed directions for Aboriginal tourism and the course taken by Aboriginal economic development organisations operating in each state, the alignment between the two types of organisations being more or less clear for each jurisdiction. Other areas are also highly relevant in some of the states, such as the 'Indigenous Arts Strategy' in the Northern Territory.
- A preliminary north/west—south/east divide can be observed in terms of viewpoints and identified priorities for IAT development in Australia. It becomes apparent that Western Australia and the Northern Territory attach



more importance to supporting and planning for economic development opportunities through IAT as well as recognising the importance of aligning IAT with the mainstream tourism industry. New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania on the other hand see their priority as adding to the destination product (and ensuring a smooth fit), recognising the value of economic opportunities for Aboriginal people or communities while Queensland's approach is to address both issues simultaneously. In presenting their strategies, the states and Territories seem to position themselves with respect to the arising political message of 'what comes first?'—tourism or Aboriginal development interests...

- Gaps in IAT research have been identified and re-identified, before and during the life of the STCRC, and constitute a fairly stable but broad-ranging issues list. In fact almost all aspects of tourism (from consumption, production, enterprise development, fit with destination marketing and impacts management or coordination) appear in efforts to identify research gaps;
- None of the previous approaches have been able to identify or articulate priorities in such a way as to rank themes, or provide a logical sequence for research steps because:
 - no set of priorities arose from stakeholders and research gaps analysis (that could have been based on obvious needs)—in fact divergences on that.
 - no logical sequence arose from researchers' suggestions and workshops (that could have been based on logical research processes or hierarchy).
 - no organic or coordinated direction arose from the research fellow project (that could have been based on the careful articulation of past or ongoing research falling into place into an endorsed agenda).

In summary, it has been shown that the STCRC-IAT research has involved:

1. With respect to the first component 'sphere-discipline'
 - less demand-side analysis;
 - less cultural – more mixed, environmental and business concerns;
 - in terms of disciplinary outlook:
 - less cultural studies/ economic opportunities

- more entrepreneurship/ product development and marketing/ environmental management.
2. With respect to the second component 'location-environment'
 - in terms of audience: more mixed, instead of specifically academic or government.
 - in terms of environment: more remote/regional and more N/A (signalling scoping research) instead of mixed.
 - in terms of location or background type: more national/ universal and less based on precise businesses.
 - in terms of state applicable: more N/A due to scoping research too.
 3. With respect to the 'methodology': more stakeholders-based/qualitative research.

Future Actions

- The major issue and challenge—and greatest potential role for the STCRC might therefore be to articulate an acceptable approach endorsing the realities highlighted above and tackle the divide between the economic development imperative of the north-west and careful integration of Aboriginal cultural tourism needs of the south-east. In each context there is a need to reconsider the basic blocks of IAT coordination (demand, supply, impacts management and coordination), with the understanding that their relative importance will differ, and that the nature of coordination will follow completely different principles.
- To provide a reliable and practical benchmark of interest in Indigenous/ Aboriginal culture by tourists (or specific segments) in general allowing to gauge the real or realistic potential of this field.
- To provide a basis to understand how tourists conceptualise ideal Indigenous/ Aboriginal experiences, and what acceptable commercial products and attributes (experience content, location, environment and conditions, ethics, cultural control, guarantees of authenticity or appropriate endorsement, willingness to pay for specific product configurations, etc.) matter, dimensions often highlighted by Tourism Northern Territory as critical for broad IAT development.