Cases in Sustainable Tourism: An Experiential Approach to Making Decisions
Irene M. Herremans (Ed.)

This book provides a collection of cases in sustainable tourism authored by 14 researchers from doctoral students to academicians to consultants. Hence, this is one of the drawbacks of this edited book, which is independently written, and hence the writing style and the coverage of the topic seem to be uneven and sometimes redundant. For a start, the well-bounded hardcover book lacks creativity in the cover image. The image showing the road to nowhere in between the Grand Canyon certainly does not tie with the title and theme of the book. As there seems not to be a preface for the book, it is not very clear what the main goals of the book are. Instead, three pre-publication reviews, commentaries and evaluations are used as a preface. All three annotations agree that this book is ideal for classroom teaching as instructors can bring theoretical concepts to life by using the case study approach as it provides richer and more comprehensive learning experiences.

After the table of contents, the book is followed by a brief description of the editor and the 14 contributors. The book is segmented into five major parts, with a brief preface by the editor at the beginning of each part. Eighteen articles are arranged within these chapters, which include the following:

- Part 1: Introduction to Cases and Environmental Thought Leaders.
- Part 2: Travelling Responsibly.
- Part 3: Sustainable Nature-based and Adventure Tourism Activities.
- Part 4: Wrestling with the Sustainability of National Parks.
- Part 5: Land Development and Governance Issues.

The two chapters in this first part of Cases in Sustainable Tourism provide a summary of the enormous selection of materials in the 16 chapters by bringing awareness to a variety of tourism stakeholders – university students in tourism programmes, tourism business professionals, employees of all kinds of tourism organizations and tourists. Each case has been adopted and modified based on a real-life incident so that students can engage in an experiential session and put themselves in the midst of the scenario.

Part 2, entitled “Travelling Responsibility”, consists of three articles based on experience at Mount Assiniboine Lodge in British Columbia, Freedom Airlines Incorporated and Fairmont Pallister Hotel in Calgary, Canada. As preached by Wild Asia (Responsible Tourism, 2006), the leading initiator for responsible tourism in Malaysia, there is a new wave of tourists who are saying “no” to mass tourism, irresponsible operators and resorts that are destroying the local environment. These tourists want real quality experience. They want to know that the shower they are taking is not depriving a village of water; that the hotel they are staying at is not robbing the locals of their livelihood; or that their very presence is not offending the local communities. Travel is about relaxation, rejuvenation, adventure, fulfilment, playfulness and sharing experiences rather than just “places and things” (Francis, 2006). It certainly is not about being cooped up in a tourist compound! This is what “Responsible Tourism” or “RT” is all about. Fergus Macleuran and Irene Herremans tried to discuss these issues in the form of a dialogue but fell short.
with no details. Robin Reid’s experience in Fairmont Pallister, on the other hand, showed clearly the challenges associated with the development and implementation of the green partnership programme.

Part 3, with the title “Sustainable Nature-based and Adventure Tourism Activities”, encompasses six interesting articles on whale watching, environmental education, mountain holidays, ski resorts and vacations by the sea. The author has used The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) definition of ecotourism (p. 71) to check the characteristics emphasized in this form of responsible tourism. Using a similar definition, Ceballos-Lascuráin (1994), often regarded as the “father of ecotourism”, defined ecotourism as, “Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations”. This definition can be used to study further the characteristics of ecotourism and thus identify genuine ecotourism operators. Ecotourism is all about creating and appeasing a hunger for nature. It is about utilizing tourism’s potential for conservation and economic development, and also it is about deterring its negative impact on ecology, culture and aesthetics. Australia, with their Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme (NEAP), and Costa Rica, with their Certification in Sustainable Tourism (CST), can be used as best practice in the most advanced system of certifying environmentally responsible tourism.

Four articles are compiled in part 4 entitled “Wrestling with the Sustainability of National Parks”. All the cases in this part focus on national parks in both the USA and Canada that are vigorously addressing the issues of sustainable tourism. Good case studies based on experience in national parks in Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Banff and Waterton Lakes are discussed. Interestingly, in the conclusion of Robin Reid’s case study in Waterton Lakes (p. 218), four dimensions of sustainability were drawn out – economic, social, political and environmental. The only dimension that was free from a human-based system was the environmental dimension. Thus, it is clear why achieving common environmental focus towards tourism development is quite often difficult.

The final part of the book entitled “Land Development and Governance Issues” aptly discusses why the environmental and social concerns are often more than just recycling waste, reducing energy use and eliminating pollution (p. 223). Indeed, the dominance governance of most of this issue falls under the management of an entire region of a country. The complex governance situations in the three articles in this final part indeed show that as our world becomes more complicated, developing decision-making skills becomes even more necessary in the future. The three cases are on the banana plantations in Costa Rica, wildlife resources at Zambezi Valley in Zimbabwe and the unique ecotourism in “extractive reserves” in Brazil. In an environmentally sensitive area clear understanding of multi-stakeholder conflict resolution is important. Thus, the development of an effective comprehensive strategic action plan to promote sustainable tourism development in a more systematic, integrated and co-ordinated manner for the future planning of the tourism sector is indeed essential.

It is a pity that the book did not include some of the best practices and experience in sustainable tourism management initiatives from Asia and Oceania, namely from
Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, etc. These best practices can be used effectively as a point of reference to develop sustainable tourism management for the better maintenance of tourism destinations as well as to upgrade the delivery of travel and tourism services that meet the global demand of the tourism sector.

Despite much unevenness in the writing style and no logic to the order in which the articles are presented, the book has many plus points, as indicated by the three pre-publication commentaries at the beginning of the book. The case studies in the book are ideal for in-class discussion, role-playing and debates, which will surely assist students in better understanding the complexity and ambiguity inherent in most sustainable tourism cases. Students should be able to grasp a much richer and comprehensive learning experience than from just textbooks and statistics alone. As aptly mentioned by the publishers, this book will prepare students to become “problem-solvers” when faced with real-life decisions in the hospitality and tourism industry. Learning by other people’s experiences shortens the learning curve, cuts down failure rates, avoids expensive pitfalls, gets faster results and achieves far better cost-effectiveness. Effective leaders play a pivotal role in the success of any venture. Hence, Irene Herremans’s *Cases in Sustainable Tourism* has provided an opportunity to learn to be even better leaders and managers.

References


**Vikneswaran Nair**

School of Hospitality & Tourism, Taylor’s College, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia

E-mail: vicky.n@taylors.edu.my
'Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research

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