

Ecotourism and Conservation in the Americas, Amanda Stronza and William H Durham (eds), CAB International, Wallingford, ISBN 978 1 84593 400 2, 275 pp.

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Seventh in CABI's Ecotourism book series, this volume focuses on the American region in much the same way that the fourth volume (Gössling and Hultman, 2006) examined Scandinavia. Both the editors are anthropologists, so despite the book's subtitle, most chapters focus first on people, with conservation as a secondary consideration. There are 19 individual authors. Six of these work as consultants; six for universities, including two professors and two PhD students; three work for NGOs, two for governments, one is a tour operator and one is a journalist.

One of the most interesting chapters is the opening contribution on community ecotourism experiences in Cofan, Ecuador, written by its long-term champion. This case has been described before, but perhaps never so eloquently. The following chapter on Posada Amazonas in Peru also makes very interesting reading, though it also has been described many times before. It seems that things have not always gone smoothly. A later chapter in similar vein presents the Kapawi Lodge operated by the Achuar people of north-eastern Ecuador. According to this chapter, the Achuar culture penalises individual wealth to such an extent that the lodge was unable to function as a business and forced to close, 'The community prefers to destroy the enterprise, despite the fact that it belongs to them' (p. 59). Confusingly, however, the lodge is listed in *National Geographic's* 2009 'Top 50 Ecolodges'. The operator listed in this book no longer has a functioning link to the lodge's website, but 2009 rates are offered on other operator websites. So perhaps it is running again.

Chapters on the Bay Islands of Honduras and the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador, by the book's two professors, both demonstrate the so-called Trojan Horse model of ecotourism, i.e. that low-key nature-based tourism is a precursor to high-impact mass tourism. These are the book's most authoritative contributions, embedding case-study specifics into the broader literature. Two chapters from the USA effectively say that there are enterprises that have earned an ecotourism label, but do not use it because Americans do not like to be called ecotourists. There is a replay of the education versus interpretation argument, and a set of surveys from children in Peru. The book concludes with brief contributions on a turtle conservation project in Brazil, ecolodge design, donor funding and ecocertification.

What general impressions can one gain from this compilation? The first is that if this is really a comprehensive review, then ecotourism in the Americas has not actually achieved very much. According to the introductory chapter, 'though many other market-based approaches to conservation are being dismissed as wishful thinking, ecotourism warrants continued appraisal' (p. 7). Indeed, such appraisals are ongoing (Buckley, 2009). This book also asks, however: 'How, when, where and under what circumstances can ecotourism truly deliver on its promises?' (p. 7). Its answers are not encouraging.

The second impression is that the authors in this volume seem to have a rather inward perspective on ecotourism. They argue that the Americas 'is the region with the greatest amount and diversity of ecotourism activity in the world' (p. 8). No evidence is provided, however, to support such an assertion. Except for the editors, most of the individual chapter authors seem largely unaware of the extensive academic literatures in tourism, conservation policy or recreation ecology, particularly outside the Americas. Since few of them are in fact academic researchers, perhaps this is not surprising. It is a valuable contribution, certainly, to have the historical development of individual in-country cases outlined by those who were closely involved. To include short reviews of more general topics, however, simply because the authors happen to live in the USA or Latin America, is rather less valuable to the international reader. In addition, it is intriguing that the editors apparently do not

consider Canada or indeed Alaska or Hawaii as part of the Americas, though there are well-respected ecotourism researchers in each, and the same issues surely apply.

A compilation of case studies in ecotourism 8 years ago (Buckley, 2003) included some three-score cases from South and Central America, and a similar number from Africa. A recently published review of the latter (Spenceley, 2008) contains many new examples and gives the strong impression that, despite a number of problems comparable to those presented in the current volume, ecotourism in sub-Saharan Africa has indeed provided a successful mechanism for conservation and community development. This volume on the Americas, in contrast, gives the impression that despite valiant efforts by a number of heroic pioneers, these early endeavours have not actually prospered. Sources such as planeta.com (Mader, 2009), however, suggest that there are ecotourism projects throughout Latin America that are doing very well. It seems unfortunate that this volume does not include them.

I have argued previously (Buckley, 2003) that different continents seem to have different 'regional signatures' for their own particular styles of ecotourism development; and comparisons of the current volume to those of Gössling and Hultman (2006), or Spenceley (2008), certainly reinforce that suggestion. The approach underlying this volume, namely a continental-scale compilation of case studies in order to extract regional trends, styles and patterns, is indeed a valid one, and both the publisher and the editors are to be commended for their efforts in this regard. As outlined above, my own impression is that this volume contains some interesting case studies with little comparative analysis, and some rather cursory review chapters with few case studies. There are some valuable nuggets nonetheless, and I look forward to a future edition with more comprehensive coverage.

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