

Tourism in Southeast Asia New Local Development Chances through Individual Backpacking?

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1. Introduction: Pacific sunset between asianization and crisis

Third World tourism, the tourism from the industrial countries of the North to the (semi-)periphery of the South, is on the increase (World Tourism Organization 2001). With a share of 14.3% (1999) of international tourism, its economic and socio-cultural impact is fully realized nowadays. The farther the distance, the higher the social value and prestige derived from trips to less developed countries (Vorlaufer 1996). However, the international reaction to an increasing number of recent terrorist attacks on tourists and tourism infrastructure (Bali, Jakarta – Indonesia; Cairo, Luxor – Egypt; Djerba – Tunisia) still remains to be seen. This paper focuses on the consequences of the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s on regional tourism. The potential transformation of overseas travel in the aftermath of the World Trade Center drama of September 11, 2001, whose long-term impact still cannot be accurately statistically assessed, has been deliberately ignored. Apparently, the search for the (well-marketed) ‘untouched exotic’ continues to constitute an indispensable factor of today’s Western leisure society.

Wherever viable, Third World governments have been actively pursuing tourism growth in their countries. They are particularly interested in international tourism (McDonnell & Darcy 1998), believing that it brings them numerous economic benefits including employment opportunities, small business development, and foreign exchange earnings. They tend to assume that more money is earned by attracting tourists who can afford luxury goods and services, despite the fact that this often leads to a country’s dependence on imported products, foreign investment, and expatriate skills, resulting in repatriation of resultant profits (Baskin 1995). But those financial benefits received from luxury tourism developments in the Third World very rarely “trickle down” to be of any significance to people at grassroots level.

Table 1: World Tourism Regions

Tourist Destination	Tourist Arrivals (in mio.)				Average Annual Growth (in %)
	1995	2000	2010	2020	1995–2020
Europe	336	393	527	717	3.1
East Asia & Pacific	81	93	195	397	6.5
North-/South America	110	130	190	282	3.8
Africa	20	27	47	77	5.5
Middle East	14	18	36	69	6.7
South Asia	4	6	11	19	6.2
World	565	668	1006	1561	4.1

Source: World Tourism Organization 2001: 49ff

According to forecasts of the World Tourism Organization – which, however, do not include present obstacles to tourism development –, Southeast Asia's growing popularity among tourists from all over the world is reflected by the highest growth of tourism worldwide. The region, which is part of East Asia & Pacific, has been one of the most popular tourist destinations since the 1990s (cf. table 1), as predicted by Harrison (1992) a decade ago.

However, tourism from Europe – admittedly on a much smaller scale – has existed for as long as 150 years, when the British tour operator Thomas Cook organized his first trips to Asia in the mid-19th century. Colonial accommodation has been popular with Dutch and British tourists since the early 20th century, whereas the first beach infrastructure dates back to 1917, when the Thai royal family opened up the beach resort of Hua Hin. Bali, on the other hand, could boast more than 3.000 international tourists p. a. in the 1930s, supporting the Indonesian island's reputation as a human paradise on earth. However, the global expansion of Third World tourism did not take off before the late 1960s, when long-distance vacation became affordable to a wider range of people in the booming industrialized countries of the north, especially Americans and Europeans (Vorlaufer 1996).

Nevertheless, nowadays Western tourists only play a minor role for Southeast Asia's current tourism, since Asian tourists have come to account for 80% of the region's international tourism (Uthoff 1998). The increasing Asian middle-classes, though, are not yet in the position to replace the conventional European, American or Australian package tourist: The Asian economic crisis has prevented a further expansion of Asian package tourism since 1997, when the bursting of economic bubble and the breakdown of political systems destroyed the myth of the Asian miracle and employment op-

portunities for thousands of workers in the regional tourism business. However, Southeast Asia's tourism development is not homogeneous, differing considerably from country to country (cf. table 2).

Thailand continues to be the key regional player with the highest number of tourist arrivals and revenues. Malaysia and Singapore perform well, with slightly lower figures. Some countries such as Cambodia and Laos, despite gaining hardly any major tourism revenues compared to the 'big three' on the Malay peninsula, even more depend on tourism, as the present and future shares of tourism employment show (cf. table 2). For Indonesia, which experienced the most dynamic and rapid tourism development before the crisis, both economic experts and tour operators had expected tourism to play a major role in the country's economy in the 21st century: Around four million tourists (1986: 825,000) were expected to spend 4.7 billion US-\$ annually and provide jobs for 1.4 million Indonesians by 2005 (Siebert 2002). However, Southeast Asia's currently most unstable country seems unable to attract large numbers of tourists, since fatal attacks against backpacker tourism infrastructure (Bali, 2002) and a luxury hotel (Jakarta, 2003) are hardly beneficial to tourism.

Table 2: International Tourism in Southeast Asia

Country	Tourist Arrivals	Tourism Revenues	GDP-Share of international tourism (%)		Share of population employed in tourism (%)	
	1999 (in mio.)	1999 (in mio. US-\$)	2000	2010	2000	2010
Brunei	-	-	2.3	2.1	2.0	2.7
Indonesia	2.48	-	2.8	2.7	2.3	3.3
Cambodia	0.26	-	3.9	4.0	2.9	5.6
Laos	-	103	6.3	5.7	5.6	6.5
Malaysia	7.93	2822	3.8	2.9	3.2	3.3
Myanmar	0.20	35	2.7	2.5	2.4	2.9
Philippines	2.17	2534	3.7	4.5	3.4	5.5
Singapore	6.95	4362	4.5	3.4	3.1	5.6
Thailand	8.65	6680	6.3	6.3	5.0	8.9
Vietnam	1.88	-	2.2	1.6	1.9	1.9

Source: World Tourism Organization 2001: 55ff

Meanwhile, the economic recession in the industrializing "tiger states" of Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan brought tourism development to a standstill: On the one hand, an estimated 200 million Asians are no longer

able to afford trips to and within Southeast Asia; on the other hand, American and European package tourism was decreasing dramatically as well, with a sharp decline in the number of arrivals ranging from 13% to 20% (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore), a slight decrease of 2% in the Philippines, yet and even a small increase in Thailand, whose long-established tourism infrastructure prevented a complete breakdown in 1998. Confirmed orders for 150 aircraft for Asian airlines have been cancelled, causing unemployment in other economic sectors as well (Siebert 2002). Additionally, many Southeast Asian beach resorts already under construction will never be completed due to bankruptcy and lack of investor interest. Despite huge discounts and special promotion offers, tourism faces its worst crisis since the beginning of mass tourism thirty years ago, despite a remarkable rebound in 2000. In most Southeast Asian countries (except Cambodia and the Philippines) the percentage contribution of international tourism to the GDP is expected to decrease till 2010 (cf. table 2).

2. Spoiler or Savior: Individual tourism as the 'golden goal' of tourism planning?

"...Yes, we went on a trek. We rafted on a river. Very boring. I want to do something different, and everybody wants to do something different. But we all do the same thing. There is no ... ah ... adventure" (In: Garland 1997: 19).

When Alex Garland, an experienced backpacker himself, wrote the novel *The Beach* in 1997, backpacker critique was released from narrow scientific circles to offer public insight. Starring Leonardo DiCaprio, the film soon became a blockbuster, describing the hippie lifestyle of young backpackers on their Thai dream island Ko Phee Phee. No doubt, this must be seen as a reflection of backpacking as a travel style no longer to be ignored by authorities and tour operators. However, today's average individual backpacker differs considerably from the image portrayed by Garland, being less escapist and more comfort-oriented than presented.

Whereas package tourism to and within Asia seems to be on the gradual decline, apparently waiting for quieter times to come, individual tourism keeps booming (Siebert 2002). While international luxury hotels and high-price tours are badly affected by the abrupt slowdown of the worldwide travel mania, backpackers continue to travel around the region as they have

been doing for decades. Thus, the main goal of this paper is to discuss the transformation of low-budget backpacking tourism within this region, which must be regarded as the birthplace of mass backpacking. The first commercial underground guidebook ever covered the area as early as the mid-1970s. "Southeast Asia on a shoestring", first published in 1975 and – presently boasting 936 pages – now in its 10th edition, has established well-trodden paths from Bangkok to Bali and contributed to the rise of a kind of mass tourism on a sub-cultural level itself. This so-called "yellow bible" opened up the opportunity for international travelers to roam around the region by themselves.

Despite the lack of specific statistical data, the trend towards individual traveling is obvious. Today's backpackers are ascribed the lead in diffusing tourism outside Europe and initiating a notable redirection of tourist arrivals to Third World countries. Fifteen years ago, every sixth tourist in the world was a youthful traveler between 15 and 29. As an example, about 50% of Thailand's tourists travel on their own, with an increasing number of youthful backpackers among them (Dearden and Harron 1994). With the dramatic decrease of (package) tours to Southeast Asia in the wake of the Asian crisis, the regional attitude towards individual tourists may change, since they might keep at least parts of the present infrastructure running.

This paper evaluates both the pros and cons of backpacker tourism in respect of local level development. Based on results of the author's empirical field work in Southeast Asia from 1990 to 1995, special emphasis is placed on the socio-economic background, travel behavior and use of local infrastructure of the post-hippie backpackers encountered a decade later in the course of further research. However, important issues such as travel motives and travel routes have been dealt with in greater detail in other papers, as has also been discussed the hippie-based history of early backpacking and the ephemeral concept of so-called alternative tourism in general (Spreitzhofer 1997, 1998, 2002). The concept of backpackers spearheading mass tourism has been analysed extensively in former studies (Aramberri 1991, Butler 1990, Riley 1988) and will not be discussed in this paper, either.

The presumption that high-spending tourists bring the greatest benefits to Third World countries is generally questioned (Adler 1985, Scheyvens 2002). Does the low-budget tourism of the late 1990s meet the requirements of a 'better', socially responsible Third World tourism? Does today's individual tourism provide a chance of sustainable development, offering appropriate ways for both local and regional participation in the world's fastest growing industry? Special focus is put on backpacking traveling in terms of its claim to offer a proper form of sustainable tourism: The aftermath of the recent economic crisis might lead to rethinking the concept of tourism in

general and a transformation of established travel modes, tourism roles and clichés.

2.1 Tacitly ignored, urgently needed: The socio-economic background of Southeast Asian backpackers

The academic literature provides clues as to how the backpacker segment can be described. In general, backpackers may be characterized by a preference for low-budget accommodation, an increased emphasis on meeting other people (both fellow travelers and locals) at their travel destinations, an independently organized and flexible travel schedule and considerably higher travel duration. Everybody traveling differently is labeled a 'tourist'. A connecting element among this heterogeneous group of mainly young, 'alternative' travelers is thus the self-established and maintained contrast to mass (mainstream) tourism, which becomes apparent not only on subconscious levels of mutual rejection and contempt, but also on the surface level of self-description (Jones 1992).

Members of this specific group call themselves backpackers, (budget) travelers, globetrotters, trekkers or adventurers. These terms will therefore be used synonymously in the following discussion. Backpackers would hardly ever accept the term (alternative) 'tourist', since they do not regard themselves as tourists. In their opinion, only mainstream, mostly package tourists can be made responsible for the so-called coca-colonization of Third World countries. Backpackers are often keen on sharing the local lifestyle (Loker 1993: 33), citing "meeting the people" as a key motivation (Riley 1988: 325). Their recreational activities are likely to focus on nature (e. g. trekking), culture (village stays and more), or adventure (including river rafting or riding camels) (Rotpart 1995). This goes hand in hand with the tendency of backpackers to travel more widely than other tourists, seeking unusual or out-of-the-way locations and/or experiences (Haigh 1995). According to Riley, "the less traveled route and more difficult way of getting there has a high degree of mystique and status conferral" (1988: 321).

At least long-term low-budget backpacking tourism in Southeast Asia still seems to be characterized by the dominance of Western male, mostly (northern, Western and central) European travelers in their late twenties and early thirties. This fact basically corresponds to studies carried out by Riley (1988), Mazur (1994) and Dearden and Harron (1994) more than a decade ago. Furthermore, it supports the theory that more and more young people postpone their entrance into the labor market, making use of their relative independence in terms of family constraints and responsibilities. Japanese and Taiwanese tourists, who dominate the region's package tourism sector

in quantitative terms (World Tourism Organization 2001), are clearly under-represented. This indicates that the individual tourists' major origin is generally independent of a region's main tourist countries of origin. Similar results have been obtained from a recent backpacking study in Australia (cf. Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995: 832). A striking feature is the lack of South European travelers, which could be interpreted as being due to language barriers. Only English and (partly) French and Dutch are former colonial languages within Southeast Asia and thus widely understood.

The tight budget many backpackers impose on themselves is largely related to the longer duration of their travels. Perhaps because of its association with the "hippie" and "drifter" tourism of the 1960s and 1970s, the backpacker segment of the tourism market has not always been welcomed by Third World regional or national governments (Cohen 1973; Erb 2000; Hall 1997; Hampton 1998; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995): Longhaired male backpackers were even denied entry into Malaysia and Singapore in the 1960s (Spreitzhofer 2002b). Much credence has been given to the stereotypical image of the backpacker as an unkempt, immoral, drug-taking individual (Heinen 2001: 11f). In Southeast Asia, the interest paid by most government planners to the backpacker sector is either negligible or negative. According to Hampton, this "sector is at best tacitly ignored, or at worst actively discouraged in official tourism planning" (1998: 640).

2.2 The myth of the common backpacker: Heroic adventurers, hedonistic ego-tourists or miserly invaders?

"Today's typical youthful traveler is not accurately described as a hippie, ... or an adherent to a 'counterculture'. Western society has undergone some major changes and the contemporary long-term traveler reflects them ...", so Riley (1988: 326) pointed out at the boom time of Asian tourism. In fact, the clear-cut identification of explorer types and drifter types (cf. Cohen 1973) does not seem to be applicable any more, since the backpacking of the late 1990s appears to be no longer a phenomenon of a minority of well-defined hippie dropouts on the one hand and bourgeois adventurers on the other.

One criticism of backpackers is that, in ensuring that their funds will last for the duration of their travels, they become excessively concerned with bargain hunting (Goodwin et al. 1998). They may regard haggling as a game, to the extent that they exploit artisans and traders so desperate for a sale that they accept unreasonably low prices for their products (Bradt 1995). However, status among travelers is closely tied to living cheaply and obtaining the best 'bargains' which serve as indicators that one is an experienced traveler. Budi, an experienced tour guide, argues that the average in-

dependent tourist to Indonesia has changed somewhat in recent years: More and more tourists go to Indonesia not to see the culture or the people, but to compete with other travelers about how cheaply they can travel. They all want to be the winner, and do not realize how rude they are to local people (cited in Wheat 1995: 50).

Furthermore, their very search for authentic experiences is based on exclusion of other tourists (Jamieson 1996), which is why Mowforth and Munt suggest that backpackers can be included in the category of the self-centered tourists they call "ego-tourists" (1998: 135). Possibly, the more lasting influence of backpackers will involve the problem of seeking out new destinations but failing to understand cultural norms of appropriate behavior in these new locales (Bradt 1995). Some suggest that backpackers simply do not care about local customs and acceptable behavior, even showing blatant disregard for social norms (Noronha 1999). Acting out their perceived freedom from social commitments and constraints (Jamieson 1996) may lead then to culturally and socially inappropriate behavior. This seems to be a problem particularly in backpacker ghettos or enclaves, places where large numbers congregate to experience home comforts (from good phone and internet services to familiar foods, such as the ubiquitous banana pancake) and the company of tourists of similar mind. Such places can be found mainly in urban centers such as Bangkok (Khao San Road), Singapore (Beach Road) or Jakarta (Jalan Jaksa), which function as bottlenecks of interregional transport and traveler communication.

Backpacking as just another variant of global tourism which reinforces inequitable links between the First and the Third World? In fact, the comparatively long general duration of stay in Asia does not necessarily imply a longer stay at one place. As was pointed out, the actual stay at one of the traveler spots was limited to some hours or days. The desired closer contact with the local population, which was cited as one of the main differences to mainstream package tourism until the mid-1980s, is not necessarily a general feature. "There's nothing to do in that village. And they aren't interested in us, either. Should I make friends with the becak-drivers?" (Austrian female, aged 32, cited in Spreitzhofer 2002b, 119ff). Budget or "alternative" travel may be criticized as an illusion of "nice" cottage capitalism, soothing ideological anxieties while extending commercialization and the tourism industry. Rather than working towards social transformation, alternative travel seems to tinker at the edges of capitalist expansion into new market niches (Scheyvens 2002). Tourism is part of the processes of modernization and globalization, but local actors are agents in this process, and not just the recipients of modernization processes.

2.3 Positive or negative contributions to local development?

Few tourism researchers have explicitly examined how individual tourists, who are usually backpackers for transport reasons, contribute to local development in Third World contexts. A body of evidence on this issue does emerge, however, when research on related issues is also scrutinized. For

Table 3: Backpackers' Contribution to Local Development

Economic Development Criteria	Non-Economic Development Criteria
They spend more money than other tourists because of longer duration of visit.	Enterprises catering for backpackers are generally small and thus ownership and control can be retained locally.
Adventuresome nature and longer duration of visit means money spent is spread over a wider geographical area, including remote, economically depressed, isolated regions.	Local people gain self-fulfillment through running their own tourism enterprises rather than occupying menial positions in enterprises run by outside operators
Backpackers do not demand luxury, therefore spend more on locally produced goods (such as food) and services (transport, home stay accommodation).	Because they operate their own businesses, local people can form organizations which promote local tourism, empowering the community to uphold their interests when negotiating with outside bodies.
Economic benefits can be spread widely within communities as even individuals with little capital or training can provide desired services or products. Formal qualifications are not needed to run small enterprises; skills can be learned on the job.	The interest of backpackers in meeting and learning from local people can lead to a revitalization of traditional culture, respect for the knowledge of ensuring low overhead costs and elders, and pride in traditional aspects of one's culture.
Basic infrastructure is required, therefore minimizing the need for imported goods (such as the use of bamboo and thatch to create a beach stall).	Backpackers use fewer resources (like cold showers and fans rather than hot baths and air conditioning), therefore are friendlier to the environment.
Significant multiplier effects from drawing on local skills and resources.	Local servicing of the tourism market challenges foreign domination of tourism enterprises.

Source (modified): Scheyvens 2002: 152

example, some useful ideas have been expressed about budget tourism in general, and about backpacking in Australia and New Zealand. Such evidence, as a whole, suggests that there may be much to gain from aiming "low", and providing for backpackers. However, both economic and non-economic development criteria need to be considered (cf. table 3).

The following discussion of various aspects of backpacker influence on local communities is based both on the author's empirical fieldwork within the past decade and the interpretation of similar studies performed by fellow researchers.

2.3.1 Backpacker expenditures benefit the local entrepreneurs

A key reason for the negative attitude of Third World governments to backpackers has been the perception that their living on a budget means they bring little revenue to their destinations. This view has been seriously challenged, however, by research in New Zealand and Australia which found that, largely due to the longer duration of their stay, international backpackers actually spent more money than any other tourist category. In Australia, for example, a 1992 survey revealed that the average expenditure per backpacker was US \$ 2,667, compared to an all tourist average of only \$ 1,272 (Haigh 1995: 1ff). Furthermore, backpackers spread their spending over a wider geographic area, bringing benefits to remote and economically depressed regions where other tourists rarely venture, except perhaps when they dash past in their luxury coach (Baskin 1995; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995). Backpackers can contribute significantly to local economic development because they generally purchase more locally produced goods and services than other categories of tourists (Hampton 1998; Goodwin et al. 1998; Wheeler 1999; Wilson 1997). While there are exceptions to this general rule, what needs to be stressed is that in economic terms backpackers are worth more to the local economy than they commonly receive credit for. Their travel style itself often results in their spending more money locally, while the more structured nature of package tours limits contacts with local people. For example, while package tourists are brought direct to the compound of their hotel, backpackers arrive at bus and train stations where local traders have more opportunities to sell them their wares (Holden 1995).

Similarly, tourists staying in higher class seaside resorts are likely to find that they have a private beach, fenced off to shield the guests from local touts. Further down the beach, however, these same touts can find backpackers willing to buy a sarong, some jewelry, or a fresh pineapple. Another good example is the case of the Komodo National Park in Indonesia, a tourist attraction on account of its unique "Komodo dragon" reptile. Those tour-

ists in the highest spending category visit Komodo from cruise ships which provide all food and accommodation, so that they spend very little on Komodo; and the same applies to those who use charter boats for their visit. Budget tourists, however, use the government ferry, which necessitates a stay of at least one night on Komodo's main island, and consequently they spend two to three times more money within the park than other tourists (Goodwin et al. 1998).

2.3.2 Backpacker infrastructure requires minimal investment

Local people and products can meet the needs of backpackers largely because they do not demand luxury. Backpackers are generally not so concerned about amenities (e. g. plumbing), restaurants (e. g., Western-style food), and transportation (e. g. air conditioned buses) geared specifically to the tastes of the mass tourist. If a budget traveler place has an appeal to Western tastes (e. g. banana pancakes), it requires minimal infrastructure (Riley 1988: 323). That infrastructure is not important to backpackers is confirmed by the fact that they buy food and drink frozen "beach shakes" and families rent out rooms to them in their homes, as is common practice all over Southeast Asia. These tourists may even be interested in staying in very basic accommodation, because of the adventuresome nature of this experience.

When local resources and skills are used to provide facilities for tourists, there can be important multiplier effects. On Gili Trawangan in Eastern Indonesia, for example, backpacker bungalows are built of local bamboo and concrete blocks manufactured in the village, and they are furnished with bamboo tables and chairs made in neighboring Lombok and curtains made of the traditional *ikat* fabric (Hampton 1998: 649). Such ventures can be economically viable even with small numbers of tourists because of low overhead costs and minimal leakages (Wall and Long 1996).

2.3.3 Backpackers are likely to support local trade

Backpackers are also likely to support certain economic enterprises developed by local communities which other tourists, because of their less flexible travel schedules, can not. For example, there are many skilled artisans in the Third World whose work is much admired by backpackers, among others. But it is these budget tourists who can decide to attend a workshop on craft manufacture, such as weaving, carving or pottery. The spread of economic benefits within communities may be greater when catering to tourists on a budget, as more community members can participate. Catering to backpackers will not usually require community members to have any formal

qualifications; rather, they can develop skills on the job or build on their existing skills.

Contrary to the beliefs of many tourism policymakers, it appears that starting small can offer greater economic benefits to a community than investing in more sophisticated, capital-intensive projects. Therefore, if tourism moves "up-scale" in an area, local people can lose important economic advantages already gained. This is certainly a concern in Pangandaran, a fishing village in Java which has developed into a beach resort popular with backpackers as well as domestic tourists. Pangandaran may not retain the feeling of being a village for long, particularly as tourism development here has been identified as a major priority by the government. Major land ownership changes have started to occur including a proposal for a golf course and the development of a five-star hotel on what was previously communal village land. Such dramatic changes will have the greatest effect on lower-class people: the poor. Many of them live on and cultivate household crops on *tanah negara* (the nation's land) which appears slated for tourism development. They face the possibility of being displaced from their homes and losing employment in their informal sector jobs as the tourism product moves up-scale and creates demands for higher standards of facilities and services (Wilkinson and Pratiwi 1995: 295).

Some governments are slowly starting to recognize the economic benefits backpackers can bring. Following the interest from tourists expected to accompany the filming of the *The Beach* in Thailand, for example, the Tourism Authority of Thailand is now welcoming backpackers, largely in recognition of the fact that the nature of their spending leads to local-level jobs.

2.3.4 Backpackers could increase local participation and interest in development projects

It has been suggested that through supporting smaller players in the tourist industry, backpackers pose a threat to corporate domination: Given the political will to constrain the larger players, backpacker tourism could increase local participation in real development, part of a more sustainable long-term strategy which attempts to balance local economic development needs against powerful interests wishing to build large international tourism resorts (Hampton 1998: 655). As was suggested in the case of Pangandaran, communities providing services to backpackers are more likely to retain control over their enterprises.

Controlling one's own enterprise is certainly a positive step in the direction of self-determination for people otherwise dependent on tourism for menial jobs or handouts, and appears more likely to lead to self-fulfillment. For example, there is a notable difference for an individual "... between be-

ing a cleaner in a large international hotel compared with being the owner of a small *losmen* [homestay], cooking and serving at tables in their own place" (Hampton 1998: 650). Hampton notes further "... low-budget tourism might be the least destructive path to follow in spite of the government's promotion of up-market hotel development." Erb (2000) has similar concerns about plans of regional Tourism Board officers to encourage luxury resort development in the otherwise backpacker-dominated areas of Flores, Indonesia.

When communities control their own tourism enterprises, as is more common where they provide for the budget sector, they are in a better position to participate in local business or tourism organizations through which wider development goals and the well-being of their people can be promoted. In Bali, Wall and Long (1996) explain how a strong tourism organization was initiated in one neighborhood where homestays were common. Its aims were to promote tourism in the area, to protect the local environment, and to address any issues concerning the community, including the immigration of outside entrepreneurs.

2.3.5 Backpacker enclaves transform run-down parts of cities

There is also evidence that the development of backpacker enclaves has transformed some run-down, crime-ridden parts of cities in the Third World. In Yogyakarta, Indonesia, for example, a *kampung* (urban village) which formerly housed the red-light district and was characterized by poverty is now a thriving backpacker area with numerous small businesses in a setting of well-kept lanes and houses. "The local *kampung* residents are in no doubt at all that the arrival of the backpackers has transformed their place for the better" (Hampton 1999: 7).

Similarly, Edward Hasbrouk (a political activist and tourism writer) has suggested that backpackers in Thailand "... are the foreign tourists least interested in, and least drawn to Thailand by, sex tourism", and that the renowned backpacker ghetto in Bangkok, Khao San Road, is the only area in this city not characterized by sex tourism (cited by Bly 2000). Backpacker tourism development could be used as the city regeneration strategy, particularly for the declining inner city area, as long as the balance between the provision of tourist amenities and the remaining old part of the city still exists (Piadaeng 2002): "The most interesting issue here is that almost all of the Southeast Asian backpacker centers are sharing some similarity in terms of tourist commodifications. Old houses, shop-houses, or other previous uses in the inner city have been converted into cheap accommodations, restaurants, pub, snack bars, internet cafes, travel agencies, and numerous kinds of back-up facilities ... It is a process of internal transformation rather than

a replacement of individual components that is generally done in the form of self-organization by the locals rather than supported by the government.”

A glimpse at table 4 suggests that urban backpacker centers tend to turn into tourist theme parks in the course of time. The low-budget traveler hubs described below are among the region's most established ones and the biggest in the respective countries.

Table 4: Khao San Road, Jalan Jaksa and Pham Ngu Lao Road:
A Comparison of Three Urban Backpacker Enclaves

Country	Thailand	Indonesia	Vietnam
Urban Region	Thailand	Indonesia	Ho Chi Minh-City
Main Backpacker Area	Khao San Road	Jalan Jaksa	Pham Ngu Lao Road
1. Basic Data			
Existence since	1970s	1970s	1990s
Location	central	central	central
Length	600 m	400 m	300 m
Spatial Trend	Stagnation	Stagnation	Rapid Expansion
Lingua Franca	English	English	English/French
2. Units of Low-Budget Infrastructure:			
Accommodation	9	8	5
Restaurants	21	7	4
Travel Agencies	21	-	-
Book Swaps	5	-	-
Laundries	1	-	4
Photo-/Copy-Shops	4	1	1
3. Units of General Tourism Infrastructure:			
Souvenir Shops	19	1	-
Money Exchange	10	1	-
Overseas Call-Offices	3	1	-
Hospitals/Doctors	4	-	-
Jewelers	6	-	-
Opticians	1	-	-
Hairdressers	1	-	-
Boutique/Tailors	27	7	-

Source: Fieldtrip Data, in Spreitzhofer 1995a

Bangkok's Khao San Road for instance, which is in the centre of the Baglamphu low-budget traveler area, has not accidentally been chosen as the location of the prelude for Garland's novel *The Beach*. Baglamphu, one of Bangkok's central urban districts, has been hosting the biggest Southeast Asian traveler agglomeration since the 1970s and constitutes a secluded Western world of its own. More than a decade ago, on less than half a mile length, Khao San Road featured pure budget accommodation (9 units), Western-style budget food (21), low-budget travel agencies (21), copy and (second-hand) book shops (9) as well as pure tourist infrastructure (cf. Table 4). The air-con coach transport to Chiang Mai, which is Thailand's second largest city and the center of hill tribe trekking agencies, is still offered much cheaper than any kind of public transport. This is definitely a result of the super-regional interconnection between Bangkok's guesthouse owners and Chiang Mai's trekking agents (cf. Wheeler 1999), which is just one example for the existence of independent low-budget transport networks. Besides, there are general practitioners, dentists and hairdressers, and even a police station.

A decade after the author's intrinsic field work, Bangkok's backpacker ghetto is no longer an insiders' tip: On March 20, 2004, 957 ("Kao San Road") and 316 ("Khao San Road") different websites concerning Southeast Asia's major tourist road could be found in various search machines, ranging from cartoons (www.nashken.com/sketchbook/thailand/09.html), Khao San business and trade corporations (www.medialine2k.co.uk/around-khaosan/about.htm) to BBC budget traveler hints: "...If you ever find yourself in Bangkok without accommodation, grab a tuk-tuk and head towards the Khao San Road, where most self-respecting backpackers will converge after arriving in the capital. The street is lined with bars which are open 24 hours a day, and you can stay in the rooms above for about £1.50 a night (for a double). As you might expect, the facilities are somewhat limited, but the atmosphere more than makes up for it. In the surrounding streets you can hear 20 different languages, and the round-the-clock lifestyle and bright lights make it hard to tell day from night. You can also pick up a (pretty dodgy) fake Rolex without selling your home-prices seem to start at about £20 but you certainly shouldn't pay any more than £9 or so. In the bars, the Sang Thip whisky comes highly recommended (when mixed with Coke: don't drink it neat). Avoid the Mekhong whisky at all costs, as it contains chemicals that make beer hangovers look positively tame..." (www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/alabaster/A126442).

It is argued that the dispersion into pure 'touristy' business reflects supply and demand, supporting the change of attitude and behavior among today's budget travelers. The aspects of counter-culture observed by Cohen (1973) seem to have been replaced by a low-budget subculture. Copy prod-

ucts, ranging from fake Rolex watches to fake Benetton sportswear, are a major source of income for informal salesmen in all backpacker enclaves. It is striking that the different perception of role behavior by package tourists and backpackers still tends to be seen as a distinctive feature among the respondents of the author's latest studies. Indeed, low-budget traveling no longer necessarily implies the rejection of fashion suits for the times back home after the trip, as a number of interviewees pointed out.

3. Conclusion: Give individual tourism a fair chance?

"... if backpackers would like to distance themselves from the unjust face of global tourism, there's a long trek ahead ... [They] need to be more critical, more honest – and less selfishly enthusiastic – about how they currently benefit from a patently unfair global system" (Noronha 1999: 5).

Clear evidence has been provided of the potential benefits backpackers can bring in terms of promoting local development in the Third World. As a matter of fact, the standard of education among individual tourists appears to be well above average: About a quarter of the long-term travelers in Southeast Asia are university graduates and another third are senior high school and college graduates, as shown in former studies carried out by the author. This is why the insight into global connections and dependencies is supposed to be much easier for individual tourists than for ordinary package tourists.

Communities can provide services and products demanded by these tourists without the need for large amounts of start-up capital or sophisticated infrastructure, and they can retain control over such enterprises. Conversely, comparatively few local people have the skills, knowledge and networks to be able to establish businesses which cater to luxury tourists, so such enterprises are often monopolized by outside owners and bring few local benefits (Spreitzhofer 1998).

In addition, the foreign exchange brought in by backpackers often exceeds that provided by other international tourists who stay for shorter periods of time. These expenditures are spread far more widely than most, both geographically as well as socially. This is not to suggest that this sub-market should be the main form of international tourism pursued by Third World governments. In fact, it is likely that smaller-scale, budget-oriented enter-

prises will exist along with larger-scale developments, as Jenkins (1982) suggested two decades ago. At the same time, Third World governments have too long overlooked the ways in which individual backpacker tourism may bring numerous local economic benefits to small-scale entrepreneurs and informal sector actors. Indeed, there are also significant non-economic benefits which can accrue to communities from this form of tourism. Aiming "low" builds upon the skills of the local population, promotes self-reliance, and develops the confidence of community members in dealing with outsiders – all signs of empowerment.

However, this paper has also raised concerns about the behavior and attitudes of backpackers which, in some circumstances, can be harmful from the perspective of local people. This may be the case particularly in ghettos or enclaves frequented by them (Bly 2000, Piadaeng 2002). However, a simplistic analysis which asserts that they are all self-centered individuals following each other around the world on a well-trodden route in search of sex, drugs, and banana pancakes, is neither correct nor helpful. Nor is the suggestion that backpackers are necessarily the saviors of local level development in the Third World. In the past, commentators have distinguished two major limitations for local communities in engaging with tourism: the unequal distribution of benefits and the fact that control often remains with outsiders (Ashley and Roe 1998). Therefore, local communities need to be empowered with both knowledge and confidence so that they can assert some control over any backpacking tourism which occurs in their area and determine the limits of their involvement with this segment of the market.

Tourism involves both hosts and guests and responsibilities on the part of both parties. This being so, backpackers should not assume that by choosing what they see to be an alternative tourism experience, their ethics are beyond scrutiny. Given the growing significance of the backpacker market and its impact on Third World societies, environments, and economies, further research into Southeast Asian backpacking tourism is indispensable. Is it becoming transformed into just another variant of mass, institutionalized tourism, as the author claimed in former papers, or haven't distinct types of backpackers emerged, some of whom are quite independent and others who are more institutionalized? If so, what implications do these different types have for communities in different destination areas?

Undoubtedly, Third World tourism destinations have been incorporated into the global economic system on what are often unfair, exploitative terms. Not only in many Southeast Asian countries is the tourism industry still dominated by foreign ownership and capital with little meaningful local involvement. There are positive signs, however, which indicate that by catering to backpackers, Third World peoples are able to gain real benefits from tourism and control their own enterprises. The various perspectives pre-

sented in this paper suggest that the temporary shift to interest in individual tourism as a consequence of the Asian crisis might constitute a chance to face the transformation of backpacking, which stopped being synonymous with hippie ideologies, formerly so disapproved of, at least two decades ago.

The facilitation of regional visa and entry regulations seems to confirm the increasingly liberal attitude of Southeast Asian governments to individual tourism, thus adapting to the global trend to individualize all parts of life. With the exception of Vietnam, Myanmar and (partly) Laos, valid passports were sufficient for entry into almost all states of the region at the beginning of the new decade; as a matter of fact, most countries have opened up many restricted areas – traditionally first visited by individual explorer-type backpackers – within the past few years in order to increase tourism expenditures. The only exception is the example of Indonesia which re-introduced visas for citizens of Austria and Germany in early 2004 as a reaction to the international stiffening of visa regulations for Muslim citizens in the course of the international fight against terrorism.

Regardless of the Asian crisis, which dramatically showed the dependencies on international tour operators, most regional governments – including the former communist Indochina states Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam – finally seem to have opted for international tourism to boost their economies. A rebound of the former concentration on package tourism seems unlikely, since backpacking is becoming both a common and widely accepted way of traveling to Third World countries and no longer a privilege of escapist youthful long-term travelers.

All countries take into account the acceleration of socio-cultural change caused by the spread of Lonely Planet-guided backpackers throughout the region. However, due to the globalization of communication technology, reduced censorship of local media as a consequence of international pressure groups and increasing internet resources throughout the region, the role of individual tourism as a negative influence on some formerly non-touristy areas should no longer be overestimated. Many autocratic leaders such as the former Indonesian president Suharto have been pushed out of office and need no longer be afraid of backpackers roaming around areas they are not supposed to go to for reasons of human rights. Currently, Southeast Asian governments are doing their best to present their countries as safe, exotic, and politically stable tourism destinations, where the benefits of individual tourism shall be spread evenly among their inhabitants. However, the positive contribution of backpacking to sustainable development must not be overrated: The advantages to local communities will depend on the attitudes and behavior of backpackers themselves.

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