

## *A Visit with the Bajo People of Indonesia: Is this sustainable tourism?*

### Summary of the Case

This case study focuses on issues related to ecotourism and cultural tourism, as aspects of sustainable tourism. It describes a situation in eastern Indonesia where the manager of a sustainable tourism company visits a Bajo village that is located over the ocean. He and a colleague go to dive on a shipwreck to supposedly recover some treasure, but it ends up being an opportunity for the Bajo to salvage brass off the boat, do some fish bombing, and have the fuel for their trip paid for by a guest. The trip was taken in part to determine the suitability of the village as a place to guide tourists that were interested in the Bajo people, as well as possibly do some scuba dives. Some of the ways the Bajo earn an income are controversial, and they are often marginalized by the rest of Indonesian society and have some economic challenges as a result. The case raises the issue of to what extent tourism professionals should try to alter people's current cultural practices that may be destructive to their future and the environment, while socio-economic influences are driving them in that direction. In the case, a specific situation is described; background information is provided; brief definitions of ecotourism, cultural tourism, and sustainable tourism, and stakeholder theory are presented; and the analysis and implications of the dilemma involved are offered.

### Teaching and Learning Objectives

Below are the teaching and learning objectives for this case.

- **Objective:** Provide students with the opportunity to learn and think about appropriate ways to interact with controversial practices connected to the three strands of sustainable tourism, specifically socio-cultural, environment, and financial aspects. Learning Objective: Students will understand, clarify, and assess issues related to the three strands of sustainable tourism, specifically socio-cultural, environment, and financial aspects. The case achieves this objective by providing definitions related to sustainable tourism and theoretical information about cultural tourism and ecotourism, along with some practical examples.
- **Objective:** Students will be able to analyze and evaluate some of the issues that arise when guiding guests to and being guests in varied culture settings. The case achieves this objective by providing a complex, cultural and environmental tourism scenario; providing background information about unsustainable environmental practices; and providing practical information about the possibility of unsustainable economic dependency issues.

### Suitability for Use

This case is suitable for use by instructors and students in undergraduate and graduate courses related to sustainable tourism in settings where the instructors want to provide students with opportunities to expand their knowledge of tourism in another culture and explore some of the issues that can arise. This case would be suitable for an introductory undergraduate tourism course where the instructor wishes to introduce complex sociological and cultural issues related to tourism. It would also be useful in a graduate course focused on sustainable tourism or tourism and culture.

### Sources and Methods of Collecting Information for the Case

Information for this case was collected via observations and reading website materials, books, and articles related to the topics presented in the case study.

### Teaching Approach and Suggested Sequence of Timeframe

Instructors may use this case in various ways. These involve using the case as the following: an individual assignment, a group assignment, as a class discussion topic, and as a combination of individual and group activities and assignments. As an individual assignment, the case study can be read and then the discussion questions can be answered. During class, students could discuss and compare their answers. For a group assignment, students can read the case study individually and answer the discussion questions in groups. Groups could be asked to find another example of cultural tourism and write their own case study. A class discussion can be facilitated through assigning the students to read the case study and answer the discussion questions. Then over one or more class sessions (of one hour or so), students could discuss and dissect the case. This could also be completed in a class scenario where the case study is one of two or three examples of ecotourism or cultural tourism, read by the class and then discussed. The following questions might be asked to generate interest in the general topics related to the case.

### Topics and Questions for Discussion

General questions about topics raised in the case include the following:

1. **What issues related to sustainable tourism does this case raise? Please explain.**

Answers will vary. The answers may focus on all three aspects of the triple bottom line, including the environmental, eco-

nomic, and socio-cultural aspects of sustainable tourism. Some questions regarding whether a business practice is sustainable socially can have answers that are less than ideal. In the situation with the Bajo, since they have a difficult time economically, and need to bring in large numbers of fish to survive, any efforts to convince them to conduct more environmentally sustainable fishing methods with the future in mind may fall on deaf ears. They are most concerned with making ends meet today, and the ocean is so big and there are so many remote places in eastern Indonesia that they may think they can just move if it is hard to sustain their village or they can go out farther to sea to catch more fish. Safe and less destructive fishing practices may not be sustainable socially among the Bajo because of their current economic situation.

Social sustainability requires looking at both the residents and the guests. If the Bajo feel like their continuing livelihood is just sustainable through fish bombing, then they will probably continue to do it if the government does not have the will and/or resources to enforce the law in and around their villages. Meanwhile, tourists that visit the Bajo and learn of these practices may depict the Bajo negatively because of the environmental destruction they may be causing, which might lead to more marginalization and even punishment for these Bajo communities. This could make their life on the sea even more difficult. Further questions related to this one include the following: Is there ever a hierarchy of importance for each type of sustainability within the concept of triple bottom line sustainability? While all three are theoretically very important, would it be possible to rank them? For example could one rank them with financial sustainability as number one, social sustainability as number two, and environmental sustainability as number three, with a higher ranking sustainability consideration surpassing another when they come into conflict?

**2. *This case provides one example, but in general how should those who operate a sustainable tourism business react when they see what they know to be unsafe practices or illegal practices or perceive to be unethical practices regarding residents and tourists?***

Answers will vary. With interactions between different cultures it is usually a best practice to be patient and resist the urge to try to fix a situation that is initially deemed unethical. This can also be true in situations that may be technically illegal, if the tour operator and guests are not directly involved in these activities. There are certain nuances and reasons that people do things that have come about after many years of policies and interactions with government officials that short-term tourists might not be knowledgeable about in any way. There are

also economic issues at play that outsiders may not be able to grasp. A good tour operator should have a solid understanding of these issues and should be able to explain situations to the guests. While a tourism-related business operator should ensure that guests are not involved in any illegal activities, it is possible that activities initially considered unethical by an outsider can later be found to be fine ethically, once the situation is better understood. Tour operators should be familiar with the local area and culture (s) and try to carefully observe things that guests may initially consider unethical and try to be up front with their guests and explain some of the background, so that the guests can go into situations knowing what types of situations they might be confronted with and have an appropriate way to respond. This response may be a very different one than the initial gut reaction from the guest's own culture.

**3. *Does being aware of and/or a part of these activities make the tour operator and tourist complicit in environmentally unsound practices, or is that just part of observing another culture? Why or why not?***

Answers will vary. The tourist would not be complicit if he or she did not know the activities were taking place, but if the tour operator did know and did not tell the tourist, then he or she would probably be at fault. Since the tour operator in this case study lives in the area he is used to seeing a variety of activities like this, but someone who is just there for a short time could probably have a very negative reaction. The situation would be even worse if a Bajo man was injured while a guest was there. This could have long-term repercussions for the business as well as the mental health of the visitors. There could also be negative repercussions for the business and the guests if any local authorities decided to enforce regulations prohibiting fish bombing or certain types of salvage operations during the visit. Any attempt to coordinate details of salvage or village visits with certain types of local authorities in the area could potentially cause more trouble than benefit. There can be a difficult balance to be achieved when it comes to deciding whether it is appropriate to request permission for certain activities from higher authorities or whether it is better just to work with the local people.

*Questions specific to the situation in the case include the following:*

**4. *In what ways can the tour operators discourage the continuation of activities, such as fish bombing and salvaging items from deep wrecks, while maintaining a positive relationship with the Bajo community? Please explain.***

Answers will vary. One possible answer would be that the tour operator should probably go back to this village and start a conversation with the stakeholders about the different ways

that tourists think about fishing practices and to share with them that safety is also a concern. This would be an opportunity to see how the Bajo would react to the possibility of making some changes regarding fish bombing and diving from a compressor. There could be some education involved, including an analysis of the risks involved with these activities and how they have affected Indonesians in other parts of the country. Then there could be a look at the actual benefit from these practices as opposed to others with less risk. Guests probably should not go to this village until some forward progress has been made. If the stakeholders in this village were not willing to cooperate, maybe another village would be willing to do so.

Salvaging metal from a shipwreck probably does not have a negative impact on the environment and it may be good to get some of that material off the ocean floor, if it is done carefully. The biggest concern would be the safety of the Bajo divers and the risk that they are taking by diving so deep from a compressor. There could be an analysis conducted in conjunction with the Bajo about the economic benefit of taking such a risk and perhaps they could explore other safer ways of getting brass bolts and making a profit.

**5. *Should tours to villages like this be avoided to prevent the commodification of poor people and to avoid the possibility of creating uncomfortable situations on the part of both the hosts and guests?***

Answers may vary. This is a real concern and the tour operator should probably screen who goes to a Bajo village such as this one. The accommodations will be very rustic, and there are some aspects of life in Bajo villages (such as a lack of traditional restrooms) that the guests will need to be prepared for during a visit. It can also be overwhelming to have crowds of children and people always surrounding the guests. For example, a village out on a lake near Siem Reap, Cambodia, has been visited by large numbers of tourists in a way that has transformed the village, and probably not for the better (Keiko, 2006). There is more money flowing into the village, but people come to just stare at the people and how they live, while the residents are reduced to objects that tourists look at during their tours. It would be important for guests to personally interact with the Bajo in their village and probably visit on an infrequent schedule so that a tour company does not create scheduled dependability. Instead, the visits could serve as more of an intermittent financial benefit when guests visit.

**6. *There are efforts underway to make the lives of the Bajo easier by putting them on land in some areas, but what if there are some communities whose residents still strongly believe that they should live on the sea? How should this issue be***

***handled and why should it be addressed that way?***

Answers may vary. Under the long-lasting government of President Suharto, there were efforts by the Indonesian government to move the people that lived in inland jungle villages and on remote islands to the coastline. The hope was that this would allow them to better integrate with the rest of Indonesia, and they would be able to reap the benefits of living close to the ocean for transportation and food. While there are positive aspects to this strategy, there were also cases where the people believed strongly that they should not move from their village sites for cultural and religious reasons. This view should be respected since the residents will bear the consequences for their decisions, and they have their own leadership and ways of making decisions within their village government. They should be able to decide where they want to live, but there is no harm in weighing some of the pros and cons together with the residents if the question of a move closer to land ever entered the discussion.

**7. *There is at least one Bajo community near the one in this case study that has a relationship with a company in Taiwan and provides little minnows for them. Most of the community gathers fish for this business and it provides a livelihood. Do you think that this a good model? How can the Bajo thrive in the future, not endanger their lives in the process, and be able to overcome marginalization? Please explain.***

Answers may vary. This is obviously not a solution for every village, but this village was in a difficult situation with its residents living far from land and having a source of regular income for steady work has probably been a good thing. The residents could benefit by having at least one person in their village that is familiar with how businesses work throughout Indonesia and in the surrounding countries so that they are not taken advantage of regarding economic activities. They could also partner with a company to supply fish that can make the relationship profitable to the partnering company. Relationships with businesses could provide a steady means of work for fishermen and their families to supplement the daily chore of providing food for their families from the sea. Intermittent surges of income that these large-scale minnow sales provide can help the Bajo get ahead a little financially and not be relegated to making just enough for each day.

**8. *What can guests do to help the Bajo dive more safely?***

Answers may vary. Dive theory provides guidelines that help prevent divers from getting decompression sickness, and even though most divers today use dive computers there are also dive tables available to plan dives safely. A large portion of diver training courses explains dive theory so that wherever divers are in the world, they know the principles of diving safely, such as how long to stay under and at what depths. The tour opera-

tor in conjunction with guests could possibly provide manual dive tables to the Bajo divers they visit and provide some training and education about safe diving limits. The tables will take some time to understand, but this can be one way that guests can play a part in helping the Bajo dive safer. All the other solutions such as providing dive computers and scuba equipment would probably not be sustainable because it would be difficult to set up a system for it to be shared fairly and a lack of proper maintenance would probably lead to its quick demise.

**9. What are some ways that tourism businesses, fishing businesses, and/or the government can help the Bajo overcome some of their economic hurdles? Could volunteer tourism help?**

Answers may vary. Tourism and fishing businesses can create partnerships with Bajo villages that are mutually beneficial, but also avoid creating a dependability that is not sustainable and would have negative social consequences. The businesses should be clear up front that their support would be intermittent, but at the same time let the residents know that they can benefit financially if they provide a certain type of resource or service in a certain way. This will take some education and training, as well as in-depth cultural understanding on the part of the businesspeople about the Bajo way of life and possible obstacles that may interfere with a successful partnership. The Indonesian government has helped several Bajo villages that are closer to land by providing more structurally solid walkways between houses, even those that can withstand motorcycle traffic. Without these improvements, most of the houses in these villages are connected with boards that require good balance to traverse and periodically snap under the weight of heavier people, such as guests. It could also help the Bajo if some of their residents ventured inland to college and government jobs so they could be advocates for the Bajo and help prevent their continued financial and educational marginalization. There are already several non-governmental organizations operating near Bajo villages in Southeast Sulawesi to help the plight of the Bajo people. Ideas for volunteer tourism opportunities will vary, but may provide some creative insights into how to effectively help the Bajo and the environment.

**10. This was about the most authentic Bajo experience that someone could ask for, but would this be a good trip for a cultural or ecotourist? Why or why not?**

Answers will vary. The answer could be yes or no, depending on the guest. If the guest was open to learning more about authentic Bajo life in Indonesia and could be content with accepting differences and patient enough to deal with some uncomfortable situations, then it could be a good trip. If the guest was overly concerned with helping or correcting the

Bajo way of life in a short visit, particularly from a western perspective, then it might not be a good trip. With vast cultural differences, it is usually best to first arrive as a learner, and if the guest really wants to make a positive difference in people's lives, then it will probably take time and patience to do it well. It is also possible that the guest will be changed more than the Bajo through the experience, and the guest needs to be open to learning new things as well.

**11. What roles could interpretation play regarding authentic cultural tourism in this case?**

Answers will vary. Both mediation and cultural brokering roles could be mentioned. Students could perhaps bring up thoughts about how the interpretation needs to consider the circumstances surrounding staying at a Bajo village. They may note how the concept of hospitality, in terms of greeting and hosting guests, cannot just be measured by a physical international standard, but expectations should be tailored to the host culture and location. The hospitality also depends on intangible factors and the attitudes of the hosts, even if they are limited in what they can tangibly provide, and interpretation can help to address these topics. The interpretation could also involve having visitors think through what are some of the positive and negative aspects of living on the water, away from land. For example, negative aspects could include: there are no vegetables and no fresh water available, they cannot drive, there is the danger of children falling in water, etc. Positive aspects could include that there are no plumbing issues, it is quiet, there are lovely ocean sounds, and there are no mosquitos. Answers may also address authenticity and tourism and how, thoughtful, informed interpretation can bridge the gaps between visitors and hosts.

## Suggested Class Activities and Projects

To use the case in a class, first, the general questions might be addressed to develop interest in the topics and then the students could read the case and discuss the questions specific to the case. As a suggestion, it might be wise to have the students read and answer the questions about the case in writing individually first and then when they return to class they can discuss the case with other students. Once the case has been discussed, students could complete individual or group projects that focus on one or more of the following:

- Find another example of a controversial tourism practice in the news or in the literature and write up a summary and analysis of the issue and present the findings to the class.
- Create a training program for tour guides and/or other hospitality professionals to help them to engage in effective interpretation using mediation and cultural brokering practices.
- Expand on the case to develop a sustainable tourism plan for

the Bajo or another cultural group and consider environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability principles.

- Create and write a case study of one's own (suggested for graduate students).

## Suggestions for Additional Reading Material

Butler, R., & Hinch, T. (2007). *Tourism and indigenous peoples*. Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

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