

Book Review

Mountaineering Tourism

Musa, G., Higham, J., Carr-Thompson, A. (Eds), (2015)

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The mountains are part of the earth's physical environment that have steep, sloping sides and sharp or rounded ridges and a high point called a peak or summit. To some natives and western societies, there was unique connection developed within the terrain, even back in historical ancient times, in terms of 'symbolic, emotional and ancestral' values (Higham *et al.*, 2015, p2). However, as time progressed, the mountains became attractions for nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers. Mountain-related activities such as hiking, climbing, skiing, mountain biking and others have flourished and transformed the landscape in the tourism industry. Mountaineering Tourism provides a comprehensive insight into the mountain-based adventure phenomenon as a niche market within modern tourism. The book is designed as a text for students, researchers, and academics, with its detailed discussion on pertinent issues related to mountaineering tourism in the past, present and the future.

The book begins with the explanation and definition of the theories and concepts used, supported by the different views that construct the studies of Mountaineering Tourism. The authors' main framework in the development of this book was derived from Weed and Bull's (2004) theoretical concept of 'sports and tourism'. In this context, a complex interaction between 'activity', 'people' and 'place' either directly or indirectly. The authors illustrate that mountaineering activities may differ between places, involving a diverse engagement of people and may occur in various environments. Also, the book defines mountaineering tourism as "the activities of mountaineering tourists, their interplay with members of the climbing community and all associated stakeholders, together with associated impacts and management at the environmental and local community level" (Musa, Higham & Thompson-Carr, 2015, p. xxi). Hence, chapters within this book were brilliantly designed based on these 'tripartite structures' to address the issues pertaining to mountaineering tourism. Among the best features offered in each chapter of the book are the critical analysis and various theoretical framework used by the academic field experts as well as the examples of the worldwide mountain tourism case studies.

Part one of the book describes related *activities* to mountaineering tourism. The climatic conditions of the mountains can change rapidly at different elevations and heights. Besides, there are diverse landforms, differing in geological and ecological conditions providing the mountain trekkers with various experiences and attractions. The authors characterize the differences between dedicated professional climbers and adventure tourists. Professional climbers require uncrowded places and challenging environment to test their self-capability. While the adventure tourists depend on the guides and mountaineering operator, equipment, other

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climbers and the condition of the climate to perform the activity. The book presents the crucial points from several academicians that identify and explain the key motivational factors which influence the mountain tourists to participate in mountain trekking activities. These include aspects of physical, mental, intellectual, adventure, social and nature motivations. In addition, mountain activities may vary from soft ecotourism hikes to demanding a highly technical climbing skill. Technical climbing is limited to the most elite climbers requiring specialized gear, skilled and perhaps expert guidance. Historically, mountaineering activities focus on routine and economic purpose such as extracting crystals and minerals as well as knowledge seeking. Consequently, the attractive landscape of the mountains develops further interest and turns the purpose into enjoying the aesthetic value in the 'inspiring topography'. In the meantime, as the risk of these activity intensifies, the local guides with vast knowledge of the mountain terrain were being employed by the westerners to make the climbing activity safer. Numerous international organizations were established since 1930s to meet the needs of managing the risk in mountain climbing. Among them were the governing body, *Union International des Associations d'Alpinisme* (UIAA) and accredited professional guiding training school, *Ecole National de Ski et d'Alpinisme* (ENSA). The commodification of mountaineering creates demand in professional guidance. This attracts the locals with the passion for climbing and mountain environments to choose mountain guiding as a prime career. Currently, the International Federation of Mountain Guides Association (IFMGA) is responsible for facilitating these demands. Among its chief roles are to administer the qualification and to provide the guidelines for mountain guiding professionals internationally.

In part two of the book, the authors highlight the *people* aspects in the mountaineering tourism. Traditionally, mountaineering experience was based on self-reliance among the hikers or climbers to seek for a 'rugged' and 'remote' landscape adventure. Modernity influenced society and transforms the identity from 'given' to 'task', which resulted in boredom in life. As a result, individuals eventually seek for self-identity. The book reveals some academic claims that social and cultural condition of the modern day, have a close relation with individual self-realizing action. Due to the lack of opportunities in 'self-realizing', particularly in the western culture, people choose to engage in risk-taking activities. Individuals increasingly seek for 'skilful forms' and risky performance that will create the illusion of controlling the uncontrollable. It is the act to express their competency, which may not necessarily be manifested in aspects of their daily lives. Hence, mountaineering is seen to be an ideal activity that allows the mountaineers to show their skills and reveal their ultimate abilities. However, the regulation, commercialization, commodification and the presence of new technology fuelled by the tourism industry have increasingly threatened the authenticity of experiencing 'self-reliance' in the mountain adventure.

The book also discusses gender issues in mountaineering tourism. The female is under-represented in the mountain adventure activity, which is often associated with masculinity. At the same time, the commodification of the tourism sector steadily represents growth in organized, guided either soft or hard mountain adventure vacation. This helps inexperienced tourists in mountain climbing, providing increasing opportunities for climbers to conquer the highest mountain peaks. The female climbers leverage on these changes, which see a soaring number in the demand for participation in mountaineering adventure tourism. It is interesting to point out that there are stereotype treatment and criticism on female mountaineers among the society, media and male counterparts. The book also discusses various studies on motivation and satisfaction as a construct in conducting mountaineering activity. The positive and negative emotion influence by the satisfaction of the mountaineers, comprising of two main

elements, joy and fear. Numerous studies are presented in identifying the motivation factors in mountaineering activity. Among the motivations are a goal achievement, escape from boredom, pushing to the limits, goal achievement, overcoming fear, connecting to nature and social motivation.

Part three of the book presents the *place* context, which gives a thorough explanation of the environment and development issues in the mountaineering tourism. The mountain initially represents a place for local communities to gain economic benefit from the ecosystem as well as an important place for diverse flora and fauna owing to its unique environment and climate. At the same time, the unique characteristics of the mountains draw tourist attention and become a significant tourism destination. Accurately listed in the book, increase in activities related to mountaineering such as the uncontrolled deforestation for firewood, natural water extraction, disposal of human and solid waste have caused various impacts to the mountain landscapes and should be given urgent attention. Management recommendations should reduce and prevent the mountain environment from being spoiled by the activities associated with mountaineering. The stakeholders who should be involved in the management of the mountain sites are the locals, trekkers, tour operators and management agencies. Safety and ethical concerns will increasingly dominate the debate on mountaineering tourism. Referring to the historical events of Mount Everest, the mountain has claimed many lives of mountain climbers, trekkers, porters and guides. Arguably, the primary cause of the rising death ratio is the high influx of inexperienced mountain climbers in the high-risk mountaineering adventure. In addition, the unfavourable effect to the mountain community income and local authority revenue stream is blamed for causing lack of control on the tourists. These claims raised the safety concern among the experienced professional climbers. However, evidence clearly shows that in terms of ratio, the number of deaths among climbers and Sherpa per summit have decreased despite the increasing number of expeditions. Among the reasons for death among climbers are exhaustion, pushing to climbing in adverse weather, proceed with climbing despite running out of oxygen and rapid changes in climate. There are four critical elements identified that will influence the health ailments and injury awareness in the mountains. These are mountaineers, equipment, uncontrollable physical fitness and mountaineering operators. Mountaineering tourism has also changed the economic, cultural and physical aspects of mountain communities such as the Himalayas. The Sherpas, known as the professional mountain guides on Mount Everest, are mainly from the poorest household. Many of them join the professional guides and porters to earn good wages but find inadequate access to medication and health diagnostic, uncovered by insurance and exposed to exploitation to take part in the high-risk expedition or in adverse condition. Similarly, porters in Kilimanjaro face a dilemma concerning the ethical conduct and safety on the mountains. Pressure to carry an extra weight, hiding illness, unfair income as well as denial for transportation, medical attention, and food, in return of avoiding economic pressure, securing an employment, extra income and future reference were the primary issues that needed intervention from respective organizations and agencies.

An effort is needed to put a proper management in place to address the issues by providing appropriate measures related to the mountaineering tourism. *Management of activity* involves the introduction of certification and accreditation schemes by various organizations. This assures the professional safe guiding practices, by facilitating training and supervision for mountaineering tourists, issuing standards of equipment, besides receiving support from international and local mountain guide associations. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) delivers the report emphasizing on specific methods and caution of integrating diverse equipment (ladders, chains, abseil post, or other anchors, fixed bolts and

pitons) at the mountain sites unless there are risks in the safety aspect. Furthermore, UIAA is another professional governing body that accredits and certifies equipment, issuing health and safety advice, as well as promoting and regulating general ethics and codes. There should be a structured plan for mountain community to improve their economic well-being, for example, through mountaineering skills lesson, and involving in other hospitality services to cater for mountaineers in their regions.

Management of people engages with two distinct types of mountaineers, the professional climbers and the inexperienced guided mountaineers. Both should be handled in different ways. As stated earlier, while professional climbers require uncrowded places and challenging environment to test their self-capability, the adventure tourists - guided mountaineers - depend on the guides and mountaineering operator, equipment, other climbers and the condition of the climate to perform the activity. The guided mountaineers will need a carefully planned and organized mountaineering itinerary. Knowledge development of the mountaineers is crucial and can be acquired through direct learning from the expert, or indirect learning from the guides and porters. Mountaineers are recommended to be aware of the environment, local community, security, and safety aspects. The precautionary measures for mountain expedition or activity are reinforced with easy medical access, first aid kit, ample insurance coverage and emergency development system.

Management of *place* deals with practices aspect at the unique mountain spot that hold the mountaineering activities as well as the impacts on the mountain regions environment and social condition of the host community. The well-known measures on the management of mountaineering tourism activities comprise peak permits and concession. Additionally, it is important to inculcate the awareness as well as the responsibility for conserving mountain environment through education and training for locals, trekkers, expedition members, porters, guides and support staff are crucial. Better design, development, and maintenance of the trails may be able to reduce the damage on the mountain environments. Hindering the spread of pathogens and weeds that can affect the mountain plants involves education and enforces of hygienic practices among tourists and tour operators. In addition, further damage to the mountain landscapes can be curbed with obligations to limits the number of pack animals at certain location, impose rotational feeding practice, control grazing activity and introduce weed-free fodder. Mountaineers are encouraged to use kerosene at the campsites or alternative energy sources such as solar panel at the base camp to stop from deforestation for firewood usage. Litter or solid waste disposal is minimized by introducing a practical solution such as the use of eco-friendly product for cleaning purposes and the minimum impact codes for tourist guidelines. Human waste requires ethical practices such as cat hole, pack-out system, and surface disposal system at the suitable location. The use of toilet at certain high traffic campsites is highly recommended. The high influx of tourists in certain mountain areas can be managed by proper control, planning, execute sanction on the permit and increase fees during peak season. The environmental impact due to rock climbing activity can be managed by regulating the specific types of equipment that can be used, establishing certain zones for different uses and restricting activity during certain period of the year.

The book acknowledges that the future of mountaineering tourism will steadily grow and that climate change will not halt the demand for mountain adventure. The interesting point is, this industry will experience an innovative business diversification or necessary adaptation. This tourism segment will become more accessible through the availability of infrastructure that supports the interaction among climbers, guides and support workers. Commercialization of mountaineering tourism is inevitable with the presence of social media, technological access, motivational literature, guiding operator services, retail equipment stores and film indus-

try. The increase in leisure time among the society allows people to participate in recreation activity worldwide and the 'armchair experiences' brought by the media industry may change the need for the real physical mountaineering experience. Equipment and technological improvement will also influence the mountaineers to push themselves to discover and venture into higher altitude mountains. The future mountains conservation will see a continuous monitoring on environmental impact as well as data sharing for standards setting and benchmarking among networking members. This effort will be driven by professional governing organizations such as UIAA, IFGMA, and IUCN. The future research efforts in theoretical perspective of mountaineering tourism is diverse. The potential themes are philosophies, changing values, attitudes and other psychological aspects of the mountaineering tourism experience. In addition, likely important subjects are history of mountain tourism destinations, cultural, spiritual and religious aspects. Social issues such as community development, workers' rights and aged or gendered that influences mountaineering tourism also require academic attention. Furthermore, in-depth research is needed on managing impacts from crowding and the commodification of mountains, which eventually affect the spiritual significance and cultural values of local peoples. Other research consideration includes the development of mountaineering businesses stimulated by literature, film, media, and social media that able to influence mountaineers' motivations, decision making and social networking to experience mountain adventure. The introduction of state-of-the-art devices smartphone, GPS, laptop, personal locator beacon and APP change the mountain experience as well as improve safety and risk management are potential subject to be explored.

In conclusion, this book flourishes in presenting a complete evidence and theory based insights on the phenomenon of mountaineering tourism. This is accommodated through explanation on the historical, environment, development, ethical issues by holistically integrating the activity, people and places within mountaineering tourism. Nevertheless, it can be understood, developed, managed and promoted by respective parties for various mountain destinations. The book gives important indicators that mountaineering tourism should be considered as a potential niche market with an increasing pressure in a growing number of tourists and limited resources. There are highlights on the trends of mountaineering tourism. The risk associated with this activity diminishes as the 'knowledge, experiences and technical capacity' soar. Mountaineering Tourism covers holistic topics which both applicable to researchers and industry players alike.

REFERENCES

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