

Book Reviews

Clint Rogers. 2007. *The Lure of Everest: Getting to the Bottom of Tourism at the Top of the World*. Kathmandu: Mandala Publications.

In the “Author’s Note” included at the beginning of his *Lure of Everest*, Clint Rogers makes the origins of this book very clear. The text is an updated version of his 2000 Master’s thesis (in Geography from the University of California, Berkeley) written before he had conducted extensive doctoral research. As such, it is basically an extended review of scholarly literature on tourism and its impacts in the Everest region of Nepal. The author’s main contribution is in “plowing through the multitude of observations, analyses, and opinions of those who had gone before” (p. vii), presenting this material in coherent and well-organized chapters, and then drawing a set of basic conclusions and recommendations based on this published material. For people interested in the Sherpa experience specifically, or mountain tourism in general, this is a useful work that assembles and analyzes academic works on what is probably one of the most well-studied mountain micro-regions in the world. With its extensive footnotes and bibliography, the book would be a good reference work for people with these interests. Those looking for new research-based data on Himalayan tourism and development should look to the publications Rogers developed based on his graduate and post-graduate work in Nepal.

Chapters one (“Mountains and Tourism”) and two (“Nepal’s Everest Region and Tourism”) provide general overviews of the academic literature on mountain tourism and the specific experience of tourism in the Everest region respectively. Chapter one summarizes the arguments for and against mountain tourism while chapter two lays out Khumbu tourism history, patterns, and statistics.

Chapters three through seven survey the huge literature on the “effects” of tourism in Khumbu. Chapter three is on economic impacts, chapter four on “Personal Well-Being,” chapter five on environmental impacts, chapter six on the impact of tourism on local self-determination and dependence, and chapter seven on the effects of tourism on Sherpa society and culture. The strength of these chapters is to assemble literature on related topics, compare results, and synthesize conclusions. For readers

only casually acquainted with the Khumbu region and the scholarship on it (such as myself), one of the most stunning things about these chapters is the sheer volume of work that has been done in this area.

The final two chapters attempt to synthesize and draw conclusions from the literature already surveyed (chapter eight) and summarize the effects of, and factors influencing, Khumbu tourism (chapter nine). While the previous chapters are largely summary in nature, chapter eight (the longest chapter in the book) is Rogers' effort to take the material he has surveyed and make sense of it. Says Rogers, "I believe this chapter forms a novel contribution to the subject of tourism in the Everest region through its attempt to offer a rationale for the particular effects that tourism has had there" (p. xiii). In other words, Rogers does not contest or add to the literature on "tourism effects" but rather tries to identify the factors that, together, account for the specific set of impacts and effects laid out in the previous chapters. The ten factors that Rogers identifies take into account everything from local geography and history, to Sherpa culture and personality dispositions, to governmental and international non-governmental tourism and development interventions, to international media coverage of Himalayan mountaineering, and even how the area has become associated with Western cultural fixations on such things as Yetis, Shangri-la, and Tibetan Buddhism. Based on this assessment of the factors that have led to the tourism effects or results (positive and negative) documented by others, in the last chapter (nine) Rogers identifies five "lessons" that must be adhered to for Khumbu tourism to remain beneficial and sustainable: tourism needs to be small scale; the natural environment needs to be protected; tourists must be aware of their own responsibility to protect the cultural and physical environment; and all tourism initiatives should empower local residents.

In short, Rogers makes it clear that he believes that tourism must be managed not at the expense of, but to the benefit of local peoples and environments. To the extent that tourism has been controlled by Kathmandu based or international commercial interests (including mountaineering), tourism has typically been detrimental to the local environment and only minimally beneficial to local economies. Instead, Rogers argues, the tourism effects and impacts documented by decades of scholarship on the Khumbu region suggest that sustainable and locally-beneficial tourism has to be the result of carefully considered, locally controlled action rather than being left to the whims (and interests) of national and international market forces.

Among other things, this book suggests just how difficult it may be for Khumbu Sherpas and others to, in fact, resist or manage the global media and market forces that propel large numbers of tourist trekkers to the Everest region. Rogers discusses how the 1996 Everest disaster (and the subsequent flurry of books, articles, and movies about it) led to “a stampede of trekkers and climbers to the Himalaya” (p. 225). This kind of coverage increasingly isolates “Everest” from Nepal itself, luring a kind of tourist mainly intent on a kind of adventure “trophy bagging” but with little or no interest in Nepal per se. Trekking agencies report a decline in the young “hippie-type” trekker of the 1970s and 80s and a rise in older, wealthier “yuppie” tourists (p. 226) that tend to be less interested in local culture, and more demanding of the “tourism product” that they have paid for and expect to be provided. With tourism so tied to the vagaries of global market forces (not to mention national and regional political instabilities), the kind of intentional, carefully planned, and well-managed tourism that Rogers advocates will never be easy.

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