

Ethnic Tourism and Real Estate Development: A Case of Yiren Ancient Town, China

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Abstract : Tourism is employed by many countries to facilitate socioeconomic development and to assist in the heritage preservation. An "ethnic culture boom" is currently driving the tourism industry in China. Ethnic minorities, commonly portrayed as primitive, colorful and exotic, have become a big tourist draw. Many cultural attractions have been built throughout China to meet the demands of domestic tourists. Sacred cultural heritage sites have been rehabilitated as a major component of ethnic tourism. The purpose of this study is to examine the interconnected consequences of tourism development and tourism-related leisure property development and, and to discuss, in a broader context, issues and considerations that are pertinent to the management and development of ethnic attractions. The role of real estate in tourism development and its sociocultural consequences are explored. An empirical research was conducted in Yiren Ancient Town (literally, "Ancient Town of Yi People") in Chuxiong City, Yunnan Province, China. Multiple research methods, including in-depth interviews, informal discussions, on-site observations, and secondary data review were employed to measure residents and tourism decision-makers' perceptions of ethnic tourism and to explore the impacts of tourism on local community. Key informants from government officials, tourism developers and local communities were interviewed individually to gather what they think about benefits and costs of tourism, and what their concerns about and hopes for tourism development are. Yiren Ancient Town was constructed in classical Yi architecture style featuring tranquil garden scenery. Commercial streets, entertainment complexes, and accommodation facilities occupied the center of the town, creating culturally distinctive and visually stimulating places for tourists. A variety of activities are presented to visitors, including walking tours of the town, staged dance shows, musical performances, ethnic festivals and ceremonies, tasting minority food and wedding shows. This study reveals that tourism real estate has transformed the town from a traditional neighborhood into diverse real estate landscapes. Ethnic architecture, costumes, festivals and folk culture have been represented, altered and reinvented through the tourist gaze and mechanisms of cultural production. Tourism is now a new economic driver of the community providing opportunities for the creation of small businesses. There was a general appreciation in the community that tourism has created many employment opportunities, especially for self-employment. However, profit-seeking is a primary motivation for the government, developers, businesses, and other actors involved in the tourism development process. As the town has attracted an increasing number of visitors, commercialization and business competition are intense in the town. Many residents complained about elevated land prices, making the town and the surroundings comparatively high-value locales. Local community is also concerned about the decline of traditional ethnic culture and an erosion of the sense of identity and place. A balance is difficult to maintain between protection and development. The preservation of ethnic culture and heritage should be enhanced if long-term sustainable development of tourism is to occur and the loss of ethnic identities is to be avoided.

Keywords : ancient town, ethnic tourism, local community, real estate, China

Conference Title : ICHTMM 2016 : International Conference on Hospitality, Tourism Marketing and Management

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : June 20-21, 2016