

12

Mana versus Money: An Indigenous perspective on the tribal tourism destination of Whakarewarewa

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Introduction

Tourism is the largest export industry in Aotearoa New Zealand and has the potential to promote economic prosperity for many communities in the nation (Tourism New Zealand, 2016). Research shows that Māori tourism is one of the main reasons international visitors come to New Zealand, second only to the natural landscapes (Tourism New Zealand, 2015). There has been a dramatic increase in Māori tourism start-up businesses in the past two decades and these businesses are capitalising on their cultural landscapes, that incorporate both the culture and landscape in the visitor experience/product. The significance of Māori tourism to the national economy also elevates the political position of Māori tourism communities. Issues related to environmental pollution, intellectual property protection and the representation of Māori in governance positions are taken seriously when there is a threat to tourism development.

Māori tourism businesses do not necessarily follow the mainstream business models that focus on profit maximisation. Indigenous tourism, or in this case Māori tourism, has been and is, a way forward for small communities to share their culture while at the same time promoting economic, social and cultural sustainability. Furthermore, due to the importance of the nation's clean green image, primarily marketed through Tourism New Zealand's *100% Pure* campaign, the national tourism industry has a keen

commitment to environmental sustainability. This provides the opportunity for Māori to incorporate traditional Māori philosophies of environmental protection and stewardship into their tourism business operations, both in the business organisational functions as well as what is delivered to the visitors.

This case critically reflects upon key concepts identified as important in the success of a tribal tourism collective. The necessity to consider what is authentic related to cultural identity and intellectual property; business control, management and governance; cultural, social and environmental imperatives and the challenges of working within tribal frameworks of knowledge that do not always respond favourably to the many stakeholder groups involved. Māori tourism businesses are now promoting sustainable business models that incorporate a “quadruple bottom line of economic, environmental, social and cultural wealth creation” (Spiller & Erakovic, 2005:219). For example, Whale Watch Kaikoura provides visitors with an experience, while synchronously supporting local, tribal economic imperatives as well as encouraging environmental and cultural sustainability. Another example is Taiamai Tours, where visitors are taken out on traditional *waka* (canoe) and told ancestral stories of the region, the political history and the methods by which the Indigenous operators maintain and protect the environment (Puriri & McIntosh, 2013). Considerations for Māori businesses are not necessarily based primarily on economic imperatives but rather on sustaining ancestral legacies involved in Indigenous people’s narratives.

While the increase in Māori tourism offerings is supporting Māori community economic development, this notion of offering visitors ‘new’ experiences that showcase cultural landscapes has been happening for generations at Whakarewarewa. The case study provides evidence of critical tourism development undertaken by the people of the *hapū* (local sub-tribe) from the mid-19th century. Therefore ‘new’ tourism development paradigms are not necessarily new but rather are being rediscovered. Accordingly, articulation of development has been largely influenced by what has been considered significant in Western terms – that of a singular and pragmatic economic imperative. This case draws upon tribal perspectives, the history and the current experience of Whakarewarewa Village Tours which is located in the geothermal landscape of Rotorua.

Case study: Whakarewarewa – The Thermal Village

The case study examines a Māori tourism destination that began in the late 1800s. At that time visitors were offered Māori cultural representations in the form of Māori guides, cultural concerts and traditional stories connected to the natural landscape features of the Rotorua region. These are still core products today and are now created for two key reasons:

- To continue the legacy of our ancestors and our heritage, to keep it alive for future generations
- For the tourists who are increasingly becoming interested in heritage imaginations and representation

It is this dialectic between production and consumption of cultural heritage, or the tensions between ‘us’ as producers and tourists as consumers that has initiated further examination.

The Whakarewarewa Thermal Village is a tribal Māori tourism enterprise that delivers an authentic experience by taking visitors on a tour of a living Māori village in the heart of the geothermal area of Rotorua. The organisation is part of the hapū of Tūhourangi/Ngāti Wahiao and provides employment and residence to those who live in the tribal territory. It is a vital component of tribal cultural identity, even for those members who live away and who may not be directly involved in the business operation. It is a central part of the Māori cultural identity of the hapū, and aspects such as ‘guiding’ are now part of an ancestral legacy that is considered vitally important to sustain. This organisation contributes to the hapū economy providing financial benefits and is inextricably linked to the strengthening of the hapū culture, traditions and identity of its members.

This generative learning environment is important as it is an environment that promotes diversity and encourages *whānau* (family/tribal) members to participate in hapū development and tourist activities. The Whakarewarewa village is therefore considered more than just a case study of a tourism destination, but more as a reflection of how tribal members continue to have input into the organisation regardless of from whence and in what capacity that entails.

Three hours south of Auckland is Rotorua, promoted by many New Zealand marketing sites as the cultural tourist capital of the country. The steaming hot pools and the Māori concerts are well known to most in New Zealand and famous overseas due to its longevity as a tourist destination.