REVISITING “WONDERFUL INDONESIA”
Tourism, economy, and society

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Hailed as an important dimension of the nation’s economy, tourism has played a complex role in the culturally-diverse nation of Indonesia. Like Oz’s proverbial “yellow brick road,” tourism development was initially envisioned as a pathway to empowerment. Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a growing chorus of Indonesian politicians and tourism consultants extolled tourism as an avenue for generating foreign exchange, fostering sustainable development, and enhancing national identity and pride. Yet, just as Oz’s yellow brick road was riddled with unanticipated twists, detours, and challenges, so, too, has been the story of tourism in Indonesia. In broad terms, this chapter examines the interplay between tourism development (both planned and unplanned), local dynamics, and intergroup sensibilities in Indonesia.

More specifically, as I will underscore in the pages that follow, both domestic and international tourism in Indonesia are entwined with nation-building, inter-ethnic, religious, and regional political dynamics. Likewise, the government’s relentless pursuit of UNESCO World Heritage sites and its tourism awareness campaigns (such as the current, foreigner-oriented “Wonderful Indonesia” and the “Sapta Pesona” or “Seven Charms” promotion for Indonesians) have had reverberations for many Indonesians’ understanding of their places in the world. The expansion of tourism and travel-oriented campaigns in the archipelago has not only transformed the aspirations and leisure-time activities of middle-class Indonesians with disposable incomes; it has also subtly reconfigured the ways in which local groups imagine themselves and their relationship to the nation. This is the case not only for those whose ethnic homelands have become established tourist destinations, but also for some groups residing in remote locales far from the tourist trail. This chapter traces the history of tourism projects and policies in Indonesia and spotlights case studies from various regions of Indonesia to address the interplay between tourism development and local understandings of identity, cultural heritage, and the state. Ultimately, this chapter showcases how tourism is entangled with a variety of sociocultural dynamics in Indonesia, ranging from economic and environmental transformations to shifting sensibilities about lifestyle and “place,” to reconfigured understandings of ethnic, regional, religious, or national identities.

Tourism visions: from the colonial era into the New Order

Most scholars of Indonesian tourism trace the birth of international tourism back to the colonial era, when the Dutch colonial tourist bureau published the first Bali guidebook in Batavia
in 1914, just six years after their conquest of the island—a conquest which had entailed the
slaughter and exile of thousands of Balinese (Picard 1993: 75; Kodhyat 1996; Dahles 2001: 28;
Hampton and Clifton 2017: 181). As Adrian Vickers observed in his history of Bali as a "created"
paradise, "the scar on the liberal imagination of the Netherlands produced by these massacres
had to be healed, and the preservation of Balinese culture, in combination with tourism, were
the most effective balms for the healing process" (Vickers 1989: 91). In this period, Dutch-
produced tourism pamphlets gradually shifted the older popular image of "savage Bali" to a
new vision of an unspoiled Eden, fit for genteel tourism centering on cultural arts. These idyllic
images coalesced in the late 1920s, as Bali attracted international artists and writers whose works
further enhanced Bali's reputation as the "most romantic" stop on cruises that included various
Javanese ports. By 1940, "paradisal Bali" was drawing 250 international tourists monthly, a
sizable number given the high costs of travel at the time (Vickers 1989: 97–8).

World War II, the Indonesian post-war struggle for independence, and the politically tumultuous
violence of the 1960s interrupted international tourism in the archipelago. Likewise,
domestic tourism in this era was either a political activity for government officials or a leisure
pursuit restricted to only the most economically privileged citizens (Gunawan 1997: 18; Dahles
2001: 28). Nevertheless, Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, imagined a broader, transformative
role for tourism in national development, both economically and culturally. Soon after
independence, in the early 1950s, Sukarno began promoting Bali abroad as an international
tourism destination and eventually drew on Japanese war reparation funds to construct Bali's
first international-class hotel and begin airport expansions (Hitchcock and Putra 2007). While
formal national tourism policy was scant in this post-independence era, by 1958, Sukarno sensed
a need to cultivate local tourism consciousness and minted an Indonesian term for tourism,
pariwisata (Kodhyat 1996: 66).

Sukarno's seemingly instinctive tourism-as-nation-building efforts were not limited to Bali.
From early in his presidency, he envisioned the construction of a national monument in the
center of Jakarta that would serve as the symbol of the nation, akin to Paris's Eiffel Tower. In
Sukarno's vision, the structure's architecture would incorporate ancient "Indonesian" symbols
(conveying the naturalness of the nation) and would both commemorate Indonesia's struggle
for independence and showcase the grandeur of the nation. Its museum spaces would display
national icons, such as the nation's first flag, and historical dioramas. Monas, as the national
monument has come to be known, was ultimately built over the course of two presidencies;
as a prime destination for touring school groups and domestic tourists (as well as a symbolically
potent site for political demonstrations), the monument continues to promote leisure-time les-
sons in citizenship.

It was not until after General Soeharto took power in 1966–1967 that large-scale interna-
tional tourism began to take center stage in government planning initiatives, eventually emerging
as the country's most important economic sector, after oil and gas. In this era, international
tourist arrivals went from less than 100,000 visitors annually in the 1960s to an all-time peak
of 5,185,000, just before the economic turmoil that led to the collapse of Soeharto's regime
(World Bank 2017). Beginning in 1969, Soeharto's New Order regime initiated a series of Five-
Year Plans (Rencana) aimed at generating economic growth over a 25-year period. The first plan
(1969–74) identified five key tourist zones for development (Bali, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Solo, and
North Sumatra) and outlined a tourism policy aimed at augmenting foreign exchange earn-
ings, promoting Indonesia's natural and cultural resources, and reinforcing national and global
solidarity. While the emphasis was heavily economic, Michel Picard observes that one should
not underestimate the government's political objectives; just as Dutch colonialists had lassoed
tourism's romantic imagery to expunge memories of their massacre of Balinese, the New Order
which had entailed the 996; Dahles 2001: 28; y of Bali as a "created" ed by these massacres w with tourism, were 1 this period, Dutch- of "savage Bali" to a ural arts. These idyllic w writers whose works that included various al tourists monthly, a. 8, the politically tumult- rchipelago. Likewise, t officials or a leisure wan 1997: 18; Dahles broader, transforma- uturally. 1 Soon after d as an international 3 to construct Bali's 3 Putra 2007). While 958, Sukarno sensed n term for tourism, not limited to Bali, il monument in the riv's Eiffel Tower. In indonesian" symbola Indonesia's struggle paces would display mas, as the national two presidencies; as ell as a symbolically oe leisure-time les-
large-scale interna- eventually emerg- is era, international to an all-time peak. Soeharto's regime ted a series of Five- period. The first plan 9yakarta, Solo, and gn exchange earn- rational and global es that one should misists had lassoed o, the New Order egime's promotion of tourism helped replace international memories of Soeharto's violent rise to power with images of a peaceful and orderly multi-cultural nation (Picard 1996: 44).

**Domestic tourism and nation-building**

Indonesia's second Five-Year Plan (1975–1979) mapped a more specific growth plan and highlighted tourism's contributions to local communities and national unity. This era saw the opening of Jakarta's "Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park" (Taman Mini), an ethnic theme park that exemplifies tourism's linkages to nation-building in the New Order era. Hailed as recreating Indonesia's cultural diversity in miniature, the park was designed to showcase Indonesia's exemplary cultural heritage to both insiders and outsiders (Pemberton 1994: 255). From the outset, as First Lady Soeharto explained at the park's opening ceremony, Taman Mini would encourage Indonesian visitors to "understand the culture, language, customs of their brothers from the other islands... [thereby] consolidating the cohesion and the unity of the nation" (cited in Freeman 1984: 231). The organization of the park conveys these unity-building aims: park zones for each of the nation's provinces showcase full-sized replicas of indigenous houses, dance performances, and regional material culture drawn from the same set of categories (weapons, baskets, marriage garments, and so on), regardless of the relevance of these categories to the particular ethnic group on display. For instance, the South Sulawesi pavilion displays wedding costumes of local groups, such as the Bugis and the Toraja, even though funeral attire would have been a more relevant category for the Toraja. Adherence to a uniform set of categories communicates that despite superficial differences, there is underlying commonality among the groups that constitute the nation (Adams 1998: 85).

Moreover, the park was designed to be experienced in provincial terms: the primary signs visible from the park's thoroughfares indicate only the names of provinces, not ethnic groups. The take-away point is that the province (not the ethnic group) is the source of regional culture (Hitchcock 1998: 131–2; see also, Picard 1997: 197–8). 2 As depicted in Taman Mini, provinces contribute colorful cultural pinnacles to Indonesia's national culture (Picard 1993: 93). In essence, for domestic tourists, the park aims to naturalize the state.

Yet, as anthropological studies of domestic tourists visiting New Order–era national-consciousness-building destinations in the 1990s and 2000s suggest, tourists bring their own cultural and persona agendas, which may contrast with or conflict with the state's vision of the sites' function. For instance, Edward Bruner's observations of Jakarta migrant Toba Batak families making recreational weekend visits to Taman Mini suggest that provincial and national identity are not salient to their visits. Rather, these Jakarta-based migrant Batakans celebrate and create their own versions of ethnic identity via picnics, concerts, and fashion shows in the park's Batak area, which serves as a homeland surrogate. As Bruner argues, urban Batakans reared far from the ancestral homeland are recreationally toying with ethnic identity in a space where they are "simultaneously the tourists and the toured" (Bruner 2005: 227). The Batak domestic tourists Bruner observed were exploring identity and heritage at a distance, through a sanitized version of their homeland. In this at-a-distance leisure setting, idealized ethnic identities seldom have occasion to clash with the often economically and emotionally charged familial and clan identities given preeminence in the Batak homeland.

In a similar vein, state-sponsored cultural festivals and official museum displays designed to foster shared provincial and national identities by stressing similar cultural themes for each provincial district (e.g., housing, textiles, and livelihoods) sometimes produced ironic outcomes. For instance, Alorese domestic tourists observed visiting Nusa Tenggara Timur's Provincial Museum in Kupang voiced disgruntlement at their island's frozen-in-time depiction in the museum's
displays, which featured 1930s-era photographs, images of traditional houses, bronze drums, and what they considered poor-quality textiles. For many Alorese visitors, the displays (which stood adjacent to cases of sumptuous East Timorese textiles) were evidence of the province’s disrespect for them as “backwards.” Likewise, Chinese residents of Kupang voiced dismay at their absence from the museum’s displays, which was, for them, a powerful reminder of their exclusion from the New Order era’s vision of the nation (Adams 1999, 2003). In short, for some minority groups, domestic tourist sites sometimes inadvertently produce a sense of disenfranchisement from province or nation.

Blurring culture, tourism, and economics: “touristification,” socioeconomic dreams, and schisms

Indonesia’s Five-Year Plans of the last three and a half decades not only continue to emphasize tourism’s role in strengthening national unity and identity, but (in tandem with rising tourist arrivals) these campaigns have also, directly and indirectly, encouraged even those residing far from the beaten tourist track to reimagine ethnic identities in terms of tourism. For instance, in preparation for a series of international tourism drives (e.g. Visit Indonesia Year 1994, Visit ASEAN Year 1992, and so on), in 1989, the Indonesian government initiated a Tourism Consciousness Campaign, which has continued to the current day (e.g. Departemen Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata 2008). The campaign delineated the “Seven Charms” (cinta pesona) to which all Indonesian groups should aspire. These tourist-pleasing charms included security, orderliness, friendliness, beauty, comfort, cleanliness, and memories. To this day, these “seven (touristic) charms” are featured in regionally-distributed booklets, detailed in Indonesian newspapers and blogs, discussed in local workshops, and posted on plaques in villages throughout Indonesia (e.g. http://pariwisata.ponorogo.go.id/articles/view?detail=gerakan-sadar-wisata-dan-aksi-sapta-pesona-di-telaga-ngcel, April 6, 2017).

For instance, as early as the mid-1990s, Indonesia’s ubiquitous Tourism Consciousness Campaign was inspiring villagers on the seldom-visited island of Alor in East Nusa Tenggara to weigh and tout their own touristic charms and attracting powers vis-à-vis other more touristically famous Indonesian ethnic groups. As Alorese acquaintances were fond of declaring, the Seven Charms were every bit as present on Alor as they were on Bali, if not more so, since Alor lacks the debauchery for which Bali’s Kuta Beach has become famous. Although the Tourism Consciousness Campaign has clearly helped craft visions of a new kind of “imagined community” based on shared notions of one’s homeland’s tourist-drawing charms, the competitive representation of Alor’s “greater” (but still unrecognized) touristic charms merits our attention, as some local groups cannot help but recognize and resent that certain groups receive more promotion and tourism revenues than others (Adams 1997: 157–8; 2004:119).

It also pays to note that although local groups are reimagining themselves and their homelands in terms of the Tourism Consciousness Campaign’s seven “touristic charms,” the state’s emphasis on these charms does not necessarily entail prioritizing the needs, comforts, or rights of indigenous groups. This has been a painful lesson for some groups who have found themselves on the wrong side of state tourism development plans. For instance, many Saasak residents of Gili Trawangan (a small island off Lombok’s northwest coast in Eastern Indonesia) enjoyed a modest economic boost from small-scale, impromptu backpacker and dive tourism from the mid-1980s through the early 1990s. As the island gained popularity, backpackers began to establish tourism businesses and labor migrants began arriving from nearby islands, prompting population pressures and climbing land prices (Kasima and Bras 2000; Hampton and Jeyachveya 2015). Elite national and regional investors eventually became aware of the economic potential of the island,
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and soon thereafter, a new provincial Tourism Master Plan slated the island for beach and dive resort development. locals were ordered to clear the zones designated for development, which they initially refused to do. This prompted a series of army-led land clearance operations in 1992, 1993, and 1995 that destroyed local tourism businesses and homes, displacing locals to fringe areas of the island (Kamuna and Bras 2000; Dickerson 2008).

While the New Order government clearly did not shy from using force to achieve its ends when local groups opposed national economic interests, the Reformasi era that began with Soeharto's fall in 1998 has ushered in new policies that ostensibly promise to return decision-making capabilities to local hands. The 2001 Autonomy Act initiated a process of decentralization that devolved financial and administrative decision making to regional and local governments. As part of decentralization, the central government now steers sizable tourism development funds to the local level to enact locally determined tourism development policies (Hampton and Jeyacheya 2015: 489). Under Reformasi, the violent displacements on Gili Trawangan have ceased, yet islanders have yet to receive financial assistance from the regency and still find themselves unable to control tourism decision making on their island (Hampton and Jeyacheya 2015: 489). As Hollin Dickerson observes, "On the one hand, decentralisation could provide opportunities to resolve these conflicts through the local political process. On the other hand, it might give local governments a chance to assert greater authority over local land rights with no national oversight" (Dickerson 2008: n.p.).

The Reformasi era's decentralization policy has also had reverberations for regional campaigns and festivals targeting domestic tourists. (Under Reformasi, domestic tourism has become an increasingly important building block of recent Indonesian tourism policy, which now recognizes not only the nation-building potential but the economic potential of domestic tourists, who far out-number international tourists.) Maribeth Erb (2009) studied several cultural festivals organized in two recently-divided Manggarai districts in western Flores. These cultural festivals were part of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture's "Archipelagic Tourism Glitter" (Geybar Wisata) domestic tourism campaign initiated in 2003. As she notes, the two districts' tourism boards conceptualized the "glitter" promised via tourism in very different ways and organized tourism endeavors accordingly. The Tourism Board head in Ruteng envisioned travel as "a new necessity" - part of a modern lifestyle increasingly important for the younger generation - and therefore set about identifying local leisure sites that promised to appeal to local residents (rather than targeting domestic and international tourists via cultural displays). His vision was to develop facilities and activities for the pleasure of local urban and nearby rural dwellers: playgrounds, beachside toilets, and concerts catering to local music tastes. By "civilizing" local behaviors via glittering tourist amenities and by cultivating local leisure tastes, he hoped to integrate tourism into the lives of Manggaraisians, thereby engaging in a kind of cultural "ordering" that schooled locals in modernity (Erb 2009: 180–1). In contrast, the neighboring Tourism Board in Labuan Bajo (a town planned in the 1980s as the "gateway" to Komodo National Park) opted to pursue the economic glitter embodied in international tourists and organized cultural displays, ethnic wedding song performances, races, and feasts targeting ever-elusive international visitors. As Erb notes, these dreams of attracting foreign revenues took on a life of their own, as tourism board officials sought and received funding from Jakarta for their structural and cultural projects in the name of tourism (Erb 2009: 178, 181). In both these contrasting cases, we see visions of tourism routinising ways of thinking about and mobilizing culture.

The reformulation of Indonesian cultural identities in terms of tourism is perhaps best exemplified by Michel Picard's long-term research on Bali. In the early years of New Order tourism development, a number of foreign consultants and anthropologists warned of mass tourism's looming threat for the vitality of local Indonesian cultures, and for Balinese culture in particular.
However, as Picard chronicles for Bali, older colonial, anthropological, and touristic representations of Bali in tandem with the New Order’s conception of “culture as art” (Acciaioli 1985) so thoroughly homogenized and reified Balinese culture that tourism became inseparable from Balinese ideas about themselves, a phenomenon Picard terms “touristification” (Picard 1996, 2003). In the post-New Order era of Reformasi, Balinese intellectuals, well aware of tourism’s entanglement with their cultural notions of identity, have drawn on the idea of “Balineseness” in debates concerning the future course of tourism and the rights of Balinese to craft tourism policies that benefit Balinese, rather than outsiders (Picard 2003: 111).

Here, it is worth underscoring that the top-down mega-tourism development initiated in the Soeharto era has ultimately marginalized many Balinese who are largely unable to compete with outside investors. Although Bali’s tourism sector generates US$3–5 billion annually, an estimated 85% of the tourist economy is controlled by non-Balinese (MacRae 2010; Cole 2016: 42). Not only has tourism drawn outside investors to Bali, but it has also attracted impoverished, predominantly Muslim migrant workers from other regions of Indonesia seeking tourism-sector jobs, a phenomenon Balinese perceive as unjust since the government pressed unemployed Balinese to transmigrate off-island (Picard 2003: 112). Bali’s touristic image as an island paradise has also inspired an additional 30,000 foreign migrants to move to Bali (Cohen 2008, cited in Cole 2016: 36), creating further inequities in wealth and privilege. Tourism has thus fueled debates about which groups of Indonesians (wealthy Jakarta investors, Balinese, migrants, foreigners, and so on) have the right to shape Bali’s future.

As tourism development has resulted in the disappearance of an estimated 1,000 hectares of rice fields annually, growing numbers of Balinese are finding themselves disenfranchised from landownership (Picard 2003: 111). Unrestrained tourism development has also resulted in overuse and contamination of Bali’s groundwater, which has had ramifications for the health and well-being of the Balinese. With 65% of the island’s water now diverted to tourism and the water table unsustainably low, poorer and lower-caste Balinese women have suffered the heaviest burden, as it is they who are responsible for securing water for washing and meal preparation. These women have little recourse when wells run dry, as they can ill afford to purchase bottled water (Cole 2016: 41). Moreover, poorer, lower-caste women are least able to register concerns in this patriarchal society, where only male household heads may participate in local decision making via territorial socio-cultural units known as banjar and where they risk being doubly censured for more public outcry (Cole 2016: 31, 41). In short, the flow of tourism-derived economic benefits and deficits is far from uniform, giving rise to additional caste, class, gender, and even regional tensions on the island.

Tourism in tumultuous times

From the 1970s into the 1990s, the New Order’s ability to keep religious and inter-regional tensions at bay benefitted tourism development, which in turn contributed to the nation’s economic growth in this era (Dahles 2001: viii). The 1998 collapse of the New Order not only relaxed the government’s top-down control of tourism in Indonesia’s regions, but it also unleashed an era of more politicized ethnic and religious identities, as well as new shocks to Indonesia’s tourism industry (Picard 2003: 109). Beginning around the time of the New Order’s demise, Indonesia was struck by a series of crises that plummeted tourism arrivals to all-time lows. The Indonesian economic crisis (krusim) in early 1998, anti-Chinese rioting in Jakarta soon thereafter, inter-ethnic/religious violence elsewhere in Indonesia, the 2002 and 2005 bombings of tourist gathering spots in Bali, the 2003 Jakarta Marriott Hotel bombing, the Southeast Asian SARS scare, outbreaks of Avian influenza in Indonesia, earthquakes, and tsunamis, all took their tolls...
on tourism to the archipelago. For much of the 2000s, the external perception of Indonesia had shifted from tropical paradise to tropical disaster zone.

Yet, even in this context of diminished visitors, tourism has offered a lens for Indonesians to rethink ideas about self and other. For instance, Andrew Causey (2007) documents how Christian Toba Batak, well aware of Western tourist fears of religious violence, encouraged tourists to spend their vacations in the hinterland Sumatra Batak homeland, since the Batak and their homeland are “safe.” Via his study, we catch a glimpse of an emergent new twist on Toba Batak sensibilities concerning their group identity. Whereas in the past Toba Batak remoteness and traditional spiritual practices branded them as “dangerous headhunters,” in the post-Bali-bombing and post-9/11 era, their remoteness becomes an asset and their Christianity facilitates bridge-building between themselves and Western tourists.

The tropes of safety and danger were equally relevant to the trickle of Western danger-zone tourists visiting East Timor in the late 1990s at the height of Indonesia-backed paramilitary genocide in the now-independent nation. Although drawn to East Timor for varied reasons (e.g., activism, desires to witness news as it unfolded, pursuit of adrenaline-rush experiences), the activities and blog reports of these tourists subtly shaped outsider understandings of the Indonesian state and had reverberations for nearby islanders’ understandings of themselves. In the mid- and late 1990s, I interviewed a number of danger-zone tourists who had stopped on the nearby island of Alor while en route home from witnessing violence in East Timor. Most had not planned to visit Alor but were seduced by the tranquility of Alor’s scenic port. On these stops, impromptu visitors readily shared with locals their impressions of the contrasts between East Timor’s tensions and violence and the peacefulness of Alor. Alor’s self-representations had long stressed “ruggedness,” the island’s profusion of languages, or its abundance of bronze gongs, yet by the late 1990s, the image of ruggedness was receding, and some Alorans were foregrounding these newer, danger-zone-tourist-inspired images of “peacefulness” and “beauty.” As the Alor case suggests, even small numbers of tourists visiting Indonesia in tumultuous times can play a potent role in reshaping indigenous self-imagery and sensibilities concerning place (Adams 2001).

Some of the most interesting research on tumult, tourism, and identity dynamics in the current era derives from Bali. The aftermath of the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings prompted tourism scholarship on the complex (and sometimes deadly) interplay between religious, cultural, ethnic, and regional identities and tourism, all of which are in dialogue with state policies and global religious movements. From Picard (1996, 2009) and Pederson (2009), we know that Bali’s tourist packaging as a lone Hindu zone in a Muslim nation obscured the actual religious diversity on the island. Moreover, the ubiquitous travel imagery of Bali as an idyllic Hindu island rendered Bali’s historic Muslim communities and immigrant Muslims seemingly out-of-place “outsider” ethно-religious groups. Hitchcock and Putra (2007) have chronicled how, in the aftermath of the bombings, religiously and culturally diverse local and global stakeholders came together to rebuild Bali’s devastated tourism-based economy.

Shinji Yamashita (2012) recently offered further evidence of the convergence of tourism, spiritual healing, and multiculturalism in the form of an annual “Echo of Peace Event” (Gema Perdamaian) initiated in 2012 by Bali’s tourism business community. Initially a tourism-resuscitation strategy, this annual spiritual festival has blossomed into a movement that fosters a new kind of plural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious conception of a broader peace-oriented community. As Yamashita describes, it draws together tourists and locals from different faiths to dance together to Hare Krishna music in their own style. Via his study, we can see how sites of tragedy can become creative venues for fostering new spiritual identities and for fueling novel “umbrella group” sensibilities. In sum, spiritual tourism appears to have a diverse array of ramifications for ethnicity in today’s era of heightened religious identity consciousness.
Merantau and tourism: back to the future?

When the tumult of the late 1990s and 2000s struck, many Indonesian communities that had come to depend on tourism-derived income faced the challenge of finding new audiences for their cultural “products.” While the national government turned to pushing domestic tourism more aggressively (as noted earlier), hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies in many areas still faced sluggish revenues. This was the case in the Sa’dan Toraja highlands in Upland Sulawesi, where I have based much of my research since the mid-1980s. At tourism’s mid-1990s apex, 50,000 foreign tourists and 200,000 “domestic tourists” were visiting annually (Adams 2006). A decade later, international tourism had slowed to a trickle, severely damaging the local economy. In 2006, local Toraja officials gravitated to a new source of revenue: Courting Toraja migrants and their families to return to the ancestral homeland for vacation visits. An initial “Lovely December Festival” – subsequently dubbed a “Longing to Return Home to Toraja Festival” – was organized to boost tourism revenues and hotel bookings during the tourist off-season. Entertainment, welcoming parades, food, and dance displays as well as holiday fireworks and hotel discounts were all part of the enticement. Heavily promoted on social media and in the news, the event was a resounding success. Today, the festival is an annual event, drawing thousands of return migrant-tourists each December.

In many ways, the festival can be seen as reconstituting, in novel form, an older Indonesian pattern of mobility known as merantau (a form of circular migration wherein one voluntarily departs one’s homeland seeking livelihood, fortune, or experience, ultimately returning home with enhanced status). As Noél Salazar (2016) notes, for many Indonesians, merantau has evolved from circular migration to more permanent migration, yet the ubiquity of cell phones, cyber-, and actual travel means that “home” is no longer located in a fixed locale. For a number of the Toraja migrants I interviewed, the allure of a temporary “tourist” return for the Lovely December Festival was the promise of being able to satisfy one’s longings for home without the daunting financial burdens and expectations normally tethered to a more permanent return.

Here, a clarification concerning Toraja ritual practices is necessary. For Torajans, ancestral houses and funerals are inseparable from cultural and familial identities. Contributing funds to house consecration rituals and repaying prior generations’ mortuary debts by gifting exorbitantly priced water buffalo at funerals for house-based kin are key paths for maintaining and nurturing familial relations. Yet, for many Toraja migrants toiling in low-paying jobs, these costs entailed in returning temporarily for funeral rituals (or more permanently) are prohibitive. Thus, the migrant-oriented Lovely December Festival provides an alternative and far less costly avenue for temporary return visits. As Lina, a first-generation migrant, explained, “I don’t want to obligate my kids to get tangled up in Toraja ritual customs [euphemism for debt], but the Lovely December Festival interests me. There’s art, Toraja clothing, bamboo music, traditional dances.” Lina’s comments suggest that part of the festival’s appeal is the opportunity to connect to ancestral heritage, but not too deeply. The connections being forged are all aesthetic yet aesthetically divorced from the realm of house-family duties and funeral debts. In short, Lina and other migrant-tourists returning for the Lovely December Festival are consuming Heritage Lite. In the creative touristic borderzone space of the festival, they have found a less-burdensome way to periodically re-inhabit their ancestral culture.

Closing thoughts

As these case studies illustrate, tourism in Indonesia is far more than simply a component of the economy that contributes to Indonesia’s foreign exchange revenues. Tourism has a long history
of being entangled in political projects, beginning with the Dutch and running through the New Order to the present day. New Order-era tourist sites, such as Taman Mini, were designed not only to showcase Indonesia’s glorious cultural heritage to the world, underscore the nation’s worthiness on the global political stage, but also to instill a sense of “unity in diversity” and nourish national pride among visiting domestic tourists. Yet domestic tourists digest the state’s messages at these sites in their own ways, filtering them through their own ethnic and personal perspectives.

Likewise, the state’s use of tourism to cultivate provincially oriented identities and to fuse these identities with the arts has had unexpected reverberations on Bali and elsewhere, where tourism has become an inextricable dimension of ethno-cultural identity. Moreover, state-, provincial-, and regency-based tourism campaigns and festivals, which are often designed to chase revenues, have prompted Indonesian groups to re-imagine themselves and mobilize culture in new ways. In sum, “Wonderful Indonesia’s” yellow brick road of tourism may not always lead to riches (particularly in tumultuous times), but it always seems to meander into the terrain of politics, identity, and inter-group sensibilities.

Notes

1 We catch a glimpse of this via a scene in the classic 1955 political satire Tunan Agung, which depicts a Javanese village head discussing plans to embrace tourism development to enable the village to join the modern world (Vickers 2011: 460).

2 Writing about New Order-era tourism, Wood suggests that this de-emphasis on ethnicity per se presumably serves to mask Javanese political dominance and Chinese economic dominance in the New Order era . . . touristically, Indonesia’s Chinese minority – the largest in Southeast Asia – is completely erased . . . [from] government tourist promotion and not recognized at Taman Mini Indonesia or its regional institutions.

(Wood 1997: 26)

Likewise, Indonesia’s museum displays and cultural festivals in this era (destinations frequented by school groups and domestic tourists) reflected similar erasures of the nation’s Chinese population and Chinese spiritual practices (Adams 1999, 2003). A Chinese temple pavilion was added to Taman Mini after the fall of the New Order government.

3 As of 2010, these funds amounted to over US$200,000 annually (Furqan and Pudak Mat Som 2010, cited in Hampton and Jeyachaya 2015: 489).

4 Most tourists visit the islands that constitute Komodo National Park by boat, thus they rarely set foot in Labuan Bajo, Flores.

5 Various scholars have explored the ways in which tourism has conjoined with cultural arts and ethnic identity in different Indonesian locales, highlighting in particular relationships between tourist-inspired arts and individual and group agency (e.g. Fonbee 2001, Carney 2003, Adams 2006).

6 Similar versions of paragraphs 2, 4, and 5 of this section were previously published (Adams 2016).

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