Tourism tracks and sacred places: Pashupatinath and Uluru. Case studies from Nepal and Australia*

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Like pilgrims, people are drawn to special and sometimes sacred places in the hope of gaining an experience, a taste of the place, and perhaps some new understandings.

This paper is about two such places - Pashupatinath, a Hindu temple complex near Kathmandu in Nepal and Uluru[1] in Central Australia. Both are sacred places, and both are on the tourist pilgrimage route. At each place, tourism creates both opportunities and conflicts. Our paper looks at travellers and tourists, their motivations and desires, and then looks at each place and the issues created by visitors. Finally, we discuss the challenges for those planning for sustainable tourism in sacred places.

Pilgrims, travellers and tourists

A pilgrim is one who journeys, especially a long distance, to some sacred place as an act of devotion.[2] In many ways the modern-day traveller is like a pilgrim, seeking to gain secular understanding and meaning, and having a whole world of places and experiences to select from.[3] Places of religious pilgrimage are an attraction for many travellers.[4]

The Pashupatinath temple complex is a site of major religious significance and attracts many pilgrims from the Indian subcontinent and neighbouring countries (including Tibet) who outnumber the tourists at most times of the year. Uluru, is a place of spiritual significance for the Anangu and is also a place of secular pilgrimage. At the 'handback' of Uluru in 1985, the Australian Governor General, Sir Ninian Stephens, spoke of this place as part of the spiritual heart of Australia (Hill 1994) He was speaking about the symbolic place of Uluru in the hearts of Australians as well as its significance for the Anangu.

Cultural tourists - those who visit cultural sites to gain a particular experience - expect to gain a deeper understanding and meaning from their visit. They want to walk the path of 'the traveller' and not that of the 'sight-seeing' tourist.[5] And they want to walk in the footsteps of the local. Knowing that a place is sacred, they are torn between the desire to be one with the local culture and the desire not intrude upon it.

The tourism literature offers several ways of describing tourists; the latest by Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros deals exclusively with cultural tourists (Cohen 1979, Moscardo 1996 and McKercher & du Cros 2002). Their approach is based on defining what motivates the visitor to seek out a destination and absorb particular experiences. It also acknowledges that popular images of the destination and its attractions will influence the visitor's decision about what experiences to partake in long before they arrive at the destination. This is strongly evident at Uluru. The expectations of Pashupatinath are more nebulous as this place is little known to tourists (but well known to pilgrims). The five types of cultural tourists, their motivations and quality of experience they tend to require are:

- purposeful cultural tourist **-** cultural tourism is the primary motive for visiting a destination and the individual has a deep cultural experience;

- sightseeing cultural tourist - cultural tourism is a primary or major reason for visiting a destination, but the experience is more shallow;

- serendipitous cultural tourist - a tourist who did not travel for cultural tourism reasons, but who, after participating ends up having a deep cultural tourism experience;

- casual cultural tourist - cultural tourism is weak motive for visiting a destination and the resultant experience is shallow;

- incidental cultural tourist - someone who does not travel for cultural tourism reasons, but who none the less participates in some activities and has a shallow experience (McKercher & du Cros 2002).

All five types of cultural tourists can be found at any one time at a destination. The mix of tourist types will vary from destination to destination, depending on the destination itself, the actual place being visited within the destination, and the origin of the cultural tourist.

The overall awareness by tourists and the tourism sector of the destination and its reputation as a cultural tourism node will influence the type of visitor drawn to it. As Boniface and Fowler (1993) suggest, just because a cultural place is well known does not mean it is known well. Some visitors will visit simply to gain the personal status of having visited a well-known place, or to gather another photo for their collection.[6] Many visitors will be fundamentally ignorant of the destination or will visit with such limited knowledge that it would not be possible for them to get a deep cultural experience. Others, however, will seek and receive a purposeful cultural tourism experience in the tradition of 'the traveller'.

If all the tourists have in mind is experiencing Uluṟu as 'Ayers Rock the natural phenomenon', then photographing it and climbing will match their expectations, and they will fit the category of incidental cultural tourist. The incidental cultural tourist probably makes up the majority of those visiting Uluṟu; with the other four types of cultural tourists making up the balance. However, such studies of visitor motivation and cultural understanding are yet to be carried out at Uluṟu.

Surveys are yet to be conducted on the types of tourists to be found at Pashupatinath, but it is likely that in this less wel- known place the purposeful tourist and serendipitous tourist will dominate. The latter may just happen to engage a local guide or buy a local tour to fill some spare time either side of a trek. Despite the rich cultural heritage of the Kathmandu Valley, the main tourist demand is for trekking in the mountains. For those inspired by the cultural heritage of the Kathmandu Valley, Pashupatinath would be a great 'must see'.

Pilgrims to Pashupatinath Temple Complex

The Pashupatinath Temple Complex, near Kathmandu in Nepal is a place of sacred significance to Hindus all over the subcontinent. It is holiest of the God Shiva's shrines in Nepal while being one of three important sites in the region; it attracts large numbers of pilgrims. This complex is also inscribed on the World Heritage List.

Pilgrims come to bathe in the river and where they burn their dead. To bathe in the Bagmati River at particular phases of the moon ensures translation to Shiva's paradise and to be burned on the banks of the river is to be granted certain release from rebirth (Dowman 1995:37). There are many other rituals and ceremonies associated with this place and special

festivals that occur at certain times of the year (Pashupatinath Development Trust notes 2000). The Pashupathinath complex is also part of the 1979 World Heritage List inscription of around seven major cultural zones or sites in the Kathmandu Valley.

The most symbolic buildings in the temple complex are those in the Pashupati temple compound. It is reserved for Hindus and Buddhists of certain castes.[7] The custodians of this particular shrine are Bhatt brahmins, who have kinship links with those in south India (Bowman 1995:41).

The temple itself is a two-roofed structure in the Newari tradition, common to the Kathmandu Valley. It was last renovated in the eighteenth century. It houses a sacred sculpture representing the lingham of Pashupatinath, which is a replica of the one smashed by Muslims in a raid in 1349. There are also other important and sacred shrines within the courtyard at which pilgrims make votive offerings (Bowman 1995:41).

An 'unspoken policy' exists at the site complex that tourism operators should use a different entrance to that used by pilgrims and move visitors along a different route to view the main shrines. There are also supposed to be areas where tourist access is restricted, as at Uluṟu. But independent tourists unaware of the 'unspoken policy' can move through the site complex freely, deliberately or unintentionally intruding on pilgrims and worshippers.

Worshippers and pilgrims commonly outnumber tourists and are seen by the site's managers as the main user group for the whole complex. Currently the southern side of the Bagmati River is the main place that tourists are taken; non-Hindus can only view Pashupati and Guyeshwari temples from a distance. Tour groups are usually accompanied by a guide who brings them in by the south-western entrance, avoiding the main gate and the majority of the temple complex on the northern side of the river where cremations and rituals occur. Tourists are also brought along the southern edge of the river past numerous souvenir shops up a small hill to where they can look across and down into the courtyard of the Pashupati Temple and watch the cremations along the riverbank from a distance. The Lonely Planet guide notes that some tourists have been known to treat those conducting cremations insensitively getting up close to film the activity (Lonely Planet 2000: 231). While co-author Hilary du Cros was visiting the site, a few independent tourists were observed sitting on one of the prayer platforms nearby a cremation filming the activity. A Hindu member of our tour party was so incensed she went across the river to chase them off. No one directly connected with the management of the complex appeared interested in preventing the activities of such intrusive tourists.

Little has been done on-site to provide information about appropriate visitor behaviour at the complex or to improve information and interpretation about the site to tourists. It seems to rely entirely on the proficiency of guides that escort such groups and the ability of independent travellers to behave in accordance with the information provided in guidebooks. There was a very basic tourist information booth in amongst the souvenir shops, but it provided little useful information.

Current problems and possible solutions

Tourists still form a small minority of visitors to the complex and their activities and needs are not considered very important by the new Pashupati Area Development Trust, set up by the government with royal patronage. The construction of a better tourist information centre and the provision of interpretation materials has been proposed in a recent tourism master plan for the complex. However these proposals are well down the priority list, with solutions

to greater site management problems related to the needs of other users and its overall conservation being seen as more important. For instance, the sacred Bagmati River is so heavily polluted by heavy industry upstream and the removal of water for other uses that it can no longer absorb the ashes of the faithful very well. It has become a slow running stream full of sludge, which demeans its cultural value. Development encroaches on the complex from all sides and a resettlement and rezoning plan is urgently needed to maintain a buffer between the complex and modern secular areas. Some commercialisation of the western side of the river by the way of unplanned shops and stalls is affecting the cultural value of the complex and the visitor experience it offers. There are also political problems regarding the reinvestment of religious donations into the conservation of buildings and structures for much of this remuneration has been going into religious activities and maintaining the religious leaders’ lifestyles instead. This difference of direction on reinvestment may also be related to the racial and caste disparities between the custodians and the Trust.

Hence concerns about improving the experience for tourists and encouraging better behaviour at the site have not been given the attention they deserve since many other more serious problems beset those concerned about conserving the complex. There is no formal management plan of the kind that has long been in use for Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṯa National Park. It is feared that the government will upgrade the promotion of the site in its tourism marketing without putting the necessary visitor management and monitoring programmes in place. There have also been mutterings that if the general management of the complex does not improve it may be put by UNESCO on the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger.

Travelling to the Centre: Uluṟu

Whether it is known as Uluṟu, Ayers Rock or just 'The Rock', the large red monolith in Central Australia has attracted a steady and increasing flow of tourists for over 40 years.

Mountford, visiting Uluṟu in 1935, wrote of the 'lure' of the 'great rock' calling him back, and others have written of its lure for Australians and visitors alike (Hill 1994). A visit to 'Ayers Rock' is like a secular pilgrimage, paying respect to the Rock by capturing it on film or the ultimate test of faith - the Climb. The Rock is part of the 'new world' tourist experience - it is a place of natural wonders, discovered by each of us as though we are the first.[8]

'Uluṟu', on the other hand, evokes the Rock as a place with a vital cultural and religious life and significance to its Aboriginal custodians, the Aṉangu. Uluṟu, for most of us, represents a culture that is a long way from our own. Uluṟu is 'other'.

Mass tourism to central Australia and Ayers Rock (Uluṟu) dates aback to the 1960s. The number of visitors continues to grow with 371,939 fee-paying visitors in 1999, a growth of 9.5% from the previous year. (Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṯa Board of Management 2000) Tourism at Uluru is perhaps the primary way that the economic aspirations of the Aṉangu can be achieved.

Since the 1985 hand-back of Uluṟu to the Aṉangu, a joint management arrangement for Uluṟu- Kata Tjuṯa National Park has been in place[9], enabling the traditional owners to play a central role in management decisions. As a result, for example, sacred sites previously open to tourists are now closed, and the Plan of Management proposes many other actions to respect Aboriginal law.

Tjukurpa provides the guiding principles for the management of the Park. *Tjukurpa* is the Pitjantjatjar*a* word for law, environmental history, knowledge, religion and morality that is the basis of Anangu values and accounts for much of their intangible heritage. As an Aboriginal traditional custodian explained to the 1991 conference on Aboriginal involvement in park management:

> Ananguku Law is held in our head and *kurunpa* [spirit]. You can't put Aboriginal Law on paper; it's the rules that grandfathers and grandmothers and that fathers and mothers gave us to use, that we hold in our hearts and in our heads.

Climbing Uluru remains one of the most controversial activities inside the Park:

> There they go, up the Rock … Minga say Anangu about the climbers. Ants. All tourists are minga, crawling everywhere. (Hill 1994)

The Anangu would prefer that tourists did not climb. The route of the climb is sacred; as well, the Anangu feel responsible for visitor's welfare. They mourn those who die and close the climb, for hours or a day or more, no doubt to the frustration of tourists on tight timetables who are determined to climb. Since 1962, more than 30 people have perished on the monolith and each year another 30 or so people need to be rescued from the site (AAP, 1997). Some of these deaths are marked by plaques at the base of the climb. (Breeden 1994, Hill 1994, UKTBM and Parks Australia, 1999).

Alternatives to 'the climb' are being actively promoted. For example, a park brochure introduces the Mala Walk and Mutitjul Walk with the words:

> Welcome to Aboriginal Land. We are Anangu, the traditional owners of Uluru. We want to share with you some of our ancient knowledge. We see some visitors coming to Uluru just to climb ‘the rock’ and look at the sunset. When you travel the Mala and Mutitjulu Walks you will experience much more - a journey into our living traditions.

In speaking of the Mala Walk, it is explained that

> The route taken by the Mala men to reach the top of Uluru is spiritually very important to Anangu. Visitors call this route ‘the climb’ and it makes Anangu sad top see people swarming over the tracks of our ancestors simply to get to the top… Although Anangu allow visitors to climb Uluru, we would prefer it if you chose to respect the Tjukurpa instead.

Why do people continue to climb? Has the climb become a cultural tradition or is climbing still the 'thing to do'? Or does Uluru attract the wrong type of tourist? A brief review of some of the guidebooks and tourist operator offerings suggest that it is a combination of these things. Perhaps we are witnessing a major change in the nature of tourism at Uluru too.

From the guidebooks

Lonely Planet is one of the guidebooks marketed to 'travellers' or independent tourists (some of whom may be purposeful cultural tourists). It communicates the 'don't climb' message:

> Uluru is a site of deep cultural significance to the local Anangu Aboriginals and the most famous icon of the Australian outback. A pilgrimage to Uluru and

> the coronary-inducing scramble to the top was an entrenched Australian ritual, but the Aboriginal owners would prefer visitors not to climb the rock and many visitors are now respecting their wishes. (Lonely Planet website)

The Rough Guide, designed for a similar market, gives a different slant - the gob-smacked tourist view combined with the 'avoid the crowds' by not climbing line:

> Even with our bus tours and our fully automatic cameras and our cries of ‘Oh, wow!’, we still couldn’t belittle it. I had come expecting nothing much, but by the power of the thing itself I had, like some ancient tribesman wandering through the desert and confronting the phenomenon [sunset on Uluṟu], been turned into a worshipper. Nobody was more surprised than I. (quote from Geoff Nicholson, Day Trips to the Desert)
>
> Uluṟu–Kata Tjuṯa National Park encompasses Uluṟu (the Aṉangu name for Ayers Rock) and Kata Tjuṯa (or the Olgas). The park is the most visited single site in Australia and if you’re wondering whether all the hype is worth it, then the answer is, emphatically, yes. The Rock, its textures, colours and not least its elemental presence, is without question one of the world’s natural wonders. Overt commercialization has been controlled within the park and other tourists can be avoided, especially if you choose not to undertake the climb (Rough Guide website)

There are lots of other interesting web sites for the 'traveller'. Gary Craig writing on The Sierra Club site in 1997 says:

> … when I read in our guidebook that the Aborigines don't like people climbing up it, I was really disappointed as I thought that I might not be able to go up it after all. I imagined that there would be some sort of picket line discouraging people from going up but there was actually only a relatively small sign at the base politely requesting that people respect the Aborigines' wishes. This sign was dwarfed by another one warning prospective climbers of the risks they were taking if they climbed up the rock - apparently climbers regularly die from heart attacks or falls and there are commemorative plaques at the base for some of them. (Travel Addicts web site)

And the Walkabout web site (Australian Travel on Line) simply says:

> There are now signs around the rock which make it perfectly clear that the traditional owners, the Aṉangu people, would like the 400,000 visitors to the rock to 'respect our law by not climbing Uluṟu'.
>
> …The current estimate is that, on average, one person per month dies either directly (quite a number wander too far and fall off the edges) or indirectly as a result of climbing the rock.

Even the Northern Territory Tourist Commission's web site[10] doesn't provide the 'don't climb' message to any potential visitors:

> In Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṯa National Park, the opportunities for sightseeing, photography, walking and gaining new knowledge are boundless. You can take

> guided walks through the fascinating nooks and crannies around the base of Ayers Rock/Uluṟu, or you can climb to the top of the Rock if you are fit and healthy. … Be warned that several people have died during or as a result of a climb up the Rock.

Offerings from the operators

A web search via a tour-booking site suggests there are many companies that provide a variety of tours to Uluṟu. But at Uluṟu the offerings of the different companies are remarkably similar.[11]

Most companies offer sunrise and sunset tours, clearly responding to the demand for specific products that has developed over the past 40 years. Some companies include the climb as an automatic part of the package (although no climbs are actually 'guided') with a guided walk around the base as an alternative.

Camping tours and tours targeted at the 18-to-35 market suggest that a climb is an expected activity; for example, the Sahara Tours' brochure (unchanged for the last four years) still calls it Ayers Rock and says 'you can see sunrise on the Rock before tackling the challenge of the climb'. The Sahara Tours would appeal to the 'purposeful tourist' and to any tourists able to spend more than two days at the attraction and who are looking for more than the standard tour experience.

Others offer the climbing option: for example the AAT Kings tours brochure says 'there is time to climb Uluṟu or you may prefer to take a guided walk around spectacular parts of the monolith's base'. The 'don't climb' message is not to be seen. But, in a recent change, this brochure does use both names - Ayers Rock in headings and Uluṟu in the text. AAT Kings is probably the largest and longest serving tour operator, and has 'combined passes' with Aṉangu Tours. This product is more likely to appeal to all tourist types except the incidental tourist and possibly the casual tourist.

Discovery Ecotours are an interesting example of a company seeking to provide a more contemporary tourism experience, with the emphasis on ecology and Aboriginal culture:

> Here, the beliefs of the people are embodied in one of the great places of this world. From a distance Uluṟu is spectacular; from close up it is powerful and deeply moving.

Nevertheless Discovery Ecotours offer an Uluṟu Climb tour:

> Upon arrival at the base of Uluṟu before sunrise, you can take your picnic breakfast provided for you in a backpack and begin the ascent of Uluṟu. Magnificent panoramic views can be enjoyed whilst you rest over breakfast. Upon returning to the surface, your guide will return for you and proceed to the Cultural Centre for an introduction to the natural and cultural aspects of the Uluṟu Kata Tjuṯa National Park. After some free time for shopping, you will be returned to Ayers Rock Resort.

A note adds that 'whilst climbing is allowed, the Aṉangu people (traditional owners) prefer that people do not climb. As such the Uluṟu Climb is not listed on our brochure, as we do not promote it in accordance with the wishes of the Aṉangu people'. The challenge of meeting the complex demands of a tourism industry based in a sacred place could not be more apparent.

Australian Kakadu Tours is another company that seems to be trying to meet everyone's needs. While at Uluṟu its tours include 'the climb' further north it is part of a joint venture with the Tiwi Land Council, creating Tiwi Tours.

Base tours are promoted as an 'alternative' to the climb rather than as the best option. One guidebook says:

> Far less strenuous is the nine-kilometre walk around the Rock, which takes an easy three hours. It offers a closer look at Uluṟu's Aṉangu sites (though note that some of the sacred sites are closed to 'uninitiates' – heed any warning notices) and the extraordinary textural variations. While the walk may not be a triumphant achievement, it can be more rewarding and is certainly more in keeping with the spirit of the place. (Rough Guide – emphasis added).

Of course, the brochure and the experience can be different. Chris Johnston, one of the co-authors of this paper went on a five-day Sahara Outback Tours - a camping trip - a couple of years ago.

> As we approached Uluṟu, our guide explained quite clearly and strongly about the Aṉangu views on climbing. For most of the young overseas travellers in the group, this was a shock. They had not been told of this issue, and were then faced with a dilemma.
>
> And then, when we got there - mid afternoon - the climb was closed. There was a man dying on the Rock, down low near the start of the climb. We could see the attempts to revive him. It was awful.
>
> The next morning, the climb was open. Some climbed, some changed their minds and walked 'the base' with our guide - the Liru walk, Mutijula waterhole, and the Cultural Centre. The decision each had made - to climb or not - stayed around like buzzing flies, intruding into every conversation for days.

The Aṉangu alternatives

The Aṉangu as co-managers of the park, have tried through signs and information to persuade people not to climb. They have also started Aṉangu Tours Pty Ltd in 1995, an entirely Aboriginal owned operation created by Aboriginal people as a corporate vehicle for their direct participation and involvement in the mainstream of the Australian tourism industry. Aṉangu Tours is currently one of the largest employers of Aboriginal people in the Central Desert region of the Australia, contributing to its aims of providing employment for local Aṉangu, and profit for its Aboriginal community shareholders through the operation of Aboriginal cultural tours, based on the traditions and skills of local Aṉangu. Its objectives are closely aligned with those of the Management Plan (Aṉangu Tours).

Aṉangu Tours offers several short tours, including sunrise and sunset tours, cultural tours, bush skills and guided walks:

> With Aṉangu Tours you are able to discover the real Uluṟu (Ayers Rock) through small group tours guided by local Aboriginal people.
>
> Aṉangu guides tell creation stories thousands of generations old, and demonstrate bush survival skills that were taught to them by their grandparents. All our guides have grown up in Central Australia and have an intricate

understanding of the environment, flora, fauna and desert survival. They enjoy passing some of this information on to you.

All tours are conducted in the guide's own traditional language, with interpretation into English provided by our experienced interpreters. This makes our tours very special. You will hear the ancient languages and know that you are getting an authentic, quite extraordinary experience.

Tours run seven days a week, all year round. Our product range includes half-day tours and charter and special activities for groups, conferences and incentives. Tours use comfortable air-conditioned vehicles with a dedicated driver. The cultural walks are up to 2 kilometres in length, and include lots of activities and opportunities for asking questions.

The new message

The new Anangu/park management message is 'we never climb' (Uluru-Kata Tjuta Board of Management 2000). This message is now one of three key messages that is communicated with visitors on their entry ticket. Tourist operators have agreed to convey these messages, and a new in-flight program prepared by Qantas also presents the 'don't climb' message.

From the evidence gathered, this change seems to be slow - but happening nevertheless.

Guidebooks - hardcopy and on-line - appear to provide the best opportunity to inform visitors about the local culture as well as the different kinds of experiences available well before arriving at the attraction. Compared to a tour brochure, guidebooks are a rich source of information.

And rather than being a disappointment, limiting access to significant spiritual sites may ironically heighten the sense of authenticity and provide more of a 'spirit of the place' for tourists seeking a cultural experience.

Tensions between global and local, tourism and heritage management, as well as colonial and post-colonial philosophies and values are apparent at Uluru. There is also the tension between measures for the protection of tangible as against intangible heritage. While the latter is acknowledged, its protection from damaging activities by Commonwealth law (DEST, 1996) in association with a World Heritage property is rarely explored. Given that 'the climb' may be seen as a 'damaging activity' by the Anangu holders of intangible heritage, what action should be taken?

Finally, in the spirit of post-colonial values, the climb is increasingly being seen within Australia as being politically incorrect. A number of high-profile people, including the former Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the conservative National Party, Tim Fischer, have apologised for climbing in the past (McKay and McDonald, 1999). This may be influencing many Australian visitors, but possibly not the overseas tourists.

Park managers seem to believe that interest in the climb is deteriorating though some statistics on this would be useful as would surveys of visitor motivation (UKTBM and Parks Australia, 2000 and recent interviews).

Bruce Stapleton (AAT Kings, Uluru) suggests that in the last five years the number of tourists who climb has dropped substantially, from 70 to 50 per cent (Spapleton pers. comm). However, the climb remains one of the most common and central tourism activities that is

promoted or allowed for in virtually every tour package of the main operators. So climbing remains a core feature of the commoditised tourism experience offered and tourism operators are adamant that they would never support a total ban (McKay and McDonald, 1999).

So today, tourism tracks and visitor flows at Uluru still follow much the same pattern as they have since Uluru-Kata Tjuta first started attracting visitors, despite the variety of products now offered. The question remains as to how change can be accelerated, to ensure spiritual values are protected along with the jobs of Anangu people. New tourism products will be needed to meet the diverse interests of visitors. Over time, a different group of visitors may be attracted to Uluru, visitors more attracted by its spiritual meaning and importance. And an integrated approach to management planning and tourism product development will be essential.

It is much harder then for Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, despite being inscribed on the World Heritage List, to change existing tourist tracks and visitor expectations than it would be for a less well known place like Pashupatinath. An attraction that properly cultivates an integrated partnership from the earliest stage of its tourism product life cycle should find it easier to work through such issues than one in the mature stage of the life cycle, such as this particular case study.

Conclusions

Sacred places are not safe from tourists. Today, the tourist track is everywhere. Even those tourists who want to tread lightly may be doing harm to a culture, traditions and spirituality that the visitor neither shares nor understands.

Places need to be robust and well managed to cope with the extra stresses created by visitors - especially if they come in large numbers. Impacts on the fabric may be measurable and perhaps preventable. But what of the impacts on intangible values - on spiritual values. How resilient does a culture have to be to survive under the tourist microscope?

Uluru and Pashupatinath are such different places. Uluru is the spiritual place of the local Anangu people, while Pashupatinath is a place of spiritual pilgrimage for Hindus (and pilgrims are a special kind of visitor). For Australians, Uluru is a part of our secular 'spiritual' heart, embedded in powerful historical themes of the Centre, exploration and discovery, ‘The Rock’, Azaria, hand-back and more.

Each of these two places stands for the many other places that are challenged by a competition between spiritual needs and tourist demands. At Uluru, the history of tourism makes change difficult. Uluru - as Ayers Rock - is virtually a product of tourism. It is ‘the Rock, the climb, sunsets and sunrises’. Basically a good time in the outback. Changing this image will take time, determination, and coordinated effort involving the tourism industry. A start has been made.

For Pashupatinath, the biggest challenges are not yet tourism. Many other and more important problems need to be faced first. But, in fact, now is the critical time to set some limits, and avoid creation of a tourism product that is culturally unsustainable. If Pashupatinath is not to follow the Ayers Rock-Uluru track, tourist management is critical and is needed right now.

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[1] This paper uses the name Uluru out of respect for the Anangu. The name Ayers Rock is only used where needed to make a particular point or when quoting others.
[2] *Macquarie Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991, The Macquarie Library Ltd, Australia.
[3] By contrast, a religious pilgrim will have a specific goal and focus.
[4] For example, Pashupatinath; Mount Kailash (Tibet);
[5] To a 'traveller', a tourist is a consumer of shallow or packaged travel experiences. Travellers often disdain tourists and seek out the places that tourists don't go. Of course, this too has consequences.
[6] The Thorn Tree bulletin board (Lonely Planet website) demonstrates this well. A recent posting by someone advised to visit Brisbane while in Australia, resulted in many responses indicating which places any self-respecting traveller to Australia would visit, and which places no-one goes to (including Brisbane)!
[7] Hindu expert, Keith Dowman notes that even the term 'non-Hindu' can be caste-based with racial overtones and therefore not necessarily a religious one.
[8] Looking at recent postings on Thorn Tree, a bulletin board on the Lonely Planet web site, the top two places to visit in Australia are Uluru/Ayers Rock and the Great Barrier Reef, somewhat followed by North Queensland and, a new entry, the Great Ocean Road.
[9] The park is managed jointly by the Anangu and Parks Australia, now part of Environment Australia.
[10] NTTC is an agency of the Northern Territory Government.
[11] For example: Sahara Tours; AAT Kings; Uluru Experience; Australian Pacific; Anangu Tours; Northern Territory Adventure Tours (Darwin); V.I.P Travel Australia.

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