



HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	北海道におけるツーリズムの課題と可能性：先住民族の歴史・文化・現在に関するアクセス手段としてのツーリズムの観点から
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Relation	Symposium on Tourism and Landscape in the North. Tuesday, 1 November, 2011. Hokkaido University Conference Hall. 国際シンポジウム「北方のツーリズムと景観」. 2011年11月1日（火）. 北海道大学学術交流会館 小講堂. 札幌市.
Issue Date	2011-11-01
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/47369
Type	conference presentation
File Information	abstract_english_yamamura.pdf, abstract(English ver.)



Challenges and Potential of Tourism in Hokkaido From the Viewpoints of Tourism as a Means of Access to the History, Culture and Current Status of Indigenous People

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When we consider tourism in Hokkaido, we must not forget, as a fundamental premise, the general ignorance and indifference seen with previous tourism development in regard to the history, culture and current status of indigenous people. The government of Japan and the majority of its people were indifferent to indigenous issues, as manifested by the fact that it was not until 2008 that both houses of the Japanese Diet finally adopted a resolution urging the government to officially recognize the Ainu as an indigenous people as a change of direction from the assimilation policy implemented in the Meiji Period (1868 – 1912).

This indifference is apparent in the way Hokkaido is advertised as a travel destination and in guidebooks. The region is often promoted based on weighted images, such as that of *unspoiled nature* emphasizing how the natural environment there remains untouched by mankind, and that of *the frontier spirit*, which focuses only the history of land reclamation during and after the Meiji Period.

In contrast to the images presented by these descriptions, people have inhabited Hokkaido continuously since prehistoric times, and the area's culture has developed over thousands of years. The history of land reclamation there is no more than a single chapter in Hokkaido's history. Needless to say, the culture that predated the settlement of ethnic Japanese people – particularly Ainu culture – forms the basis of today's cultural tapestry in Hokkaido. Tourism promotion and related programs that intentionally emphasize the region's pioneering culture and ideals without understanding and respecting indigenous culture may distort its true history.

As defined in the International Cultural Tourism Charter (1999) of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), tourism is an economic activity that is among “the foremost vehicles for cultural exchange.” In other words, it is a means of making the significance of cultural heritage accessible to visitors as well as people in and outside host communities physically, intellectually and/or emotively.

Against this background, a number of issues relating to tourism in Hokkaido require immediate examination. These include the need to promote tourism activities featuring the direct involvement of indigenous people in managerial roles and consideration of the resources used – in short, the establishment of indigenous tourism. From the viewpoint of accessibility, this means creating, with the active involvement of indigenous people, a mechanism by which accurate information on the history, culture and current status of indigenous people is made widely accessible in a user-friendly manner.

An important consideration in developing this mechanism is the question of who will communicate information to whom, and how. In response, *who* should include the active involvement of indigenous people, the establishment of collaborative relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people, and the development of human resources; *whom* should include travelers, locals and indigenous people; and *how* should include the use of travel guide systems as well as information and

communications technology (ICT). Advances in computerization have enabled indigenous people to communicate information freely more than ever before, and this is considered essential in defining the way information will be shared in the future.

With these viewpoints in mind, the author and others have established heritage trails at several locations in Hokkaido, and have conducted verification tests to determine how indigenous people can take the initiative in heritage interpretation and the nature of systems designed to send and receive heritage information they can manage on a self-sustaining and continuous basis. The author outlines specific challenges and potential regarding the establishment of indigenous tourism as clarified through these activities, and hopes the presentation will help to further highlight issues that need to be addressed in connection with Hokkaido tourism.