



Conference Report: International Conference on Tourism ICOT) 2013, Limasol, Cyprus

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The International Conference on Tourism is an academic conference organised annually by the International Association for Tourism Policy. In 2013 the third conference was held from 5-8 June in Limassol, Cyprus at the Cyprus University of Technology (CUT). The focus was on “trends, impacts and policies on sustainable tourism development” and aimed for a stimulating exchange of ideas on how to achieve sustainable tourism. Papers presented ranged across spiritualism, economics, environmental and health impacts with the underlying theme of social, cultural and environmental sustainability. Abstracts were genuinely peer reviewed with most papers being at a reasonably high standard and these peer-reviewed proceedings are to be published. There were close to 150 participants from all ends of the Earth which made for interesting communication, even English to English!

Key note plenary sessions were held at the start of morning and afternoon sessions and the final session, with other papers being 15 minute presentations at concurrent sessions over the middle two days of the conference. The opening day included a walking field trip of old Limassol and beach front and the final day was an all day field trip that took us into the forested mountains of Cyprus. Indeed, a feature of the conference was the large number of field trips and especially the emphasis on religious tourism, with each field trip featuring at least one stop at a religious site. I now feel more familiar with the Greek orthodox religion than any other! The mountains, varied forests, beaches, sea, heritage and 30 degree

temperatures meant I became a keen promoter of Cyprus as a tourist destination. The strangeness of a divided island (‘occupied by illegal invaders’ we were frequently reminded or corrected) at the cross-roads of Europe and the Middle East, with 800,000 Russian tourists and over a million UK tourists each year only adds to the allure of the place for someone interested in tourism.

Dallen J. Timothy’s keynote speech on microstates, islands and sustainable tourism provided a stimulating opening that nicely set the scene for my later paper on disaster risk reduction and tourism in Tonga (Rennie et al. 2013). Other papers that will stay with me included a theoretical analysis of the concept of spiritual tourism, a spirited debate over whether tourism to the Pope-oriented World Youth Week in Sydney constituted a pilgrimage or some other form of tourism, and the health impacts on the porters of tourism treks to the summit of Kilimanjaro.

It did seem somewhat ironic to be presenting a paper on surf break protection (Rennie, 2013) in a popular island tourism destination where there are beaches but essentially no surf, but I appreciated the Conference organisers waiving the additional conference registration (they were charging for a second paper even by the one speaker!) in recognition of the costs of travelling from New Zealand.

Attendance at the conference was down on expectations and this was attributed in part to

the financial crisis and associated bad publicity that Cyprus experienced in early 2013. However, there was a wide range of friendly participants, with a number of high quality post graduate student papers. Their involvement as main session presenters is encouraged by the Association and was good to see. CUT is only seven years old and is still establishing its office and teaching facilities and associated technology, but the conference organisers were enthusiastic, affable and things generally ran smoothly with essentially minor technical hiccups. The 2104 ICOT conference is in Dalien, China, the first time it has left Europe, and I suspect that the ICOT reputation will continue to grow.

REFERENCES

Rennie, H.G. 2013 "Surf tourism, activism and science: From creating to protecting surf breaks in New Zealand" p. 89 in Andriotis, K. (ed.) Book of Abstracts of the International Conference on Tourism (ICOT 2013): Trends, Impacts and Policies on Sustainable Tourism Development Limassol, Cyprus: International Association for Tourism Policy. P.116

Rennie, H.G., Mahon R., Becken S. 2013 "Disaster Risk Reduction and the Tongan tourism supply sector: A business case for investment?" p. 59 in Andriotis, K. (ed.) Book of Abstracts of the International Conference on Tourism (ICOT 2013): Trends, Impacts and Policies on Sustainable Tourism Development Limassol, Cyprus: International Association for Tourism Policy. P.116.