

Cultural and Environmental Protection in a Remote Tourist Destination: The Norfolk Island Experience

Ian Kelly, Ian Kelly directed tourism courses at Monash and Swinburne Universities in Australia before retiring in 2000, and maintained involvement in an adjunct capacity at the University of South Australia. His interests include destination management and peace through tourism, iankelly34@bigpond.com

Abstract

The ability of tourism to contribute to harmonious relationships is threatened by negative impacts on the biophysical and cultural environments of destinations. It is therefore important that tourism is managed in ways which avoid these negative impacts. Norfolk Island lies in the South Pacific Ocean, 1600 km from Sydney and over 1000 km from Auckland. The resident culture stems from a decision to make it available in 1856 to the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers and their Tahitian wives, then living on Pitcairn Island. Extreme remoteness and insularity have played a strong part in the evolution of a unique culture which is now both supported and threatened by tourism. Efforts to maintain a degree of self-sufficiency are apparent and ecotourism is seen as one channel for raising awareness of the need to protect the biophysical environment. There are also issues relating to a perceived need to protect the Island culture while providing visitors with meaningful experiences, and other destination managers with similar problems may learn from the measures adopted.

Key words: remoteness, insularity, culture, environment, Bounty heritage, transportation

Introduction

A visiting historian wrote about the Norfolk Islanders:

There are two customs observed among them which strike strangers very forcibly, and cause them to be favorably impressed with the character of the islanders; one is their love for churchgoing – every person on the island attends divine service at least once on Sunday; most of them attend twice. The other is the reverential way in which at every meal they ask a blessing on the food they are about to partake of, and return thanks at the conclusion ... Drunkenness is unknown among them, and swearing is very rarely heard. Intercourse with other parts of the world is increasing, and it is to be regretted that such is the case, for with it, the amount of vice and sin is also increasing (Campbell, 1879).

Norfolk Island provides an illustrative example of how tourism can be managed to avoid or ameliorate the negative cultural and environmental impacts with which it is commonly associated. In 2004 the Island experienced its first murder since its days as a convict settlement. The victim was a 29-year-old Sydney woman. The police acquired

details of the 2091 Islanders and workers and the 690 tourists present at the time and the coroner's enquiry identified 16 'persons of interest.' In the media the community was described as traumatized by the suspicion, gossip, malice and threat to the 'island paradise' image which emerged during the investigation, and there was only partial relief when, two years later, the police charged a male New Zealander. The victim and her killer (convicted in 2007) were both temporarily employed in the tourism industry on the Island.

It is interesting to speculate on what Campbell might have written today. Norfolk Island lies in the South Pacific, 1600 km from Sydney and over 1000 km from Auckland, New Zealand/Aotearoa. It is a mere 5 by 8 kms (34 sq km) in extent. Although overall responsibility for the Island lies with the Australian Commonwealth Government, the 1800 permanent residents have their own government and considerable autonomy in matters of internal regulation. Remoteness and insularity have been major contributors to their unique culture, a culture which today is both maintained and threatened by tourism.

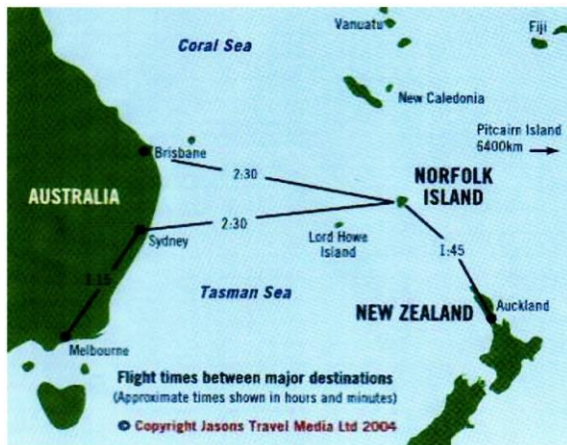


Figure 1: Location of Norfolk Island

Historical background

Norfolk Island is of volcanic origin and, with its smaller neighbor, Phillip Island, is an exposed section of the submarine Norfolk Ridge, running from New Caledonia to New Zealand/Aotearoa. Except for the gentle slopes around Kingston, the coastal areas are generally precipitous. The climate is subtropical, with average daily temperatures ranging from 16 to 22 °C. during the year. The dominant natural vegetation is the Norfolk Pine.

There is evidence of a previous Polynesian presence on the Island but it was unoccupied when discovered by Captain Cook in 1774 and before the establishment there of a penal settlement for British convicts from New South Wales in 1788. Following expressions of concern about the treatment of prisoners in the early 1850s, it was decided to abandon the penal settlement.

In the meantime, the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers and their Tahitian wives, who had lived on Pitcairn Island since 1790, were experiencing hardship as the island became less able to provide for the growing population. They petitioned Britain's Queen Victoria for assistance and, in what has been described as 'one of the most generous gestures in the Empire's history,' (travelonline, n.d) were granted Norfolk Island as their new home. After a voyage of over 6000 km, 194 Pitcairners landed on June 8, 1856, a day celebrated today as Bounty or Anniversary Day.

The then Governor-General of New South Wales, Sir William Denison, wrote

Captain Fremantle, who went down in the 'Juno' to ascertain the wishes of the Pitcairn Islanders as to their transfer to Norfolk Island, brings me a most wonderful account of their simplicity, single-mindedness, &c. We are going to put them on an island provided with cattle, which they have never seen, sheep, of which they know not the use, machinery, such as mills, &c., of the application of which they can have no conception. It would be a curious and interesting occupation to watch the development of their ideas under these very novel circumstances. I am afraid that their simplicity will wear away fast under the operation of the new influences brought to bear upon them. I have, however, done my best to isolate them, by directing the officers who are going down in charge of the vessel, and who will allocate them in their individual allotments, to divide the whole island (which contains about 10,000 acres) among the families, with the exception of about 500 acres for public purposes, and 200 acres for a church and schools; so as to leave no room for other settlers (Bloodless Genocide, n.d).

After 18 months, some members of one family chose to return to Pitcairn Island. Links with their namesakes on Norfolk have been maintained. For those who settled on Norfolk, adaptation involved overcoming unfamiliarity with, in addition to cattle and sheep, horses, large stone buildings, lavatories, wheeled vehicles, and new fruits and vegetables. However, almost half of the resident community today is descended from the *Bounty* mutineers, with certain surnames so common that the telephone directory has resorted to the use of nicknames such as 'Cane Toad', 'Kik Kik' and 'Snoop.' (Wikipedia, accessed 2008).

Another formative influence in the Island's heritage was the Melanesian Mission, established in 1866. By 1899 the Mission had 210 scholars with a staff of European and Melanesian missionaries. It was moved to the Solomon Islands in 1920, but St Barnabas Chapel, completed in 1880, is still in use. It is noted for its carved and inlaid pews, stained glass windows, organ, marble pavement, reredos, tapestry, lamps, marble font and lectern, all donated by church members, friends and relatives. The majority of residents are Protestant Christian (51.9%) but there are also Roman Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist adherents. Religious observance is important for most Islanders, especially among the older generations. In addition to this, the Island's people are noted now for

their culture of independence, communality and hospitality, and the 'Norfuk' dialect, derived from an amalgamation of 18th century English and Tahitian.

The Islanders are deeply appreciative and protective of the environment in which they live, but limited resources and remoteness have combined to create difficulties in maintaining the desired standard of living. Fishing is a major activity among the residents of the Island, and fish constitute an important element in the restaurant menus, but there is no commercial fishing industry. American whalers visited the Island for supplies during the late 19th century and a processing plant was built in 1956, but the scarcity of whales led to its closure in 1962.

Nonetheless, living heritage and the seagoing ancestry of the Islanders are apparent in the skills demonstrated when passengers and cargo are brought ashore in lighters from ships which must anchor offshore from Kingston or Cascade, dependent on the weather. News of anticipated off-loadings is broadcast on local radio and locals and visitors gather to witness them, rendering this traditional part of Norfolk working life a major tourist attraction. The absence of a sheltered harbor has led to the exclusion, until recently, of Norfolk Island from cruiseline itineraries. Almost all passenger access is by air, using the airport built by American forces during World War 2, and upgraded by the Australian Government in 1991.

For most of its history, the community was largely dependent on subsistence farming with some income from whaling and the export of Norfolk Pine and Kentia Palm seedlings. Efforts to maintain a degree of economic self-sufficiency are still seen in the farming sector. Beef cattle (earmarked to identify ownership) are allowed to freely roam on the Island and have right of way on the roads. Fresh vegetable imports are restricted to onions, ginger, garlic and potatoes, and most residents have gardens in which they grow much of their requirements.

The Island is rich in tourism resources - natural, historical and cultural. However, at present, the major tourist attractions are reflections of the Island's heritage.

Heritage and Tourism

The Islanders are fortunate in the duality of their heritage – the Bounty/Pitcairner tradition and the preceding penal settlement era for whose cruelties the residents bear no responsibility.

The best preserved evidence of the penal settlement is in Kingston, chosen originally because of relatively easy (but still difficult) access from the sea. The peaceful atmosphere today belies the harshness of the conditions in which the convicts and their guards lived. The largest buildings are the prisoners' barracks, notable for their impressive stone walls and dimensions. The pier was completed in 1851 by a team of Royal Engineers, whose office is now the Archaeological Museum. The convict-constructed buildings on Quality Row are still in use as homes, a museum, and government and administrative offices. Settlement commandants lived in what is now

Government House. The golf course occupies an area once devoted to soldiers' gardens and farmland. The headstones in the nearby cemetery can be linked to stories (some of doubtful authenticity) about notable individuals, injustice, mutiny, executions and untimely deaths. Treatment of the convicts was generally harsh in the extreme but there was a short period of enlightened administration (aimed at reformation rather than punishment) from 1840-44, under Captain Alexander Maconochie (Clay, 2001). An evening sound-and-light show gives visitors a taste of life in the penal colony.

The Pitcairn Settlers Village presents a picture of life in the days after 1856, a theatre show enacts an imaginary trial of the mutineers, and related artifacts may be seen in the Bounty Museum. Visitors can gain further insights into the Norfolk way of life by joining in the Bounty Progressive Dinners, held in private homes and restaurants.

As noted, the authenticity of some information provided to visitors is questioned (even by the tour guides), especially with respect to the presence of ghosts in a number of buildings and inconsistencies in reports of historical events. There is some debate over a perceived need to entertain visitors by favoring the more colorful and dramatic versions of these stories or adherence as closely as possible to the truth.

The Environment and Tourism

The biophysical character of the Island is marked by its geology (volcanic landforms), and its native flora and fauna, much of which is unique. The most visible vegetation element is the Norfolk Pine which, despite its size and trunk straightness and the favorable reports of early visitors, proved to be unsuitable for ship masts. The native flax also proved unsuitable for the manufacture of sails.

There are opportunities for nature-based activities such as photography, bird watching and bushwalking and a range of adventure experiences including rock climbing, abseiling, mountain biking, horse riding, sea kayaking, coastal cruising, scuba diving, fishing and snorkeling. Value is added by the use of local boat transport to provide access to the sea-cliff areas, although the conditions are not always hospitable. Whale watching is popular from June to October. Visitors, accompanied by a guide, can also visit uninhabited Phillip Island, 6 km to the south of Norfolk Island. Denuded by goats, it offers a colorful background for walks requiring a moderate degree of fitness.

It is recognized that increased tourist visitation contributes to environmental problems. The less obvious, but necessary, elements of tourist destination management include the provision of power and the disposal of waste, problems of particular significance in remote and island communities. On Norfolk Island, electricity is supplied by diesel generators located in a mini-power station, expensive in comparison with mainland Australia and creating a problem with barrel disposal. Wind farms are not supported because of the danger to bird life and possible noise pollution, and solar power is not yet regarded as sufficiently reliable. With some funding from the Australian Government, the waste management centre has a growing recycling and mulch-generating component, but

still disposes of the excess by burning and dumping in the ocean, a solution with which there is dissatisfaction on environmental grounds.

Maintenance measures

Norfolk Island is first and foremost the home of its residents.

This statement is placed at the beginning of every Norfolk Island Government development document to ensure that the principle is enshrined in planning for the future. It may be seen as reflecting a degree of possessiveness apparent in the years following settlement by the Bounty descendants when Campbell noted in 1879 that new residents could be accepted only by marrying a Norfolk woman or by the approval of two-thirds of literate residents, the Magistrate and Councillors, and the Governor of the Island. Even today, permission to take up residency requires sponsorship by an existing resident or (dependent on other conditions) purchase of a business, although temporary residency is granted to skilled workers. There is a history of resistance to efforts to 'Australianize' the Islanders, and although the claim has been rejected by the Australian Government, the Pitcairners regard themselves as the indigenous inhabitants, and like First Nations elsewhere, a distinctive people with their own language, culture, customs and traditions. Indeed, efforts to bring about a closer relationship with Australia have been described as 'bloodless genocide.'

The existing relative independence is jealously guarded. Passports are required for visitors, including Australians. The British, rather than the Australian national anthem is sung on formal occasions, often accompanied by the local anthem, 'Come Ye Blessed', which uses words from the New Testament (Matthew 25, p. 34-36, 40). The Island has its own flag, and a proposal to provide representation in the Australian Government by amalgamation with Canberra for electoral purposes was rejected in 1991.

There was concern in 2006 over another proposal in the Australian Parliament to remove anomalies pertaining to the Island's territorial status. Among other changes, this would have removed its taxation exemption (a major attraction to tourists) and imposed Australian laws pertaining to Medicare, use of seat belts in vehicles and random driver breath testing. However, the proposal was dropped because of the likely disruption to the Island economy.

Despite these concerns, the Island community does not demonstrate a tendency to isolationism and it is noted that, at any given time, about 10 percent of the resident population is absent from the Island. However, there is debate among the Islanders concerning dependence on tourism as the economic base and their desire to preserve the Island way of life. 90 percent of the labor force is employed directly or indirectly in tourism, which also provides an important market for the agricultural sector. It is also recognized that the provision of tourist experiences contributes to the maintenance of certain traditions and the knowledge of these among the resident population.

There is concern about the potential of tourism to impact negatively on the Island culture and certain forms of tourism are deemed unacceptable. For example, with its relative autonomy the Island could become 'the Las Vegas of the South Pacific' but the community has rejected the establishment of a casino and the introduction of gaming machines in hotels and clubs because of the cultural contamination perceived to be associated with these. A degree of compromise is apparent in that disapproval of dancing by some residents does not preclude participation by them in dance, jazz and rock bands.

Efforts are directed to achieving a synthesis in which tourism can contribute positively to both prosperity and maintenance of culture. The Bounty tradition and family orientation are kept alive in the annual celebration on "Bounty Day" or "Anniversary Day." Residents wear period costumes and participate in the arrival reenactment, a march to Government House and the Bounty Ball. The continuing popularity of hula dancing and certain foods reflects the Polynesian background. These activities are also enjoyed by tourists, as observers or participants.

Measures to counter the declining use of the Norfolk dialect include restrictions on the acceptance of new residents, its recognition by the Government as an official language, instruction in schools, the publication of dictionaries, the use of Norfolk in tourism brochures and the local television station, and the allocation of Norfolk names to a number of tourist attractions.

Museums also illustrate the synthesis of tourism and cultural preservation. Buildings in the former penal settlement now house displays of archaeological relics from the convict days, artifacts from the wreck of *HMS Sirius* (one of the ships which transported the first convicts to New South Wales), and representations of daily life after the arrival of the Bounty settlers. There is also a research centre in which books, photographs, newspapers and genealogical materials are made available. The Kingston settlement is one of 11 Australian sites nominated for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage register.

Emerging entrepreneurship is apparent in the recent development of coffee production and winegrowing, both business areas in which the tourism market is important. However, to protect the local operators, a ban has been imposed on the introduction of new businesses, and further development must depend on product diversification or attracting new markets.

Ecotourism is seen as a channel for attracting visitors while raising awareness of the need to protect the natural environment. 12 percent of the Island (about 650 hectares including Phillip Island) has been set aside as National Park land and a management plan, developed by the Norfolk Island Impact Management Parks Advisory Committee (NIIMPAC) after rigorous stakeholder consultation, is produced every seven years. There is financial and advisory assistance from the Australian Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) in conservation of native species and the construction of access roads. Problems addressed include rats (introduced about 800 years ago with the Polynesian migration), and feral cats and fowls. Green waste is mulched, composted and sold to householders and farmers as organic fertilizer and to help meet the cost of operating the

recycling plant. The Norfolk Island Sustainability Levy Act was passed in 2006, imposing a 1 percent levy on business turnover, to be invested in the ongoing sustainability of the Island society and economy.

Tourism is not, of course, the only factor contributing to change in the culture of the Islanders. In-migration, television, films and the Internet have the same influence as elsewhere and many young adults leave the Island to pursue a higher education, trade qualifications or employment, mainly in Australia and New Zealand. It has been suggested that tourism courses be included in senior high school to enhance professionalism and counter out-migration through facilitation of employability in the local industry. Limitations (which have been eased over the years) have been imposed on the number of visitors permitted in each year but the current target (37,000) is not being achieved and marketing is focused on increasing visitation and visitor spending. Tourism is almost totally dependent on airline services (which have from time to time been cut because of viability concerns) and efforts have been directed to establishing a greater degree of control over air access.

It is submitted that there are opportunities to benefit from tourism, encourage an outgoing perspective and preserve the Island culture through adoption of the National Heritage and Tourism Thematic Interpretation Framework (NHTTIF), an outcome from the 2004-2005 Australian Federal Department for the Environment and Heritage (DEH) project "Telling the Stories: Integrating Heritage More Effectively in Tourism." The aim is to develop an interpretation framework to be used in enhancing visitor experiences while encouraging attitudes favourable to conservation and protection of natural and cultural heritage in Australia. It is noted that heritage is valued at a number of levels, from global to site-specific.

The thematic interpretation approach uses the stories attached to heritage assets and integrates these into stories of the wider world. It is based on a belief that an understanding of historical significance will lead to appreciation of the value of heritage sites. The target audiences are those responsible for delivery of the stories (local government, destination organizations, planners, communities, developers, tour operators, managers and guides) and visitors, whose experience is enhanced by communication of a 'sense of place.' Delivery may be conducted through narratives, panels, signs, trails, guided tours, brochures, interactive displays, etc.

An important measure is the establishment of links with similar operations in other locations, such as Port Arthur in Tasmania. Elements held in common include the beauty of the setting (a natural focus), a convict history (and the contributory conditions) and recent involvement with tourism. There are links to natural history, 19th century Britain, Australian and Tasmanian development, and other penal institutions in Australia. Interpretation is provided through guided tours, signs, trails and a visitor interpretive centre. Visitors to Port Arthur are invited to draw a card which guides them through the experience of a real individual prisoner.

Implementation of the Framework to heritage tourism on Norfolk Island would focus on the following:

- The geological, natural and historical factors contributing to the presence and biophysical nature of the Island and the establishment of British ownership;
- The historical factors relating to transportation from Britain and Australia, and the choice of the Island as a penal settlement;
- The experience of life on the Island (for convicts, guards and administrators) as a penal settlement;
- The conditions which led to the occupation of Pitcairn Island and the resettlement of Pitcairn Islanders and others; and
- The uniqueness of the Island culture and its evolution.

Conclusion

The Norfolk Island experience suggests that the heritage and environment of a remote community may be more easily sustained than those of more centrally located and more accessible communities, and that this can be assisted through the implementation of a carefully managed program in which tourism plays a part. The elements of such a program would include the following:

1. Identification of the environmental and heritage attributes (eg, rural landscapes, local dialects) deemed valuable by the community;
2. Identification of desirable attributes which are under threat (eg, from migration, urbanization, modernization);
3. Purposeful development of policies and practices to sustain attributes under threat (eg, through education, preservation, commemoration, celebration);
4. Identification and rejection of forms of tourism deemed unacceptable by the community (eg, gaming, so-called 'sleaze' tourism);
5. Identification, protection and promotion of resources on which a tourism industry may be based (eg, recreational opportunities, historic sites, festivals);
6. Identification of carrying capacity limits and damage indicators (eg, habitat destruction, traffic accidents, crime rates);¹
7. Limitations on visitation levels, for the destination or locations within it, as required;
8. A focus on appropriate target markets (eg, families, honeymooners, nature tourists, heritage tourists);
9. Development and maintenance of tourism resources which strengthen and support heritage and environmental preservation (eg, artifacts, home-based activities, re-enactments);

¹ An excellent example of this approach is the Tourism Optimisation Management Model (TOMM) currently implemented on Kangaroo Island, South Australia, in a collaborative exercise involving, government agencies, industry and community organizations (www.tomm.info).

10. Diversification of the economic base to promote self-sufficiency and reduce dependence on tourism (eg, agriculture, exportable products, 'footloose' industries).

It is recognized that the discussion in this paper has focused primarily on the past. It is also recognized that tourism is dependent on hosting in that everyone who leaves home is on someone else's 'turf' and that there are, therefore, protocols and obligations inherent in the host-guest relationship. In this context, it is apparent that tourism resources of at least equal value to those identified above are present in the peaceful atmosphere; relaxed lifestyle, hospitality and friendly, welcoming community of Norfolk Island.

These attributes appeal strongly to leisure travelers seeking a therapeutic experience away from the stresses of modern life. With its unpolluted landscapes, clear air and a ready availability of fresh food, Norfolk Island is well equipped to play a part in the recognition of tourism as 'the wellbeing industry of the 21st century'.

References

Most of the information for this paper was generated by fieldwork, observation and conversations with members of the Norfolk Island community and members of the tourism authority, between 2006 and 2009. However, reference was also made to the following:

- Anon. (nd). *Bloodless Genocide: A Political History of the Pitcairn People in Norfolk Island from 1856 to 1996*. Retrieved February 4, 2010, from www.pitcairners.org/bloodless_genocide2/html
- Campbell, J. *Norfolk Island and its Inhabitants*, Sydney, NSW: Joseph Cook. Retrieved November 27, 2009, from http://anglicanhistory.org/campbell_norfolk1879.html
- Clay, J. (2001). *Maconochie's Experiment: How one man's extraordinary vision saved transported convicts from degradation and despair*, London: Murray.
- Ellyard, P. (2004). Planning for Sustainably Prosperous Rural Communities. In I. Kelly (Ed.), *Australian Regional Tourism Handbook: Industry Solutions 2004*. (pp.66-74) Lismore, NSW: Australian Centre for Regional Tourism Research, (www.crtr.com.au)
- Hoare, M. (1991). *Rambler's Guide to Norfolk Island*, Norfolk Island: Photopress International.
- James, J. (2007). Developing a National Thematic Interpretation Framework to Integrate Heritage More Effectively in Tourism, in *To the City and Beyond*, Proceedings of the CAUTHE Conference, Melbourne, February 6-9, CD-ROM.
- Kelly, I. (2007). Addressing the tensions in university tourism education and research, in *To the City and Beyond*, Proceedings of the CAUTHE Conference, Melbourne, February 6-9, CD-ROM.
- McNicoll, D.D. (2007). Punishing heritage. *Weekend Australian*, Jan 13-14, pp.3.
- Travelonline. (nd). *Pitcairn to Norfolk*. Retrieved November 27, 2009, from www.discovernorfolkisland.com/norfolk/pitcairn.html

Wikipedia. (nd). *Norfolk Island*. Retrieved February 20, 2010, from
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norfolk_Island.