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Tourisms' *Tristes Tropiques* II: Cultural Landscapes

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Abstract

In this second special issue on "Tourisms' *Tristes Tropiques"* we explore "Cultural Landscapes" socio-culturally and ecologically to show how they are intertwined with historical, colonial, and neocolonial aspects of tourism. The anthropology of tourism and critical tourism studies recognize tourism as both an industry and a cultural phenomenon, and this dual approach provides a lens for exploring how cultural landscapes are created, transformed, activated, and morphed by tourism. In this Introduction, we discuss how such studies have contributed to a nuanced and careful understanding of tourism's effects on cultural landscapes. The title of this special issue pays homage to Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, a memoir that, in many ways, anticipated the subfields explored here. Although *Tristes Tropiques* remains a controversial text, on its publication in 1955, it presented an intrepid indictment of racism and colonialism, and of travellers whose very act of mobility contributes to both. In this second issue, we venture across a range of tropical landscapes, from South America and Northern Australia to the Seychelles and the Andaman Islands, through India, Southeast Asia, and finally to tropical Africa. The contributors examine how tourism shapes and is shaped by cultures, ecologies, heritage, and history. Their analyses reveal cultural landscapes that are not merely scenic backdrops but rich spaces that local people engage with to counter the touristic forces of commodification and inequality. This second part of the double special issue on "Tourisms' *Tristes Tropiques*" complements the analysis established in the first issue on the subtheme of "Literary Travels," and furthers that analytical journey.

Keywords: tropical tourism, tristes tropiques, cultural landscapes, critical tourism studies, anthropology of tourism, colonialism, neocolonialism

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The world began without the human race and it will end without it.
—Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* 1961, p.397

Introduction

If you look up at the sky in any region of the tropics, you are likely to see a frigatebird (Fregatidae). Frigatebirds soar across all the tropical oceans. Because they cannot swim or dive, they stay aloft for weeks in search of food to steal from other birds, in mid-air. Several species of these beautiful "pirates of the sea" are endangered due to climate change, habitat loss, and resource over-exploitation caused, among other reasons, by unscrupulous tourism development.

Frigatebirds are but one emblematic example of the tropics' rich biodiversity as well as its fragility. They are also what the eminent French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss called "good to contemplate." For the anthropologist, birds and other species in nature were chosen by cultures worldwide as subjects of myths and totems because of their abundant symbolic and mediating qualities. This second issue of "Tourisms' *Tristes Tropiques"* recognizes Lévi-Strauss' vast analytical concepts, tracing the intersections of tourism's cultural, ecological, and social imprint across the tropics. We have subtitled this issue "Cultural Landscapes."

The anthropology of tourism and critical tourism studies understand tourism as both an industry and a cultural phenomenon. This dual approach provides a powerful lens for exploring how cultural landscapes are created, transformed, activated, and morphed by tourism. In what follows, we offer a brief discussion of how the anthropology of tourism and critical tourism studies have contributed to a nuanced and careful understanding of tourism's effects on cultural landscapes. But first, let us return to *Tristes Tropiques*, a memoir that, in many ways, anticipated these subfields.

Tristes Tropiques

Tristes Tropiques is an influential book for several reasons, including its ability to inspire reflection and a broader interpretation of the modern world. For anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1988), the memoir is, in effect, a series of overlapping texts: a travel book, no doubt, but also an ethnographic account, a philosophical reflection, a reformist treatise, and a literary text. As we noted in our introduction to Special Issue I, *Tristes Tropiques* offers a provoking representation of writing by anthropologists "with their 'other hand', not the one used for their academic works" (Kubica, 2014, p. 603). It also offers an early discussion of the largely uniform way in which most anthropologists engaged with tourism for decades.

Today, some anthropologists would consider *Tristes Tropiques* a Eurocentric illustration of exoticized tropical cultures. Scholars who criticize the book argue that, despite the author's anti-colonial mission, Lévi-Strauss's gaze remains privileged and exoticizing (Kubica, 2014, p. 618). Cases in point are his references to India and Pakistan as countries encountering an "overpopulation explosion," or their failure to accept "others as others" (Chowdhury, 2023, p. 107). When it was published in 1955, however, it represented a bold and unmistakable indictment of colonialism. In the book, Lévi-Strauss was critical of racism and colonialism, and of travellers whose very act of mobility contributes to both. He was critical of the western gaze *and* hand, which have transformed the tropics beyond recognition. Writer Susan Sontag (1994) said of the tropics studied by Leví-Strauss that they are not merely sad, "they are in agony" (Sontag, 1994, p. 80).

In the memoir, Lévi-Strauss wondered, with puzzlement, about some westerners' interest in the travels of other westerners to faraway regions of the planet. One can almost hear him sighing,

> Amazonia, Africa, and Tibet have invaded all our bookstalls. Travel-books, expeditionary records, and photograph-albums abound; and as they are written or compiled with an eye mainly for effect the reader has no means of estimating their value…. For what do these books, these lectures, amount to? A luggage-list, a story or two about the misdemeanours of the ship's dog, and a few scraps of information." (1961, pp. 17-18)

Lévi-Strauss saw traveling and travellers (and, by extension, tourists) as either a menace or irrelevant. While he referred in neutral terms to several sixteenth-century European travellers' accounts—at times complementing them with his own fieldwork observations and at times revising their findings—he was critical of twentieth-century travellers who pretended to understand cultures with which they spent very little time; he was also critical of the effect these travellers had on the cultures they visited.

This vision of travellers reflected the prevailing anthropological norm at the time of *Tristes Tropiques'* publication, even though mobility in all its forms was central to the discipline. The anthropology of tourism and travel emerged as legitimate subjects of inquiry only relatively recently: in Europe during the 1930s and in the US by the 1960s. Anthropologists William Douglass and J. Lacy remind us that one reason for this neglect is the unease anthropologists felt about engaging with the tourism industry and, perhaps more acutely, about being mistaken for tourists or travellers. In part, this is derived from the inherent tension between the travel industry and the anthropological enterprise; travel writing aims to exoticize its subject while anthropology seeks to do the opposite, to make it familiar (2005, pp. 119-120).

Likewise, anthropologists resented being associated with tourists and dismissed them as superficial pleasure-seekers, unconstrained by ethical obligations and uninterested in the communities they visited (Crick, 1995). Tourism was deemed too trivial for serious intellectual or ethnographic engagement (Nuñez, 1977).

Despite this troubled start, the field of tourism studies and its relationship to anthropology has grown tremendously since the 1970s. Anthropological scholarship on tourism has not only contributed significantly to tourism studies but has also expanded exponentially over the years (Guerrón Montero, 2012; Leite & Graburn, 2009; Nash, 1996; Nogués-Pedregal, 2019). Anthropologists have come to recognize tourism as a rich context for examining questions related to political economy, social change and development, natural resource management, and cultural identity, among other themes (Guerrón Montero, 2018). Following this line of thought, anthropologist Edward Bruner argued twenty years ago that "in this contemporary world, not only has tourism become an object of ethnography, but ethnography is not complete unless it takes account of tourists" (2005, p.16).

In the 21st century, there is a general recognition that anthropology has become a richer discipline because of its broadened scope to encompass tourism, and—conversely—that its contributions to critical tourism studies have been substantial. Critical tourism studies emerged in 2005 as an interdisciplinary network of international scholars proposing an alternative reading of tourism, one centred on systems.[1] The founders of this paradigm (Ateljevic et al., 2005; Ateljevic et al., 2007; Lew et al., 2004; Hall, 2004; Hollinshead & Jamal, 2007; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004; Tribe, 2005, 2006; Wilson et al., 2008) call on scholars to resist narrow conceptualizations in their fields and to foreground social change in and through tourism practice, research, and education. Key characteristics of critical tourism studies include a postmodern and post-disciplinary approach grounded in an academy of hope, and a critical-realist, pragmatic approach that centres on the structural roots of oppression and the material forces that sustain it (Fullagar & Wilson, 2012, p. 2).

Tristes Tropiques has been admired and criticized and remains polemical in the 21st century. Our particular interest here is with the entryway this memoir offers for exploring the cultural and ecological effects of tourism in the tropics.

A Tropics of Tourism

Anthropological work has been substantial in understanding how the tourism industry "tempered" the tropics to make them suitable for Western tourists. It has helped us

[1] Systems, in this context, are interrelated entities in which hosts, guests, the tourism industry, and scholars collaborate to construct meaning-making narratives about destinations, groups, cultures, and nation-states.

understand that—starting in the late 19th century—"warm weather, tropical fruits, and dark peoples were viewed as healthful and reinvigorating remedies for cold temperatures. Pursuing these remedies (consuming the weather, the fruits, the peoples, or getting a tan) through leisurely trips to presumably pristine places became a welcome option for the wealthy and the middle class" (Guerrón Montero 2018, p. 250).

The above quote reveals the "white man's" tropics and alludes to how tropical tourism prospers from a longer colonial history involving ways of seeing landscapes and cultures. In the previous issue of "Tourisms' Tristes Tropiques," which concentrated on "Literary Travels," we outlined this history, articulating how the postmodern concept of "orientalism" was reconceptualized under the specific conditions of the tropics to form the notion of "tropicality". It is worth briefly rearticulating tropicality again here, with a view towards its relation with this issue's subtheme of "Cultural Landscapes."

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) investigated how colonial ways of seeing West Asian, Northern African, and South Asian cultures were created through literary, artistic, historical, and political discourses. These discourses reinforced colonial ideologies by depicting the Orient as mysterious and exotic, yet always inferior. Said's aim was to show how power works through representation. Thus, rather than just a physical geographic region, the Orient was a colonial imaginary. Furthermore, it was created to justify domination (Lundberg & Guerrón Montero, 2026).

Adapting Said's critique to the tropics, David Arnold proposed the concept of "tropicality". Just as the Orient was an "imaginative geography", Arnold argues that the tropics likewise need to be understood as a space both conceptual and physical—the Other of the northern temperate zone (1995, pp. 141-142). As discourse became an instrument for justifying colonial power through orientalism, the same ideological effects were at work in tropicality. However, beyond cultural histories and aesthetics, the notion of tropicality was closely entwined with climatic and natural landscapes through analyses of scientific and natural-history discourses alongside cultural observations. This tropical nature-culture are represented as either sublime or degenerate but invariably needing western supervision and cultivation (Lundberg & Guerrón Montero, 2026, p. 5; see also Lundberg et al., 2022).

Similar to how colonialism cast the tropics as exotic yet inferior and in need of Anglo-European intervention, tourism casts the tropics in a neocolonial light as available to tourists and economically dependent upon them. As we previously noted, "the same tropical areas that were once colonized for exploitation are now exploited through tourism" (Lundberg & Guerrón Montero, 2026, p. 6).

Today, ways of seeing the Other, via orientalism and tropicality, are recycled through the "tourist gaze" (Urry, 1990).[2] As John Urry theorizes, touristic ways of seeing are shaped by media images, which turn landscapes and cultures into consumable products. The imagery at work in tourism discourses renders tropical landscapes and cultures as experiences to be bought. As with the colonial gaze, the tourist gaze naturalizes inequality along with consumption (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 14). Thus, tropical tourism must be understood as neocolonialist, rather than a neutral economic activity. Infrastructures of mobility, economies of racialized labour, and representations of paradisical landscapes and cultural exoticism are an extension of colonialism.

The tropics have become the temperate world's leisure zone and its "sacrifice zone" (Samal & Samantaray 2026). The tropics are "marketed for their beauty, climate, and exoticism, while also serving as sites where inequalities of mobility, labor, and ecology are starkly exposed" (2026, p. 138). Tourism is entwined with colonial histories that transformed the tropics, where infrastructures (political to structural) laid the groundwork for travel and tourism. These seaways and airways were never natural or neutral; rather, they were embroiled in "power geometries" (Massey, 1994) that dictated who could move and consume, and who would stay and serve. From steamships to airlines, new routes of affluence were opened between the temperate west and the tropical other. Travel was, and is, racial and geopolitical, and has never been simply technological (Scott, 2022; Samal & Samantaray, 2026).

Thus, tourism is not a neutral industry. Its existence is premised on the infrastructures of colonial landscapes and cultural depictions that sustain racial hierarchies. In the past, "these imaginaries produced empires; today they form empires of tourism" (Lundberg & Guerrón Montero, 2026, p. 6).

Cultural Landscapes

Landscapes must be recognized as cultural rather than purely natural (Lundberg et al., 2022). Such portrayals of cultural landscapes were part of a visual "technology of empire" and a politics of power (Jordan, 2022, p. 261), and in the neocolonial present, cultural landscapes are increasingly created in the imagery of touristic desires.

As Ashton Simamai (2022) argues, interpretations of the cultural landscapes of the tropics continue to be prescribed by western philosophies. They are a legacy of colonialism and neocolonial politics that determine what constitutes knowledge and the global flows of knowledge. These knowledge flows mirror those of tourism—from temperate climates to the tropics.

[2] Or what, during colonial times, David Arnold referred to as "the tropics of the traveling gaze" (2006).

The notion of cultural landscape is essentially Anglo-European and "focuses on human exceptionalism and domination of the land, where land is always—whether for conservation or exploitation—considered as property that can be sold or bought and used for the benefit of humans" (Sinamai, 2022, p. 52). This understanding of landscape is premised on the conquering of land to transform it into a space for human enjoyment, including through touristic pleasure. Extremely visual (think of all those paintings of panoramic vistas), it is also viewed through an optics of economics. Thus, although landscapes may at times be experienced as sublime or awe-inspiring, land is ultimately conceived as a resource to be shaped to suit humans (Sinamai, 2022).

It is this same western conception that underpins UNESCO definitions of cultural landscapes (WHC UNESCO, 2026). Although the World Heritage Convention recognizes and protects 'cultural landscapes', this came only in the wake of growing dissent from tropical countries, which argued that the separation of culture and landscape was in flagrant disregard for important aspects of cultural heritage. Nevertheless, within the World Heritage definition, 'cultural landscape' is still regarded as an inanimate 'thing' to be overseen by humans. This view goes against many tropical and Indigenous people's understandings in which landscape is itself cultural: it is venerated, and it shapes people's ideas, their languages, and their philosophies. In short, landscape shapes culture rather than human culture shaping landscape (Sinamai, 2022, pp. 53-54).

The western human-centric and ocular-centric image of landscape neuters the ability to experience the sensorial landscape. Sinamai outlines how landscapes are perceived in Zimbabwe's tropical Africa and how this perception can enrich mainstream archaeology, anthropology, and cultural heritage studies—and, we contend, the anthropology of tourism and critical tourism studies. He explains that, in his Karanga/Shona culture, landscapes have a memory of their own, and he advocates for the inclusion of local knowledge and Indigenous systems to foster a more holistic and decolonial understanding of cultural landscapes (Sinamai, 2022; Sinamai in Lundberg et al., 2023).

Thus, cultural landscapes, in their specificities of tropical geological formations and weather systems, and their adaptations of niche plants and biogeographic animal species, need to be enriched by local knowledge systems and Indigenous understandings. This can only be achieved if tourism systemically incorporates local expertise, and travel slows down to allow for deeper contemplation.

"Good to Contemplate"

In contrast to the ubiquitous tropic frigatebirds, the Brazilian Japim bird, or Yellow-rumped Cacique (*Cacicus cela*), can only be found in the South American tropics. Lévi-Strauss was fascinated by the birds' brilliant songs and their ability to mimic over 20 species and noises. He was as fascinated with the abilities of the Tupi-Kawahib's Chief, Taperahi, who, like the most accomplished Japim, could perform a one-man musical comedy, seamlessly switching between nearly a dozen different animal characters (1961, p. 354). *Tristes Tropiques* is as much about Lévi-Strauss's critical views on travel and tourism as it is about his admiration for Indigenous peoples' profound knowledge of the environments in which they lived.

Recurrent in his thinking is his urgent call to recognize the adverse effects of globalization and industrialization, which he believed were eroding natural and cultural resources and flattening the globe. Lévi-Strauss was "concerned about a planet that was shrinking, not quantitatively but qualitatively—in terms of ways of being in the world" (Chowdhury 2023, p. 112). In *Tristes Tropiques,* he lamented,

> A proliferating and overexcited civilization has broken the silence of the seas once and for all. The perfumes of the tropics and the pristine freshness of human beings have been corrupted by a busyness with dubious implications, which mortifies our desires and dooms us to acquire only contaminated memories (1976, p. 43).

The contributions in this special issue explore the tensions between cultures and environments, examining how tourism shapes and is shaped by the diverse landscapes and ecologies of tropical regions.

A Cartography of Cultural Landscapes

The articles collected in this special issue demonstrate how tourisms' tristes tropiques manifest in particular Cultural Landscapes. The articles offer various insights into the sad tropics of tourism through analyses from material phenomenology, wildlife conservation and tourism development, critical analyses of commodification and branding, digital ethnography, algorithmic analysis and semiotics, a look at paradise imaginaries via party beaches, wellness sanctuaries, and sex tourism, insights from cultural tourism and performativity, culinary tourism, and heritage tourism, and an appraisal of tourism and modernization theory.

The collection offers rich examples of tourisms' cultural landscapes from the dry tropics of Brazil and Northern Australia to Komodo Island in Indonesia, over to the wet tropical Indigenous and digital landscapes of the Andaman Islands, the Seychelles,

and the Meghalaya district in India, before continuing to India's coastal regions of Goa and Kerala, then onwards to Southeast Asia's Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia, until finally arriving in The Gambia, Africa.

Dry Tropics

We begin in the "dry tropics" of Brazil and Northern Australia with Eduardo de la Fuente's "Surrendering to the Tropics: *Tristes Tropiques* as Antidote to Tourism's Bland Place Narratives." De la Fuente argues that tropical environments are far more varied than they are often given credit for, and that flattening them into a handful of stock images strips these places of their richness and complexity. De la Fuente notes, "There has always been an underlying materiality to the tropics. However, the imperial and tourist 'gazes' have tended to push the appreciation of tropical materialities towards some generic ideal of 'tropicality'" (de la Fuente, this issue). In response to these generalizations, the article draws on Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*. De la Fuente looks closely at how *Tristes Tropiques* captures the contrast between the "wet" and "dry" tropics of Brazil, quietly unsettling the neat division between the two. From there, the article introduces the concept of "surrendering to the tropics," weaving together Lévi-Strauss's observations with ideas from the lesser-known sociologist Kurt H. Wolff. In his book *Surrender and Catch*, Wolff cites *Tristes Tropiques* and its blend of confessional-style storytelling with a grounded, sensory attention to the physical world, as an early example of what he calls "total involvement": a state in which time, place, and lived experience blur into a fresh way of seeing. The article then turns to the author's own experience of surrendering to the dry tropics of North Queensland, Australia, exploring how local organizations either reflect the landscape's earthy, sun-scorched character with honesty or erase it in favour of a more polished tourist image. The article closes by drawing on Denis Cosgrove's idea of the tropics as a site of "encounter," suggesting that narrating these landscapes—wet or dry—carries a deeper existential and philosophical weight.

Continuing further north into the dry tropics region of Komodo Island in Indonesia, Rahmat Saehu, Uus Faizal Firdaussy, Yusuf Maulana and Rahmat Saleh discuss the somewhat contradictory position of the Komodo National Park as both a UNESCO World Heritage Site sheltering one of the world's most iconic endangered species, the Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*), and a major draw for tourists flocking to the Labuan Bajo region of Indonesia. In "Living with Komodo Dragons: Wildlife Conservation and Tourism Development in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia," the authors note that these two roles do not sit together easily. On the one hand, tourism brings in money that funds conservation efforts and supports local economies. On the other, it risks turning wildlife and wild places into products for consumption, with real consequences for the fragile dry-tropics ecosystem. The authors stress that inscribing the Komodo dragon as heritage "has produced commodification practices that treat

wildlife as economic assets that can provide financial support for conservation, but also introduce significant ecological risks" (Saehu et al., this issue). One of the study's key findings is that local people's longstanding belief in the Komodo dragon as an ancestral relative has served as a form of conservation alongside official government policy. Yet as tourism has expanded, so too has the pressure to package and sell the natural world.

Digital Ethnographies and Analyses

Indigenous peoples are the focus of Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi's article, "Jarawa as Spectacle 2.0: Tropical Tourism's Algorithmic 'Human Safari' in the Andaman Islands." Banning tourists from the Andaman Trunk Road and cordoning off protected zones may have officially ended the so-called "human safaris" targeting the Jarawa people, but the voyeuristic impulse did not disappear; it simply moved online. According to Dwivedi, the spectacle has now morphed into an algorithmic safari: "an assemblage of YouTube vlogs, social media groups, and WhatsApp/Telegram networks that help tourists plan and coordinate physical roadside encounters…while skirting the letter of the law" (Dwivedi, this issue). The article follows this migration into the digital ecosystem of tourism platforms in the Andaman Islands, drawing on legal documents, media investigations, and a systematic audit of publicly accessible content. The audit reveals that recommendation algorithms and engagement-driven metrics continue to circulate images of the Jarawa alongside thinly veiled "how-to" cues, while stripping away almost any legal or ethical context that might give a prospective visitor pause. Telegram groups and YouTube channels do the rest, turning idle curiosity into concrete travel plans and effectively undermining enforcement efforts on the ground. The result is a colonial mode of looking that has been monetized and newly made accessible to a post-millennial audience. The article argues that closing the gap between Indigenous territorial protections and the logic of platform visibility requires not only state regulations, but, more forcefully, platform accountability and consent frameworks led by the communities most at risk.

Keeping with the theme of digital analysis, Thomas Greg Sophola and Udaya Kumar Dharmalingam address how Seychelles markets itself to the world as the definitive tropical island paradise, but the visual language behind that brand tends to picture a place without people, conjuring a fantasy of pristine escape that edges uncomfortably close to a neocolonial erasure of the communities who actually live there. "A Semiotic Critique of Neocolonial Visual Identity Branding in Seychelles Tourism" approaches that problem through semiotics, examining how four distinct groups—residents, tourists, designers, and a general audience—read the same official Seychelles tourism poster drawn from the country's 2022 Brand Guidelines. The analysis moves across the image's constituent parts: its logo, typography, colour palette, photography, and the relationship between people and nature in the frame. Unsurprisingly, color and

photography did the heaviest work, with greens and blues pulling viewers toward associations of environmental purity and untouched nature. The slogan "Another World" lodged itself in people's memory despite typography that made it harder to read than it needed to be. The divergences, however, are particularly interesting: tourists tended to read the absence of people as a marker of authenticity, while local residents noticed and felt that absence differently, wanting to see Seychellois culture and everyday life reflected back at them. The authors propose that "branding reinforces neocolonial tropes—framing destinations as pristine—while audiences simultaneously interpret and contest these representations, which often marginalise local cultural presence in favour of idealised natural landscapes" (this issue).

Building on digital ethnography and tourism branding, we travel to one of the wettest areas on Earth and its Indigenous landscapes. The article "Sacred Meaning and Tourism Branding in Khasi Festival Logos, Meghalaya, India" argues that across the tropics, tourism has long borrowed Indigenous symbols for their exotic appeal; however, these same spaces can also serve as platforms through which communities speak for themselves. In this article, Pascal Mario Kmenlang Pathaw and Udaya Kumar Dharmalingam examine this tension through the lens of three Khasi festivals in Meghalaya, Northeast India, looking closely at how the visual designs of festival logos carry Indigenous identities while straddling the line between sacred meaning and commercial pressure. Drawing on semiotic and iconological analysis alongside ethnographic interviews with designers and cultural knowledge-holders, the study decodes the symbolism embedded in the Monolith Festival, the Na Thymmei Festival, and the Tri Hills Ensemble Festival. Recurring motifs serve as carriers of ancestral knowledge, rendered in contemporary visual form. The risk, of course, is that once these symbols enter the market through branding and merchandise, they can be reduced to mere decoration. As the authors state, "This shifting context raises questions about how sacred value is preserved, how cultural continuity is supported, and what responsibilities arise in the visual communication of Indigenous identity" (this issue). Yet the findings resist a merely pessimistic reading: Indigenous festival branding also emerges as a site of cultural survival and reinvention, where communities actively shape how their heritage circulates rather than simply watching it be consumed. The article ultimately frames festival logos as a kind of negotiated space where the sacred and the commercial meet and, in doing so, advances broader conversations about decolonizing Indigenous design in the context of tourism.

Contesting Paradise

The next article, "Paradise Contested: Tropical Tourism, Eco-landscapes, and Cultural Resistance in Goa and Kerala," takes us to the wet tropics of the Coast of India, where Pankaj Vaishnav unpacks the gap between the "paradise" image attached to Goa and Kerala, two of India's most visited tropical regions. Goa has long been sold as a sun-soaked destination of beaches, parties, and festivals, while Kerala trades on its image as a place of spiritual retreat and unspoiled nature. Yet both are straining under the weight of environmental damage, cultural erosion, and growing local discontent. Drawing on Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, postcolonial theory, and the concept of tropicality, the article extends Edward Said's critique of the exotic gaze to tropical landscapes, asking how colonial ways of seeing have survived into the age of wellness brands and Instagram tourism. Vaishnav defines tropicality as foregrounding "how tropical regions are imagined as lush, timeless, and naturally abundant, while masking histories of extraction, dispossession, and ecological transformation" (this issue). In Goa, the costs of tropicality manifest as coastal erosion, waste, and fishing communities being pushed aside by leisure economies. In Kerala, backwater pollution, the sprawl of houseboats, and a commercialized Ayurveda industry hollow out the "God's Own Country" brand. By treating both regions as contested rather than idyllic, Vaishnav connects their experiences to broader global patterns, arguing that where tourism thrives on fantasies of tropical escape, questions of power, ecology, and justice are never far behind.

Sex tourism has a long history in the Philippines. In "Tryst Troppo: Sex, Tourism, and Relationships on a Philippine Beach," Rosemary Wiss focuses on the long, tangled story of migration, colonial dispossession, occupation, and contested settlement in the coastal village of Aplaya in Puerto Galera, Mindoro. The paradise on offer today was built atop all of that. It was also constructed alongside something the brochures leave out: Aplaya is equally well known for its go-go bar scene, a red-light district that sits just beyond the beach. Many of the foreign men who go there speak openly about their desire for a kind of utopian escape, imagined as an empty tropical space, populated only by welcoming locals and compliant women. The Philippines, in this telling, becomes a place where female sexuality is treated as part of the natural landscape, an ambient abundance that comes with the territory. Threaded through these desires is a deeper nostalgia, a longing, rooted in the west's relationship with its own sense of loss, for a world that feels unmediated and free. Wiss makes clear that Aplaya's identity as paradise is not simply discovered but actively produced, assembled from particular stories about connection and escape that naturalize what are, in fact, very specific arrangements of power. In parallel, the author makes a case for "the value of nuanced ethnographic accounts in critical discussions of tourism" as "ethnography can reveal the complexity of the politico-cultural landscape of tourism, including sex tourism" (Wiss, this issue) in ways that no other methodology can.

Cultural, Culinary, and Heritage Tourisms

Emphasizing performativity and the ethnic communities of Vietnam, Tran Quoc Viet, Bui Van Tuan, and Le Thi Thu Huong draw on ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2022 and 2024 across H'mong, Muong, and Kinh communities to explore how identity is shaped and staged for outside consumption, while still being held within limits that communities set for themselves. "Bounded Performances: Cultural Tourism and Negotiated Authenticity in Northern Vietnam" examines how practices that once carried sacred weight, such as bride-taking rituals, stilt-house hospitality, Quan Họ singing, or Hầu Đồng trance, have been recast as performances and made visible on tourism's terms. The authors resist reading this as a straightforward cultural loss. Instead, they argue that this kind of bounded, partial exposure reflects a survival logic: communities reveal enough to participate in tourism economies while protecting the core of what gives meaning to their traditions. Methodologically, the study pairs affective ethnography with media analysis, paying close attention to how the sensory textures of tropical environments shape the way performances are experienced and mediated. They note, "the conversion of ritual into spectacle becomes most visible in tropical climates where material conditions—heat, light, and moisture—shape how performances are sensed and valued" (Viet et al., this issue). The conceptual contribution is a framework that understands performance as ethical endurance: a way of remaining oneself while carefully, on one's own terms, learning how to be watched.

Culinary tourism as an affective practice in urban spaces is addressed in the photo essay "Pulling Warmth: *Teh Tarik* and Everyday Life in Malaysia's Culinary Tourism." Eka Yusup, Reddy Anggara, and Lukmanul Hakim explore pulled tea, *teh tarik*, which is as much a ritual as a drink, as a window into the everyday textures of social life in the tropics. The study "traces how the movements of pulling tea, hot steam, shared tables, and the presence of different cultural backgrounds form a spontaneous but repetitive affective bond" (Yusup et al., this issue). The essay approaches the practice as a form of embodied communication: something that happens in the pour, the wait, the heat, the noise, and the simple fact of sitting near other people. Drawing on visual ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2024 and 2025 across Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, the photographs hone in on urban Malaysia in order to capture moments of preparation and pause, of people gathered in kopitiams, at street stalls, in markets, and in open urban spaces. The images reveal that *teh tarik* mediates encounters between locals, migrants, and tourists, creating a shared atmosphere in which different identities can occupy the same space without friction or formal negotiation. There is no spectacle here, no curated experience—just intimacy, repetition, and the understated rhythm of a drink being made and shared. In that ordinariness lies the argument that culinary heritage in the tropics often does its most

meaningful work through habit, atmosphere, and the accumulated weight of small, repeated moments.

Heritage tourism and street art are discussed in Mohd Hasfarisham Abd Halim, Mokhtar Saidin, and Asyaari Muhamad's article, "Street Art as Tropical Heritage in Semeling: Emplacing Rural Tourism in Kuala Muda District, Malaysia." For Halim et al., "street art is not merely imagery, but also involves urban life with its atmospheric, spatial, sensorial, and affective experiences" (this issue). Street art has become one of Malaysia's more unexpected heritage tourism assets, a form of public creativity that adorns urban spaces while drawing visitors in. Much of it leans deliberately into its tropical setting, weaving in local flora and fauna alongside symbols drawn from Malay and other ethnic traditions, rendered in bold, saturated colours that make the heat and lushness of the environment feel tangible. In Semeling, a small town in the Kuala Muda District of Kedah in northwestern Malaysia, this visual language takes on a distinctly local character, blending history, nature, and culture with the occasional nod to popular culture and internet memes. What sets Semeling apart, though, is not its art but its obscurity. Unlike better-known towns further south on the Peninsula, it attracts very few visitors. That gap between what the town offers and how little attention it receives is precisely what makes it interesting. Its street art has real potential to put Semeling on the heritage tourism map, inviting a form of cultural engagement that goes beyond the well-worn trail. Crucially, the art reinforces the town's own sense of place, grounding residents in their history and environment. In that regard, it points toward a model of heritage tourism that strengthens rather than unsettles the communities it grows from.

Tourism and Modernization

Traveling further into examinations of heritage tourism, Ambali Mutiu Kolawole, Matthias Akaniyene Francis, Sheriff Sillah, and Lamin Ceesay focus on tourist crafts and markets in "Tourism, Modernisation and Cultural Loss at the Brikama Craft Market in The Gambia, Africa." The Brikama Craft Market offers a striking contemporary echo of what Lévi-Strauss mourned in *Tristes Tropiques*: a place that once hummed with genuine cultural life, now undone by the very forces that claim to improve it. A recent state-led relocation of the market to a purpose-built, modern complex designed to appeal to international visitors has had the opposite effect to the one intended. In Kolawole et al.'s perspective, "the market's relocation did not merely alter the physical coordinates of commerce; it accelerated the conversion of a dynamic cultural institution into a melancholic landscape in which authenticity is staged rather than lived, and economic promise masks cultural erosion" (this issue). This Gambian case study, built on qualitative interviews with market stakeholders, sits within a much larger pattern: the global entanglement of tourism and modernisation keeps producing new "tristes tropiques," places where economic progress and the tourist gaze arrive

together, and cultural loss follows close behind. What emerges from this study is a case for development that takes culture seriously. Despite everything, the Brikama Craft Market endures as a living expression of Gambian identity, battered by modernisation, but not yet consumed by it.

Conclusion

Close to the end of *Tristes Tropiques,* Lévi-Strauss reflects on the role of western "civilizations":

> For those of us who are earth-bound Europeans, our adventurings into the heart of the New World have a lesson to teach us: that the New World was not ours to destroy, and yet we destroyed it; and that no other will be vouchsafed to us. In grasping these truths, we come face to face with ourselves (1961, p. 392).

The new world Lévi-Strauss speaks of is also known as the neotropics. Yet we extrapolate that, worldwide, the tropics were experienced as novel and fresh compared with the old world of Europe's temperate zone. This atmosphere still permeates imaginaries of the tropics as places of adventure and rejuvenation in tropical tourisms' myriad representations. In this double special issue, of "Tourisms' *Tristes Tropiques*," we examine these ways of seeing the tropics by presenting them under the dual themes of "Literary Travels" and "Cultural Landscapes." The two complement each other and often overlap in surprising ways.

Our double special issue emphasizes that tourism cannot be reduced to one definition; our aim has been, in fact, to offer a sense of the complexities of tropical multiplicity. The articles in the collections take up Lévi-Strauss's invitation to contemplate and to question. In the first issue, we undertook literary travels through poetry, travelogues, and novels around the tropics from the Pacific to the Caribbean. In this second issue, we have ventured across a range of tropical landscapes, as the contributors examine how tourism shapes and is shaped by cultures, ecologies, heritage, and history. Their analyses reveal cultural landscapes that are not merely scenic backdrops. A collective picture of the tropics as a space of profound richness and ongoing struggles emerges, where local knowledge, Indigenous perspectives, and the slow work of genuine encounter offer a necessary counterweight to the forces of commodification and inequality that Lévi-Strauss, in his own imperfect way, spent a lifetime mourning.

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