
Themed editorial: How could rural tourism provide better support for wellbeing and socio-economic development?

The United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism is the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and they argue that well-conceived rural tourism can help to stimulate local economic growth, job creation and broader-based demand (<https://www.unwto.org/rural-tourism>). To examine these possibilities and more, I am pleased to welcome Theme Editors Ardhendu Shekhar Singh, Sanjai Parahoo, Madhavi Ayyagari and Thanika Juwaheer and their writing team who are able to draw on rural tourism expertise from around the world. I should also like to thank the team for a fascinating review of the ways in which community-led rural tourism can facilitate enhanced community well-being and socio-economic development.

Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT) aims to make a practical and theoretical contribution to hospitality and tourism development, and we seek to do this by using a key question to focus attention on an industry issue. If you would like to contribute to our work by serving as a *WHATT* theme editor, do please contact me.

Richard Teare
Managing Editor, WHATT

How could rural tourism provide better support for well-being and socio-economic development?

Rural tourism is assuming greater significance given the potentially transformative role that it can play in sustainable development and the well-being of host communities. During the past few years, a steady movement of people from rural to urban areas has occurred due to a pandemic-related contraction in job opportunities in towns and cities. At the same time, a growing number of tourists are looking for authentic and distinctive experiences as evidenced by trends such as family volunteering, immersive experiences, gastronomic tourism, ecotourism and adventure tourism, and this presents an opportunity to develop rural tourism provision.

In this issue, we explore solutions for re-imagining rural area features, events, activities and services so that they are attractive to tourists, and at the same time, enhance socio-cultural, economic development and well-being for all those living in rural communities. The articles in this collection provide insights through success stories, best practice examples, critical success factors and strategy options to capitalize on the emerging market for unique tourist experiences. In so doing, we hope that this collection of articles will be helpful to policy makers as they develop marketing strategies to attract tourists to rural areas, position rural tourism assets and train and empower rural tourism stakeholders so that they can address the challenges that they face.

**Ardhendu Shekhar Singh, Sanjai K. Parahoo,
Madhavi Ayyagari and Thanika D. Juwaheer**
Theme Editors



About the Theme Editors:

Ardhendu Shekhar Singh is associate professor at Symbiosis School of Banking and Finance, Pune, India. His research interest lies in the area of non-profit marketing and development finance. He has published papers in international journals and has presented at numerous international conferences including events hosted by the Strategic Management Society and the American Marketing Association. He is Associate Editor, *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, and a member of the editorial board of *Poverty and Public Policy*, the *Journal of Public Affairs* and the *International Journal of Social Ecology and Sustainable Development*. He has also contributed as session chair and ad-hoc reviewer for many international conferences and journals.

Sanjai K. Parahoo is associate professor and program chair for management and financial studies (PG) at Hamdan bin Mohammed Smart University in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. He has more than ten years' international contract research, training and innovation management experience in Africa, working with regional and international associations and funders to support small and medium-sized organizations in rural areas. He has published in several leading journals in the field of service management and innovation in business and online learning environments, authored a number of peer-reviewed case studies about innovation in the Middle East region and acted as an ad-hoc reviewer for several journals.

Madhavi Ayyagari is Executive Director of Mindsbourg Management Consultancy (UAE and India). She has experience across corporate, consulting and education sectors spanning the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, South Africa, Ethiopia and India. She was the country lead for AC Nielsen, Qatar and has worked on projects for the World Bank, UNICEF and ILO and the Governments of Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Bahrain. She was the Academic Director of Curtin University Dubai, Head of the Business School and Chair of the research committee at Murdoch University Dubai. Madhavi is an academic board member for several universities and a reviewer for the *Journal of International Marketing*. Her areas of research interest include marketing and service management.

Thanika Devi Juwaheer is Associate Professor, Department of Management, Faculty of Law and Management at the University of Mauritius. She is also an Adjunct Professor of the Okavango Research Institute of the University of Botswana in Africa. Her research interests include environmental marketing, digital marketing, ecotourism, rural tourism, service quality and customer satisfaction in the tourism and hospitality industry, customer relationship management and health care management. She has more than 30 years of academic experience and has published in the fields of marketing, tourism and hospitality in Mauritius and the Indian Ocean Islands. Thanika has extensive teaching, industrial and consulting experience in these disciplines and is a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Service Theory and Practice* and regularly contributes as session chair and an ad-hoc reviewer for international conferences and refereed academic journals.

Richard E. Teare

Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes, Emerald Group Publishing Ltd, Bingley, UK