FROM COLONIALISM TO NEOCOLONIALISM?
GEOGRAPHIES OF TOURISM IN THE INDIAN HIMALAYA

A Thesis in
Geography

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ABSTRACT

In colonial India, hill stations in the Himalaya were simultaneously enclaves for European leisure-seekers and outposts of power, hegemony, and territorial ambition. Today the Himalaya continue to attract independent foreign tourists in the form of backpackers, ecotourists, and trekkers. Critics in the tourism literature allege that these tourists, fixated on discovering new ‘off the beaten path’ places, replicate colonial patterns and processes and thus contribute to a kind of modern-day ‘neocolonialism.’ This thesis assesses the validity of this allegation by tracing changes over time in the geography of tourism in the Indian Himalaya, thus framing the alleged ‘neocolonial’ tourism of today in juxtaposition with the ‘actual colonial’ tourism of the past. The ‘geographies’ at the core of this work are broad, encompassing not just physical locations, patterns, and connectivities that can be drawn on a map, but human spatialities and discourses that are colored by human agency, power relations, and the geographical imagination. Evidence is drawn from historical and contemporary texts such as travel guidebooks, travel literature, books, websites, journal articles, and maps. Field methods include in-depth, semi-structured interviews and participant observation that were undertaken in 2007 in Shimla, Manali, Dharamsala, Ladakh, and Spiti in the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. This varied and layered evidence is combined to illustrate the complexities, cultural conflicts, politics, and economics that underlie patterns of tourism, and backpacker tourism specifically, in the Indian Himalaya. While this research does find that there is evidence of neocolonialism to be found, it acknowledges that any conclusions are highly context-specific and vary from person to person and place to place. It also argues that the concept of neocolonialism is most pertinent to contemporary tourism when it is understood in a broader frame of reference than colonialism proper and the historical focus on state actors.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables ......................................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures ............................................................................................................................ vii

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 1
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 1
  The problem: Tourism as neocolonialism .............................................................................. 3
  Objectives and research questions ....................................................................................... 5
  Why India? Introduction to the case studies ..................................................................... 7
  Methodology ......................................................................................................................... 11
  Positionality ........................................................................................................................ 13

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW ....................................................................................... 16
  Tourism geographies and tourism development models ................................................... 16
  Postcolonial theory in tourism: Orientalism and neocolonialism ..................................... 23
  Backpackers in India and their antecedents ................................................................... 33
  Place preference differentiation and cultural capital ......................................................... 43

Chapter 3. SHIMLA ............................................................................................................ 49
  From colonial to postcolonial leisurescape ....................................................................... 49
  Decolonization of the colonial leisurescape ..................................................................... 51
  Regulation, preservation, and segregation ...................................................................... 57
  Foreign tourists in Shimla ................................................................................................. 61

Chapter 4. MANALI ........................................................................................................... 65
  Travel and tourism in the Kullu Valley before hippies and backpackers ......................... 65
  Hippies and backpackers in the Kullu and Parvati Valleys .............................................. 69
  Development, segregation, and contestation in Manali .................................................... 74
  Environmental impacts of tourism .................................................................................... 78
  Social impacts and the issue of drug use ......................................................................... 80
  The discourse on Israeli backpackers ............................................................................. 86

Chapter 5. DHARAMSALA ............................................................................................... 92
  Historical background and demographics of tourism in Dharamsala ................................ 92
  Consumption, commercialism, and commodification ....................................................... 94
  The village of Bhagsu ......................................................................................................... 101

Chapter 6. LADAKH AND SPITI .................................................................................... 107
  Historical background and the opening up of Ladakh ................................................... 107
  Tourism development in Ladakh and its impacts ............................................................. 111
  The trekking industry: Pursuing the “frontier” ................................................................. 117
  Further frontiers: The case of Spiti ................................................................................ 120
  Resilience and mitigation of tourism’s impacts ................................................................. 126
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Indian and foreign tourists in Shimla District.................................................................50
Table 4.1 Indian and foreign tourists in Kullu District.................................................................71
Table 4.2 Number of guesthouses and hotels in Manali............................................................75
Table 5.1 Indian and foreign tourists in Kangra District..........................................................93
Table 5.2 Results of commercial transects in Dharamsala .......................................................98
Table 6.1 Indian and foreign tourists in Lahaul and Spiti.........................................................121
Table 6.2 Percentage of Himachal Pradesh tourists who visit Lahaul and Spiti .........................122
Table 8.1 Comparison of place and page counts in Lonely Planet..........................................154

Appendix
Table 1 Summary statistics and demographics of interview informants ..............................173
Table 2 Tourism-to-population ratios......................................................................................176
Table 3 Change in Lonely Planet page counts over time.......................................................177
Table 4 Foreign tourist arrivals in India, 1951-2003 .............................................................178
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Locator map</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Location of field sites</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Schematic model of “tourism space”</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Hypothetical localization curves comparing different subgroups of tourists</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Cover of <em>Lonely Planet’s</em> first edition India guidebook</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Schematic of tourist enclaves in “Other space”</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The Mall in Shimla</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Statue of Lala Lajpat Rai, hero of the independence movement</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Commemorative plaque recounts the history of Shimla</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Advertisement for the luxurious Oberoi Cecil Hotel</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Satellite image of Kullu Valley region</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Schematic of tourist enclaves in “Other space”</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Satellite image showing Old and New Manali</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Upscaling of backpacker infrastructure in Old Manali</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Traffic jam <em>en route</em> to Rohtang Pass</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Parking lot at Rohtang Pass, 13,500 feet</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Chabad House in Kasol</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Signs at guesthouse signify enclavtic space for Israelis</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Flyers for classes and activities plaster a wall in Dharamsala</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Commercial landscape in the main bazaar, Dharamsala</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Relative locations of Dharamsala and Bhagsu</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Number of hotels and guesthouses in Bhagsu, 1991-2007</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Trailside signs advertise guesthouses and encourage upslope dispersion</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Map of Ladakh and region</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Foreign tourists in Ladakh, 1974-2007</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Convenience store in Leh stocks imported, trucked-in products</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Urban to rural dispersion of tourism in Leh</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>“Leh Park” billboard encouraging rural dispersion</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Trekking agency signs in Leh</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Spiti tourism circuit map</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>Excerpt from “Mindful Travel Guide” to Leh</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>“Eco Map” of Leh</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>Solar water heater and composting toilet in Leh</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix

- Figure 1 Popular destinations of backpackers in India                                         174
- Figure 2 Destination frequency of interview informants                                      175
- Figure 3a Change in *Lonely Planet* page counts over time (localities)                      177
- Figure 3b Change in *Lonely Planet* page counts over time (regions)                          178
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

“See it before it disappears” proclaims the headline of a *New York Times* article tantalizing readers with once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to travel to places that “will be gone in a generation” (Salkin 2007). Another article, entitled “The Last places on Earth” offers glimpses of “virgin peaks, unclaimed islands, [and] isolated tribes,” reassuring readers that while “it may be a small world…modern man hasn’t conquered all of it” (“The Last Places on Earth” 2007). The global tourism industry markets and depends upon the perception that there are still “new” places on the cusp of discovery. In its obsession with place differentiation, the tourism industry may represent the most conspicuous face of global capitalism’s “quest for competitiveness [by] seeking out and exploiting differences” in geography (Jaakson 2004, 171). The same changes that have hastened the expansion of modern global capitalism—technology, time-space compression, economic globalization—have also helped tourism to become the world’s largest industry, and one from which few remaining corners of the world are insulated (Iyer 2006).

In what Jaakson (2004, 172) describes as “the internal contradiction of hyperactive capitalism,” the act of “generating profits from the exploitation of global differences eventually erases the very differences needed to generate profits.” The tourism industry, too, in the process of marketing and exploiting difference, simultaneously eradicates it. This fatalistic outcome is thinly veiled in the two articles quoted above: the uniqueness of place is acknowledged to be a finite resource, which tourists are encouraged to consume before it disappears. On a literal level, places can in fact disappear as a result of physical processes such as melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and tsunamis. But the qualities that tourists believe are “disappearing,” or at least being irreversibly changed, are less tangible. They revolve around nebulous notions of the “authentic,” the “remote,” and the “pristine,” as measured on equally vague “scales” such as development, modernity, and globalization. The project of tourism assumes that different places on Earth represent different historical moments on an imagined chronological scale of human development from pre-modernity to modernity (and post-modernity). Thus, for the tourist (“the quintessential modern subject”) travels in space are akin to travels in time (MacCannell 1976, 3). Tourists, MacCannell argues, are trained to recognize visual and spatial signifiers of variation
along this imagined spectrum. The most discerning among them spurn places that have reached a certain threshold level of development and are thus no longer “authentic” and endeavor instead to find places that are “more primitive” and “less developed.”

The result is a perpetual cycle, in which no place is immune from the voracious appetite of an ever-expanding tourism in search of new places to colonize and consume. This is the scenario painted by many of tourism’s academic critics. Tourism, they argue, serves the hegemonic interests of global capitalism and Western development orthodoxy. But does tourism really have such agency, such power to shape and change places, for better or for worse?

Conceptualized as an abstract force, tourism eludes culpability for its consequences. Instead, tourism must be deconstructed and understood as a force that is not monolithic and that works differently in different places and contexts. Tourism must be personified as the product of actions and decisions by multiple actors imbued with agency who interact on an uneven terrain of power. Those actors include tourists themselves, whose agency is reflected in *Lonely Planet’s* dictum that “India is what you make of it” (Finlay 1993, 15). All tourists experience place through their own unique gazes, which are in turn mediated by their subjectivities and ways of organizing and assessing knowledge. Tourists’ ability to “make place” manifests with varying levels of power and consequence, from the innocuousness of the personal narrative to the capacity to shape and produce the dominant symbolic meanings and images of place in public discourse.

Tourists themselves represent the consumption side of tourism, consuming the tourism industry’s commodities, places and place imagery. But tourism’s power as a place-making and place-changing force is equally determined by the production side, which encompasses every segment of the tourism commodity chain. This includes stakeholders in both the formal and informal economy. It includes every actor who helps to orchestrate the tourist’s experience, from investors, developers, guidebook publishers, travel agents, and hoteliers, to tour guides, street merchants, and rickshaw drivers (Judd 2006, 328-332). It also includes politicians whose hand in infrastructure development and fiscal policy can significantly shape where, how, and what type of tourism development occurs (ibid). This diverse ensemble of agents, whose cross-cutting goals are sometimes in sync and sometimes in competition, suggests a need to look beyond tourism’s “impacts” to the “systems, processes, places, and interactions between people in order to understand how culture and power influence the actions of tourism stakeholders” and how
those stakeholders, in turn, interact with tourists (Scheyvens 2007, 242). In other words, the “microgeographies of power” at play in the spaces in which tourism is both produced and consumed are more complex than theories of binary power differentials between hosts and guests would suggest (ibid).

Such binaries are common in critical academic tourism literature. The dominant discourse in this body of literature presents tourism as a conflict between the “uncritical pleasure-seeking right” and “sense of entitlement” (Heald 2003) of tourists in privileged positions of race and class, on one hand, and the people and places forced to constitute the tourists’ “pleasure periphery” on the other (Turner and Ash 1976). The literature cites fundamental barriers separating tourists and hosts, one of which is mobility (Bauman 1998 in O’Reilly 2005, 154). Globalization and innovation may have increased global connectivity and the flow of people across borders, but not everyone possess the economic and political means to take advantage of such increased mobility. On one hand, the majority of citizens in developing countries can neither afford the cost of international travel nor procure the necessary documentation necessary to travel overseas. On the other hand, the majority of citizens in developed countries enjoy both the financial means (through favorable currency exchange rates) and painless access to legal documents such as visas to travel most anywhere (Whyte 2008). At the same time, however, those same countries maintain strict barriers that stem from xenophobic and protectionist fears. Incoming tourists, especially those originating in “poor countries,” are closely scrutinized, and usually only admitted if deemed wealthy enough not to pose the risk of immigration.

The problem: Tourism as neocolonialism

Academic critics of tourism have focused on the dichotomous relationship between hosts and tourists wherein the former is seen to be commodified, exploited, and dominated by the latter. These critics see the geography of this host-tourist relationship in the context of international tourism as largely unidirectional. That is, most international tourists originate in the “developed” countries of the “West” while “developing” countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean serve as the “hosts” or receiving countries. A number of scholars have injected their critiques with a bitter potency by proclaiming the host-tourist relationship to be not merely exploitative but also “neocolonial.” The claim that tourism “represents the
hedonistic face of neocolonialism" (Crick 1989, 322), is not to be taken lightly. It is a forceful condemnation of the world’s largest industry, especially one that most people associate with fondness. But it is precisely the point of such statements to unsettle peoples’ compliant preconceptions. Given that its historicization has somewhat defanged “colonialism” of its implications of violence and oppression (at least, in popular discourse), the concept of “neocolonialism” is all the more scathing, summoning the wounds of its etymological antecedent and injecting it into contemporary discourse with force.

After extensive review of the appropriate literature, I have concluded that the evidence upon which scholars rely to validate the claim that tourism is a form of neocolonialism is inadequate. The claim is largely theoretical, which is probably enough to convince readers who are already sympathetic to critical theory and have embraced the idea of “neocolonialism” in other domains such as globalization, trade, development, and militarism. A good deal of the evidence cited stems from discourse analysis. Whereas historical colonialism sought to “control the ‘native’ by colonizing her/him territorially,” postcolonial scholars argue that neocolonialism “is more about subjugating the ‘native’ by colonizing her/him discursively” (Shome 1996, 42 in Fürsich and Kavoori 2001, 14). Evidence of this “discursive colonization” comes from critical deconstructions of travel literature, advertisements, and guidebooks, which are shown to portray developing countries through Orientalist tropes that reinforce stereotypes of Western superiority and rationality over myths of Eastern exoticism and primitiveness (Said 1978; Mishra and Hodge 1991; Bhattacharyya 1997; Chaudhary 1996 and 2000; Tickell 2001; Echtner and Prasad 2003; Hottola 2005; Bandyopadhay 2005).

Likewise, most readers familiar with historical colonialism would have little difficulty accepting that it “made the world safe for the international adventure traveler for the first time” and that the colonial traveler “could travel anywhere and feel safe that he was backed up by the support of the powerful hegemonic state from which he came” (Osborne 2006, 7). When this concept is translated to contemporary tourism, however, it lacks field-corroborated, empirical support. Many people, even among tourism’s critics, might understandably be uncomfortable labeling tourism as a form of neocolonialism, not wanting to categorically condemn tourists who, in their view, are innocent of such a problematic phenomenon. If pressed, they might acknowledge that tropical resort tourism can at times look like neocolonialism, with its labor and capital structure resembling colonial plantation economies (Britton 1982). But they might argue
in response that the kind of independent tourism popular in a place like India, is different. Independent tourists, they argue, avoids the top-down, exploitative dimensions of package and resort tourism because they support local livelihoods, exercise sustainable practices, demonstrate cultural sensitivity, and, furthermore, tend to identify with left-leaning politics that are critical of economic globalization and neocolonialism.

Objectives and research questions

Yet, it is these independent tourists, or backpackers¹, upon whom this thesis focuses. This thesis sets aside the question of neocolonialism in mass tourism, which has already been addressed by other scholars (see Chapter Two), to focus on what I believe is the more provocative question of neocolonialism in backpacker tourism. While there is a growing subfield of tourism literature devoted to backpackers as a subgroup, much of it lacks critical depth and tends to valorize backpackers rather than questioning them.² It is precisely because they seem so immune to neocolonialism that backpackers in fact deserve greater scrutiny. If there is evidence of neocolonialism in backpacker tourism, it is perhaps not so overt, but shrouded behind the veil of a self-aggrandizing discourse that enshrines backpackers as the paragon of tourist morality. In this discourse, I detect something akin to the “strategies of innocence” used by colonial travelers to distance themselves “from the uglier side of colonial domination” (O’Reilly 2006, 1004). Historically, even though some of the Europeans who traveled in colonial territories were not engaged in the colonial project in any official capacity, Pratt (1992, 30-31) argues that their travels were nevertheless embedded within the hegemonic and unequal relationship between their respective colonial states and the colonized people and places upon which their gaze was imposed. This contention, adapted to the present context, would suggest that backpackers can indeed be agents of neocolonialism, regardless of their intentionality, and whether they realize it or not.

¹ “Backpacker” is the (albeit broad) term commonly used to describe independent tourists in India. They are described, as a subgroup, as well as relative to other tourists, extensively in Chapter 2.
² This is perhaps not surprising as many of the researchers who write about backpackers are former (or current) backpackers themselves.
The objective of this thesis, then, is to assess the validity, applicability, and implications of the claim that tourism (and, specifically, backpacker tourism in a post-colonial developing country) is a form of neocolonialism, and to do so with a level of empirical evidence, which, so far, is lacking in the literature. This objective is accomplished by tracing changes over time in the geographies of tourism in a particular set of case studies in the Indian Himalaya. This thesis juxtaposes the alleged ‘neocolonial’ tourism of today with the historical ‘colonial’ tourism of the past. The ‘geographies’ of concern in this thesis are broad, encompassing not just physical locations, patterns, and connectivities that can be drawn on a map, but human spatialities and discourses that are colored by human agency, power relations, and the geographical imagination.

Research questions that this thesis asks include, but are not limited to, the following:

- To what degree do backpackers’ behaviors, practices, and discourses mirror or parallel those of colonial travelers in India?
- To what extent do white backpackers reflect on their positionalities and privilege?
- How much agency and control do backpackers exert over their spatialities? And how much agency do Indian hosts, guides, entrepreneurs, and tourism sector employees possess to influence those same spatialities?
- In what ways are backpacker enclaves like colonial enclaves, and how rigidly are the boundaries of such enclaves enforced along lines of race, class, and nationality?
- To what extent do backpackers attempt to get “off the beaten path”? And what exactly does “off the beaten path” mean to them? Does it mean places with no tourism infrastructure at all, or does it simply mean places that attract backpackers rather than mass tourists?
- To what extent do backpackers employ colonial tropes of “discovery” and “conquering” of “untouched” places? How much value do they ascribe to the “authenticity” or “primitiveness” of a place?
- Does backpacker tourism amount more to “territorial colonization” or “discursive colonization”? Does it make sense to talk about the expansion of tourism space in terms of “colonization”? How does this colonization compare to colonization during historical colonialism?
- Given that representations of India in the Western media and geographic imagination are often infused with Orientalist stereotypes, how do backpackers’ actual impressions of India compare with their preconceptions? Does the experience of being in India and interacting with Indians reinforce those stereotypes or challenge them?

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3 Spatialities are geographies instilled with social significance. They result when humans interact with space, whether physically, imaginatively, or discursively, and imbue those spaces with particular meanings and values (Soja 1985, 90-122).

4 Shome (1996, 42 in Fürsich and Kavoori 2001, 14) makes this distinction, arguing that the former is more a characteristic of historical colonialism while the latter is more a characteristic of contemporary neocolonialism. I wonder, however, whether the former is not in fact applicable to tourism, given the degree to which tourism is explicitly spatial, or territorial.
To what extent are backpackers in India engaged (consciously or not) in the accumulation of cultural (or other forms of) capital?

Why India? Introduction to the case studies

Tourists, backpackers, and neocolonialism can undoubtedly be found in any number of post-colonial countries today. Yet, while they are not unique to India, India does provide an excellent laboratory in which to study their patterns and interactions. India has long been represented in the Western geographic imagination as “elusive,” “enigmatic,” and so culturally different that it has driven many Westerners to travel to its ancient ruins and sacred sites in pursuit of spirituality and “life-changing experiences” (Davidson 2005, 29-30). This was as true for white travelers in colonial India as it is today. Colonial literature is steeped with images of young British soldiers who yearn to escape the boring business of imperial administration in search of romance, adventure, riches, and, perhaps, enlightenment (Kipling 1983). Geographies of tourism in colonial India were formalized to serve colonial officials and their families because travel to and from Britain was too expensive and time-consuming to undertake annually. Hill stations in the Himalaya were simultaneously outposts of imperial power and havens from the conditions of colonial life on the plains (Kennedy 2000). Thomas Cook’s travel agency and the publishing houses of John Murray and Karl Baedeker all published guidebooks to India beginning in the nineteenth century. Many of these colonial-era guidebooks are still useful for sightseeing today, suggesting that the geography of tourism has not changed much over the last hundred years (Hottola 1999, 50).

The lament of the vanishing frontier, as often espoused in contemporary backpacker discourse, also has its roots in late colonialism. As geographers and surveyors filled in the blank

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5 In fact, the neocolonialism critique is not even limited to “post-colonial” countries. The unevenness of contemporary global capitalism does not follow the old dichotomies of “First/Third World.” Examples abound of peripheral places within “developed” countries that have a “neocolonial” dependence on wealthy outside tourists (Hawaii, the Greek Isles, and the Spanish Mediterranean are a few examples).

6 Young British soldiers in Gunga Din (1939) want to “get out of the army and live like Dukes.” For the young recruit in The Lives of a Bengal Lancer (1935), being stationed on the remote Khyber Pass with Afghanistan is “romantic to a greenhorn like me.” The heroes of The Man Who Would Be King (1975) disguise themselves in tribal clothing, escape their British pursuers through the Khyber Pass, and befriend the people of Kafiristan before conquering their kingdom.
spots on colonial maps, Europeans eager to replicate the adventurism associated with earlier periods of colonialism worried that they were running out of places left to “discover” (Tickell 2001, 50; Driver 2000). As a result, the Himalaya occupied a special place in the mythology of the Western geographic imagination as a final “frontier,” its high, rugged mountains and isolated valleys thought to contain the last “untouched Shangri-La’s.” But while the era of colonial exploration and discovery is represented in popular culture as the stuff of adventure novels, it was fundamentally about wielding power and inscribing it on people and territory, buttressing colonialism’s need to constantly exploit more natural resources and open up new markets (Livingstone 1994, 179-183).

It is because of these historical threads that I chose to situate my research in India. India today is an increasingly popular destination for backpackers from Europe, North America, Israel, Australia, and New Zealand. India has historically trailed dozens of smaller countries in global rankings of foreign tourist arrivals and earnings. As of 2006, however, its 13.5% annual growth in foreign tourist arrivals is the fourth highest in the world (UNWTO 2007). As a country experiencing rapid growth in tourism, India is an excellent place for the study of tourism as a dynamic process. Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh, in particular, are highly popular with backpackers for similar reasons that they were popular with British colonials. During the summer months, the mountain climate provides respite from the temperatures that engulf the rest of the subcontinent. The colonials and backpackers seek escape through different channels—the former in hunting parties and grand balls, the latter in rave parties and hash—but for both, India serves as a “pleasure periphery” (Turner and Ash 1976).

The “pleasure periphery,” and many other models, theories, and concepts pertinent to the historical geography and political economy of tourism, in India and in general, are detailed in Chapter Two. Following that are four chapters containing empirical evidence collected in four different field sites (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2), along with additional outside research to provide context and historical background. These chapters can be seen as individual case studies, as each location plays host to a slightly different tourist milieu and features distinct themes, patterns, and problems. They are also intended, however, as connected components of a broader arc that, altogether, provides the most comprehensive answer to my research objectives and questions. They are ordered both geographically, with each chapter/site higher in elevation and deeper into the rugged heart of the Himalaya than the last, as well as chronologically, in that each
Figure 1.1 Location of Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh in India

Figure 1.2 Location of Field Sites (Copyright: Google Earth)
Chapter/site represents a progressively later moment on the timeline of tourism development.

Chapter Three is set in the former British summer capital and hill station of Shimla. This chapter shows how this once intensely colonial landscape has been reclaimed by Indian nationalist narratives and how the architectural heritage of British colonialism is preserved not out of colonial nostalgia but as a backdrop for Indian domestic tourism. As such, Shimla has the effect of challenging rather than reinforcing foreign tourists’ preconceptions.

Chapter Four is set in Manali and the Kullu Valley, where backpacker enclaves are spatially and discursively segregated from spaces of Indian domestic tourism. They are sites of multiple contestations, between Indians and backpackers, between Israeli backpackers and non-Israeli backpackers, and between intra-Indian factions.

Chapter Five is set in Dharamsala, the home of the Dalai Lama. It is a mecca for Westerners interested in Buddhism, Tibet, and new age culture. It is a place where foreigners constitute a new leisure class, taking up residence for months at a time, purchasing real estate, and enjoying trendy outlets of consumption. The nearby village of Bhagsu is a backpacker enclave premised upon the idyllic imagery of backpackers’ imaginations, but which has undergone rapid development in recent years.

Chapter Six is set in the mountainous Tibetan Buddhist regions of Ladakh and Spiti in the rain shadow of the Himalaya. Off limits to foreign tourists until 1976 and 1992, respectively, these regions have been marketed as “last frontiers” and among the “most remote,” “off the beaten path” places remaining in India, and the world. Nevertheless, their tourist markets are expanding at a rapid pace, with the same ensuing effects that tourism carries everywhere, which are only compounded in the region’s fragile, remote environment. Ladakh is also a strong center for activism aimed at counteracting tourism’s negative cultural and environmental impacts and is home to NGOs that promote sustainable tourism practices and local livelihoods.

Chapter Seven summarizes the most relevant and compelling results of the interviews I conducted with backpackers in India. Most of this material is not specific to any of the four case studies in particular and is instead arranged thematically. Some topics addressed in this chapter include host-tourist relationships, perceptions of change over time, place preferences, consumption habits, attitudes towards enclaves, authenticity, cultural capital, restricted mobilities, colonialism, and ethics, and the desire to get “off the beaten path.”
Finally, Chapter Eight concludes this thesis by synthesizing the various strands of evidence from the case studies, interviews, and other sources. It revisits, and answers, the research questions, makes linkages to larger scale issues, and concludes by summarizing efforts that are being undertaken, or should be undertaken, to mitigate the neocolonial tendencies of tourism.

Methodology

My argument rests on both theoretical and empirical inquiry, employing both historical and text-based research, and qualitative field research. I use secondary sources to construct historical and contextual narratives that weave through my case study chapters. I also reference primary source texts specific to India and Himachal Pradesh, including travel guidebooks, travel literature, websites, and maps from the colonial period to the present day. Together, data culled from these sources helps to paint a picture of spatialities and discourses of tourism and how they have changed over time.

Few backpackers would ever admit to harboring neocolonial tendencies, and the objective of this thesis is not simply to “expose” them or to apply the “neocolonial” label in broad brushstrokes. Such tactics would be dogmatic and limit the potential impact and audience of my research. In order to have any contemporary relevance, neocolonialism must be understood in a fluid, multidimensional, and heavily qualified and contextualized manner, and not according to rigid, doctrinaire terms. The evidence I present in this thesis will not always relate directly to the concept of neocolonialism. At times, the narrative will be broader, incorporating related concepts and ideas that might or might not be “proof” of neocolonialism. When the “problem” does not lend itself to direct attack, my narrative resorts to “working around the edges” instead.

Neocolonialism is not something that can be explained by logic or science alone. When I speak of “assessing its validity and applicability,” I do not mean to imply that I do so in a manner that is either quantifiable or foolproof. My evidence includes some quantitative data to be sure, but by and large, this is a qualitative research project. I make my argument by presenting multiple strands of evidence from different points of view, representing the opinions and views of many different actors with competing agendas and positionalities. Much of this evidence is
discursive. That is, it comes from discourses—what is said, written, and thought—that constitute regimes of knowledge and power (Cheong and Miller 2000, 375). Keeping in mind, however, that power is “never completely stable” (Foucault 1980, 100 in Fürsich and Kavoori 2001, 14) helps to maintain analytical space in which to explore potential neocolonial patterns even where their appearance and pertinence may be covert or contestable.

In the four case studies, the bulk of the evidence I present is drawn from fieldwork carried out during the summer of 2007 in the Indian Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh and the district of Ladakh in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This fieldwork consists of two main components: participant observation, and semi-structured, in-depth interviews. For nine weeks I traveled along established backpacker circuits between destinations ranging greatly in size and level of tourism development. I kept copious notes throughout these travels, took photographs, and kept my eyes open for anything of relevance to my research questions. Most importantly, I played the part of the backpacker tourist myself, staying in guesthouses with other backpackers, socializing in backpacker cafés, and talking to as many backpackers as possible.

Although I assumed that my interview informants would fit the general characteristics of backpackers as predominantly young, white, and middle-class, my pool of informants turned out to be slightly more diverse (see Table 1, Appendix for summary demographics of my interview informants). I also assumed that because I matched the typical backpacker demographic and because I had previous experience traveling in India, I would qualify as an "insider" and that this would simplify the ethnographic challenge of gaining access to, and the trust of, my informants. I discovered, however, that obtaining hour-long interviews from strangers was more challenging than I had expected. None of my interviews were pre-arranged. They transpired through serendipity, with people who happened to be at the right place at the right time. Although I made hundreds of contacts with potential informants during nine weeks in the field, only a fraction of them materialized into formal interviews. These interviews followed substantial investments in time, often over several days, building rapport.

In the end, I conducted and tape-recorded sixteen in-depth interviews, ranging in length from sixty to ninety minutes. My interview informants ranged in age from eighteen to fifty-seven, with a mean of twenty-five and a median of twenty-four. Half of the interviews were one-on-one, and the rest were conducted with two informants (travel companions) at the same time. I interviewed a total of twenty-four people, including thirteen females and eleven males (see Table
Ten interview informants were American citizens, eight were British, two Australian, one Dutch, one Israeli, one Portuguese, and one Taiwanese. I also obtained useful insights from forty-three “informal interviews,” or casual conversations with tourists as well as Indians who work in the tourist industry. These included fifty-eight people, or thirty males and thirty-eight females. They were nationals of, in order from most to least frequent, India, United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Australia, Italy, Japan, Canada, France, New Zealand, Spain, Sweden, Israel, Ireland, Nepal, the Netherlands, China, Belgium, and South Korea.

During the formal interviews I worked from a set of standard questions. I did not, however, ask the same questions of every one of my informants. Instead, I tailored the questions to the particular circumstances of each interview. If my goal in these interviews was to “test” the theory of neocolonialism in tourism, I could not reveal it as such outright. Most interviews began with “soft” questions in order to set a comfortable and conversational tone for the interview before moving into the “harder” questions. Still, I rarely ever broached the topic of neocolonialism (with the exception of the three post-doctoral students among my informants). Instead, I asked questions designed to elicit responses from which I could make inferences about informants’ attitudes towards neocolonialism. I was impressed by the depth, insight, and critical thinking that emerged out of the interviews. The best interviews, yielding the most interesting results, were those that evolved organically, beyond my prompting, in directions of my informants’ choosing.

**Positionality**

The origins of this thesis are personal. I first traveled to India in 2006 as a backpacker myself. Like so many other young white people, I was drawn to India in search of something, although I did not know quite what it was. What I found surprised me. Although I drew inspiration from the “off the beaten path” discourse, I often found myself in the company of other white backpackers. I was surprised by the predictability of my own spatialities, and by the level of tourism infrastructure that was geared specifically to my demographic. My observations of other backpackers and their interactions with Indians led to a heightened awareness of my own positionality. I realized that, regardless of my own moral views on colonialism, racism, and social injustice, my identity in India, as seen by Indians, would always be shaped by my
whiteness. I could repudiate colonialism all I wanted, but I would never be able to shake off the fact that I am still part of a group that has monopolized much of the world’s power and wealth for the last several centuries.

I knew that I was not the only white person in India ashamed of the historical legacy of white privilege. Some white backpackers in India deal with their whiteness by “going native,” dressing in “Indian clothes,” renouncing (to a degree) their material possessions, and embracing what they assume to be “Indian” values and spirituality. But I decided that, rather then try to conceal or hide my whiteness, I would have to face it head-on. I would turn my academic gaze not on India, or its differences, but upon my own white peers and their actions in India. This thesis is the culmination of those initial thoughts. I want to make clear that I try to avoid, as much as possible, assuming the role of the Western expert who claims to know and understand “India.” This role has been inhabited by many white academics, both in tourism studies and geography, and it is one that I attempt, inasmuch is possible, to avoid.

I also wish to fully disclose my positionality, which is privileged not only on account of my whiteness but also by my class, education, and gender. Some might see the fact that I spent two years of my life studying a topic as seemingly obscure as tourism geographies in India as evidence enough of my privilege. They might see my endeavor as a severe form of navel-gazing, as mental labor expended in exchange for academic capital in a minor niche field. And they would be right that I have, indeed, spent far more time thinking about these issues (or, at least, writing about them) than the average person to backpack across India. And I would be remiss if I did not admit that my reasons for doing so stem partly from my own desire to prove myself in academia. But they also stem from my personal reflexivity and my natural tendency to ask questions and not take things at face value.

In bringing this research to its fruition in the context of graduate school, there is no doubt I have armed myself with a litany of academic words and theories that I otherwise might not have used. But the thinking at the core of this thesis would have transpired whether or not I decided to formalize it in academic terms. And so, as I lead my readers into the meat of my thesis, I would like to leave them with a few thoughts to keep in mind. This is a highly subjective piece of writing, based on highly subjective fieldwork. I make no claims to speak for all backpackers, or all tourists, or all of India, or even what I saw with my own eyes. The observations posed in this thesis reflect and are framed by my personal experiences and
subjectivities. When I write about neocolonialism I do not do so lightly. Colonialism, and neocolonialism, are deeply problematic and when I speak of them it is always in the pejorative sense. But I also wish to avoid being the white person who sits comfortably in the Ivory Tower and labels all the other white people “neocolonialists.” I do not put myself above any other tourist. I do not deny my own embeddedness in the processes that I am critiquing. Indeed, I am as much critiquing myself as I am anyone else. I urge my readers to see my observations and claims as reasonably well-informed suggestions, but not as universal truths. This thesis is by no means conclusive. It is a contribution to a much larger dialogue, one that will remain open for many years to come.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism geographies and tourism development models

Tourism studies has gained increasing prominence in academia over the last several decades. A broad, multidisciplinary field, it incorporates methods and topics from sociology, anthropology, geography, economics, development studies, and environmental science. Among the standard-bearing journals of the field, *The Annals of Tourism Research*, was first published in 1973, followed by *Tourism Management* in 1980. In their early years, both journals focused largely on economic and quantitative topics such as marketing, measuring and modeling supply and demand in tourism, and business management practices. There were less business-oriented and more academic forays into tourism studies during this early period as well, but they were of a largely descriptive, rather than analytical, nature (Britton 1991, 451). Topics addressed included travel flows, tourist typologies, the spatial organization of tourism, social, cultural, and environmental impacts of tourism, and the implications of tourism for planning and policy.

Over time, much of the more explicitly business-oriented research have been relegated to new journals such as the *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing* (1992) while *The Annals* and *Tourism Management* have transitioned to increasingly theoretical and critical paradigms (nowadays, articles citing Foucault are not uncommon in either journal). As one of the major early proponents of the new critical direction in tourism, Britton (1991, 451) defined its goal thus: “to conceptualize fully [tourism’s] role in capitalist accumulation, its economic dynamics, and its role in creating the materiality and social meaning of place.” Not every critical tourism scholar is a Marxist like Britton, but most share some common ground in social theory, and increasingly post-structural readings of place and place meaning. In the last decade, a profusion of new tourism journals has joined the fray, mirroring the rapid growth in the global tourism industry in an era of profound and unprecedented globalization. The mission statement for the journal *Tourist Studies* (2001) stresses the dynamic nature of tourism and proclaims that it does “not seek to model tourism as if it were a more or less constant cultural phenomenon.” Others, like *Tourism Geographies: An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place, and Environment* (1999) and *The Journal of Ecotourism* (2002) were created to serve more specific but growing niches. This thesis draws from these among other sources.
One of the most influential theorists in tourism studies is Dean MacCannell, whose seminal work *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976, 3) described tourism as a response to the modern subject’s “alienation from modernity” and “search for authenticity.” In his conception, Western tourists travel to distant locales and cultures in order to fulfill their desire for difference and break the monotony of modern life. Not every tourist is, however, equally alienated or aware of his or her alienation. May (1996, 713) characterizes tourist types and preferences strictly along class lines. For instance, while the working-classes spend their holidays at the beach (either out of preference or financial constraints), members of the professional, intellectual, and creative classes can afford to flaunt more selective cultural and geographic tastes. Furthermore, they are more acutely aware of what they see as the deficiencies of modernity, and thus more likely to seek out alternative authenticities elsewhere. He argues also that the purported “authenticity” of a place roughly correlates to the “physical and imaginative distance of that destination from the modern Western metropolis” (ibid, 722). In other words, a long-distance flight departing London for the opposite side of the world might provide tourists with a tangible signifier of physical distance, but imaginative distance, denoted by cultural difference, often trumps geographical distance.

Another seminal theorist in tourism studies, John Urry, describes the *post-tourist* in an effort to break MacCannell’s semantic grasp on tourists and authenticity. The *post-tourist* abandons the search for “authenticity” as a fruitless endeavor and claims not to be fooled by MacCannell’s (1976, 98) “staged authenticity.” Rather than get caught up in signatory struggles, the *post-tourist* is content to revel, in heightened self-awareness, in the carnavalesque simulacra of “tourist traps,” without letting their “inauthenticity” detract from their experience and enjoyment (Urry 1995, 140).

Britton (1991, 453) argues that the modern concept of leisure is itself a by-product of modern capitalism. “Leisure” and “work” were not always so rigidly differentiated in time and space, but under modern capitalism, leisure has become “individualized, commodified, industrialized, codified, and endlessly marketable” (ibid). The tourism industry capitalizes on Earth’s diverse geography by differentiating and marketing places into manageable commodities that are subject to the standardizing, regulating motives of capital (ibid). Geographers have long recognized the key role of location as a determinant of rent and comparative advantage. In tourism, the role of location is greatly amplified and of utmost importance. Property values, and
thus hotel prices, tend to skyrocket in the most highly sought-after locations (Britton 1992, 462). The most desirable tourist spaces, which typically include historic city centers and spaces adjacent to top tourist attractions, are reserved for high-paying tourists whose daily rents price out all but the wealthiest of local residents. Thus, it can be argued that tourist sites are dispossessed from local control. Tourism’s ability to dispossess is not confined to spaces of prime urban locational advantage. In rural and peri-urban spaces, tourism can also co-opt previously existing and non-commodified locations such as temples, natural monuments, neighborhoods, and even entire islands (ibid, 464). These spaces, set outside the metropolitan core but utilized by tourists from the metropolitan core, are what Turner and Ash (1970) call the “pleasure periphery.”

As tourism co-opts, envelops, and submits places to its commercial purposes, it folds them into what Tim Edensor calls “enclavic space.” Enclavic spaces are spatial enclaves dominated by tourism in both form and function and highly demarcated and insulated from surrounding space (Edensor 2000, 328). Enclavic space is “centralized, organized, hierarchized, and subject to surveillance” by the tourist gaze, which is directed upon hosts whose actions take on the feel of “performances” for tourists (ibid, 324). The corollary to enclavic space is “heterogeneous space.” Heterogeneous space is not a total absence of tourism (i.e. the opposite of enclavic space) but rather “a mixed purpose space” where “tourists and locals mingle and go about their separate business” (ibid, 331). Heterogeneous space is still controlled to some degree, but in ways that are not always apparent to the tourist (ibid, 332). Tourists have more options as they move through space, with many spatial choices available in labyrinthine alleyways and bazaars. Yet, their movements are still semi-scripted, for instance, by guidebooks, which function to choreograph tourist movements, or provide a loose structure within which spatialities can be improvised (ibid, 333-335). Local populations enjoy greater agency within heterogeneous spaces. There they are freed from the burden of performance, reducing the tourist’s penetrative gaze (ibid).

Many geographers have proposed models by which tourism development, or spatial and economic expansion, occurs. One of the earliest was Christaller’s study of France’s Côte d’Azur, in which he observed that the “colonies” first popularized by artists and bohemians attracted entrepreneurs and soon came into vogue with elites and eventually mass tourists (Christaller 1964, 104 in Pryer 1997, 226). Oppermann was the first to create a model specific to developing
countries. His abstract schematic model of tourism space illustrates the concentric spatial relationship between formal, informal, and non-tourist spaces (see Figure 2.1). Formal tourist space, that is, spaces supported by official tourism infrastructure and sanctioned by the state, is highly concentrated, for instance, in high-end hotel and private resorts. The larger sphere of informal tourist space, where infrastructure is less developed but tourists are nonetheless present, overlaps with and grows out of the formal tourist space. Finally, “non-tourist” space, spaces completely devoid of tourists, initially occupy the periphery, but over time is penetrated by the expansion of informal, and eventually, formal tourist space (ibid, 545). Oppermann suggests that this penetration is an “invasive” form of “colonization” (ibid, 551). He uses of the word “colonization” more for its spatial meaning than its political-economic meaning, although there is some ambiguity, and, as I will argue, both meanings merit.

Although state and development interests often collude to displace the informal sector with formal sector tourism development, they face a conundrum. It is often the intangible characteristics of the informal sector (for example, the local color of a bustling street market) that attract tourists to it in the first place. In order to continue to market those characteristics, the formal sector cannot displace the informal outright. Rather, its tendency is to appropriate, co-opt and re-brand, preserving the outward appearance and traditional image but fundamentally altering the structure of its control and ownership (ibid, 543). The formal sector does this through surveillance of up-and-coming destinations in the informal sector (O’Reilly 2005, 156). In small developing countries such as islands, the capital needed to formalize the tourist economy is usually foreign. In India, however, the flow of capital investment in tourism is largely intra-national rather than international. In the case study chapters I offer evidence of the influence of
“outside” entrepreneurs from places like Goa, Delhi, and Kashmir who transfer their knowledge and capital from earlier tourism development in their respective regions to new, peripheral locations where they can out-perform and displace local residents’ ability to earn livelihoods from tourism.

Oppermann lays out a more precise model of development incorporating specific places and nodes in a linear progression of phases:

Phase 0 – What tourism infrastructure exists is either concentrated in urban centers or former colonial hill resorts.

Phase 1 – Adventurous tourists arrive. They use local resources, and contribute to the local economy.

Phase 2 – Initial development diffuses as adventurous tourists explore more of the periphery.

Phase 3 – Early tourists’ discoveries diffuse through word of mouth and guidebooks. Capital investment begins moving outside the major cities, usually towards beaches or major cultural or historical attractions.

Phase 4 – Completion of formal sector’s takeover of space. Resorts financed with overseas capital (ibid, 447-550).

He draws on diffusion theory to argue that development will diffuse from former colonial urban footholds with established infrastructure to nodes dispersed throughout non-tourist space (ibid, 538). The informal sector that characterizes much tourism in developing countries is better integrated with local economies and thus subject to greater multiplier effects, meaning that a few pioneer tourist businesses in a place can quickly spawn clusters of copy-cat businesses (ibid, 544). The nodes in their various phases of development form networks built upon linkages in transportation, communication, and social networks. An example of this is described in Chapter Six in which three brothers run tourist businesses in three different places, standardizing and coordinating their menus and marketing for maximum effect.

Others have put forward theories and observations about the spatial development and expansion of tourism. In describing Western travelers in India in the 1960s, Cohen (1972, 97) observed that solo travelers used the same infrastructure that Indian travelers used, such as hotels or ashrams, or that they would improvise and camp outdoors. Others corroborate this, explaining that the earliest tourists suffice with minimal tourism infrastructure, “accepting whatever assistance they can from curious and helpful hosts” such as home stays (Din 1992 in Pryer 1997,
Only when the itineraries of multiple travelers “coagulate” does a separate infrastructure develop to serve them (Cohen 1972, 97). Din (1992 in Pryer 1997, 226) calls this “indigenous entrepreneurial service sector” the “traveler superstructure” and lists some of the services that this emerging superstructure provides: “budget accommodation, social meeting places, laundry services, transport services, money exchangers and notice boards.” As knowledge of the newly developing places for budget travel spreads through word of mouth, places gain reputations for being “on” or “off” the “main trail” or “beaten path.” For Sorensen (2003, 859), “off the main trail” is not the same as Oppermann’s “non-tourist space.” It is simply a qualifier used to designate places where tourism development has not (yet) reached a certain (subjective) threshold level.

Pearce (1995, 100-101) illustrates the spatial extent of tourist space relative to non-tourist space in a given country using “localization curves.” In these simple graphs, the x-axis represents the percentage of the total area of a country and the y-axis represents the percentage of bednights spent by tourists. The effect is to show the concentration of tourism in space and time. A curve approximating line y=x would represent the most even distribution of tourism, where 10% of bednights are spent in 10% of the area, 50% bednights in 50% of the area, and so forth. Such a curve, however, is rare. More typical is a curve skewed far above the line y=x, in which the vast majority of bednights are spent in only a small percentage of the area. In other words, most tourists spend most of their time concentrated in a few locations, and spend less of their time “off the beaten path.” When used comparatively, localization curves can illustrate differences in the geographic concentration and spatial reach of different subgroups of tourists (see Figure 2.2). For instance, the curve for backpackers hews closer to the line y=x than for mass and package tourists, and the curve for Indian domestic tourists hews closer to that line still.

![Figure 2.2 Hypothetical localization curves comparing different subgroups of tourists](image-url)
Every place, touristed or not, can be described as having some level of infrastructure and development. Accepting Din’s concept that tourist superstructure is built atop already-existing infrastructure that serves local needs, it can be argued that different tourists require different levels of superstructure depending on their needs, wants, and consumption patterns. Pryer (1997, 232) introduces the concept of “tolerance” as a way to measure these needs and wants. I extend this concept to the idea of a “tolerance range,” which is bounded by both an upper and lower limit, or threshold. Tourists with high tolerance less fewer qualms with the rustic amenities that are often found in less-developed places, such as squat toilets, cold water, and bucket showers. Even the most open-minded tourists, however, have some upper limit, determined by the basic goods, services, and amenities without which they cannot live. Tourists with a lower tolerance threshold require more in the way of tourism superstructure. But most tourists’ tolerance levels are flexible, varying according to their location and mood. Some places may simply be beyond the tolerance of the average tourist. Correspondingly, tourists who pride themselves on their high tolerance may reject places with too much superstructure, dismissing them as “too touristy” or “too developed.” Since every tourist’s range is different, no place will meet everyone’s expectations. Thus, tourist destinations are engaged in constant struggle to stay within the bounds of the tolerance range that will yield the most tourists and the most revenue while at the same time turning away the fewest.

Tourists’ varying tolerance ranges are one of the forces behind the dynamic frontier of tourism development. But there is also a more general trend of development and modernization in India wherein amenities that were once the domain of tourism superstructure (such as ATMs) are becoming more common in domestic infrastructure. As domestic space modernizes, the distinction between infrastructure and superstructure becomes more vague, and its analytical value diminishes. The forces of tourism development, on one hand, and state and local development, on the other, become difficult to disentangle, leading to a chicken-and-egg conundrum: does tourism cause development or does development cause tourism? Singh (2002, 183) speaks for many tourism scholars when he argues in favor of the former: “the processes of urbanization [and tourism] go hand in hand. The infrastructure required to provide basic

7 But even the most tolerant tourists are increasingly dependent on services such as ATMs. They will often structure their itineraries so that they spend most of their time in less-developed places, but every few weeks will “recharge” in a more developed center with modern amenities.
amenities to the tourists leads to acceleration in the process of urbanization.” But other evidence suggests the contrary. In Chapters Four and Six I describe state-led development efforts such as rural electrification and road-building whose primary purpose is security, defense, and regional development. The benefits they provide to tourism are merely a convenient by-product (Singh S. 2004, 62). Butcher (2003, 116) points out that “development” of all shades is being waged all across India, and that, compared to other forms of development such as heavy industry, tourism may be the “lesser of development evils.”

But the Indian government did take an active role in development specifically related to tourism as well. After decades of ignoring tourism as a “soft” activity (Raguraman 1998, 535), during which the informal tourist industry thrived, the government changed course in 1985 by recognizing that tourism was a means to national economic development and afforded it the status of an industry (ibid, 179). Tax exemptions, low interest rates, fewer restrictions on foreign investment, and subsidies for land, hotel construction, and energy greatly increased the ability of financial capital to invest in tourism, and thus to bring it into its sphere of domination (ibid, 537; Singh 2002, 181; Brown 1988, 241).

Postcolonial theory in tourism: Orientalism and neocolonialism

European colonialism was one of the most influential forces to shape the world in the last several centuries. Although formal colonialism largely came to an end in the decades after World War Two and is now historicized as something that happened in the past, “postcolonialism” means more than simply “after colonialism.” Contemporary postcolonial theory serves to both critique historical colonialism, and to alert us to the legacies of colonialism that are perpetuated to this day in a broad swath of political, economic, social, and cultural relations (Echtner and Prasad 2003, 666). As such, one of the main targets of postcolonial scholarship is “neocolonialism,” a pejorative term for contemporary exploitative regimes of accumulation that dispossess the poor and the marginalized under the veil of “development” in ways that directly and indirectly replicate the racism and hierarchical power relations of historical colonialism. In other words, neocolonialism, as an analytic tool, reminds us that colonialism is not merely the subject of history books, but is alive and well.

As it happens though, postcolonial scholars are concerned with the stuff of history books,
because it is there that they find the contextual evidence that demonstrates the contemporary relevance of their critiques. As such, postcolonial theory is particularly attuned to the power of discourse. Discourses, or texts, language, policies, and social practices that collectively conspire to produce truth and knowledge, exercise power by “controlling and delimiting both the mode and the means of representation in a given society” (Gandhi 1998, 77). In other words, those with the power to construct and propagate discourses have a monopoly on knowledge and thus power within society. By setting the terms of the debate, they exercise control over the outcome. The direct implications of neocolonial practice, however, are not always blatant or easily proved. This is why postcolonial scholarship pays such close attention to discourse. Discourses can be unveiled, deconstructed, and challenged. Tourism between former colonizing and colonized countries on a mass scale is still a relatively recent phenomenon, and as such it is still colored by discourses that were popularized during historical colonialism (Mishra and Hodge 1991 in Echtner and Prasad 2003, 666-667).

Many postcolonial critiques of contemporary tourism focus on the discursive similarities between colonial and contemporary travel literature. Tickell (2001, 42), for example, argues that contemporary travel writing relishes in colonial nostalgia by “citing and reinscribing the integral themes of colonial adventure fiction, and refashioning them for today’s audience” and that this “process of literary re-citation suggests that the wider, discursive imagination of independent tourism is informed and animated by similar fantasies.” Nonfiction works, such as travel guidebooks, can also reinforce colonial tropes. Guidebooks are selective and deliberate in what they represent, choosing images and themes that reinforce their audience’s engrained perceptions (Echtner and Prasad 2003, 671) because “sensory capabilities are less strained when [one] gazes at the world through reassuring stereotypes” (Hottola 2005, 17).

In the case of India (and many other former colonies), the myths and stereotypes to which Elsrud refers are heavily tinged with the discourse of Orientalism. Said’s (1978) seminal argument was that the political project of colonialism was accompanied, and justified, by the discursive products of European novelists, scientists, artists, and scholars whose texts defined the Orient as mysterious, exotic, sensual, cruel, despotic, and sly. While these texts often depicted the Oriental subject in seemingly benign contexts such as picturesque, at the same time, they justified the superiority of the West “by creating a boundary between the West and the East through a series of hierarchical binary oppositions, where the former was represented as forward
and advancing, with the latter thus being systematically constituted as backward and stagnant” (Echtner and Prasad 2003, 667).

As a powerful trope in the Western consciousness since colonial times, Orientalism has enjoyed remarkable staying power. Even to this day, it is difficult to find references to or images of Asia in the Western media today that are not in some way informed by Orientalist themes. As such, it is an extremely powerful mediator in the production of knowledge for tourists who travel to Asia. There is so much choice in the marketplace of global tourism that consumers must make decisions based on pre-determined perceptions of place. These perceptions, collectively constituting the geographical imagination, are strongly shaped by signs and images circulated in popular media, which are themselves shaped by Orientalist tropes (Ross 1994, 44). One common, and dehumanizing, Orientalist trope is that of primitiveness. MacCannell maintained that “for moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles” (MacCannell 1976, 3). In other words, tourists conflate temporal variation with spatial variation by assuming that people whose cultures are different than their own are somehow more primitive or that they represent different moments in the progression of historical development (Munt 1994a, 105).

Echtner and Prasad (2003, 669) explain that “the myth of the unchanged systematically portrays destinations as firmly entrenched in a time ripe for a journey of discovery….The tourist expects to find legendary lands—to uncover their mystical secrets [inducing a yearning to] relive the journeys and experiences of colonial explorers, traders, treasure hunters, and archeologists” (Echtner and Prasad 2003, 669). One extreme example of the primitiveness discourse is the juxtaposition of humans with animals, as found in a dated article in Tourism Management: “The lifestyle and religion of the host villager is as fascinating as the national wildlife refuge he lives near” (Howell 1987, 63). A similar trope that emerges is the portrayal of Indians as childlike (Davidson 2005, 43). Munt (1994b, 53) finds language and imagery celebrating colonialism in the brochures of tour operators that encourage tourists to “follow in the footsteps of Dr. Livingstone.” Brochures also feature colonial anthropological notions of the primitive Other: natives who are “unchanged since the first appearance of the white man.”

One of the repercussions of tourism’s reliance on Orientalist imagery is that people in touristed places are forced to “orientalize” themselves. For example, an ethnic dance troupe might accentuate the “exotic” characteristics in its performance because that is what tourists have
come to expect (MacCannell 1984, 388). Oakes (1998, 2), however, insists that such performances, even if they represent contrived versions of “authentic primitiveness,” are in and of themselves acts of modernity. The performers on display for tourists are, he argues, more modern and knowing than the tourists who come to see them, who are hopelessly caught in between their own post-modernity and yearning for a false pre-modernity. Western tourists are often blissfully unaware of the false, demeaning, and racism-tinged nature of Orientalist discourses and images. They may even see their participation in such discourses as indicators of their cultural open-mindedness and awareness. MacCannell (1992, 66), however, criticizes the “incorporation of Otherness” by tourists as “cannibalistic”: “[The tourist] deals with human difference not merely by doing away with it, but by taking it in completely, metabolizing it, transforming it into shit, and eliminating it.”

Some of the proponents of tourism-as-neocolonialism cite evidence from beyond the realm of discourse. Tourism, Munt (1994b, 534) claims, maintains and reinforces “deeply embedded racial and class-bound institutionalized discriminatory processes which…have proved so successful in promoting Caribbean states from a condition of colonial dependence into highly stratified reflections of their former colonial masters.” This is because tourism service jobs, while economically necessary, are demeaning and blue the lines “between service and servitude” (ibid). Just as global capitalism exploits cheap sweatshop labor around the world, the global tourism industry exploits differences in global wealth and labor value (Tickell 2001, 52). These differences are based on historical advantages the metropolitan core accrued under colonialism while it perpetuated underdevelopment in its colonies (Britton 1982, 335). Wealthy tourists travel to developing countries and pay large sums to sleep in hotel rooms cleaned by maids whose earnings are only marginally above those paid in the export processing zones on the less scenic side of the island (Kincaid 1988). Unlike the sweatshop laborer, however, the tourism laborer is forced to “confront the personification of his or her servility—the tourist—daily,” rubbing it in her face that she is a second class citizen on her own island (Munt, 1994b, 55).

Tourism is commonly sold by development agencies as a way for poor countries to enter the global economy and boost their foreign exchange earnings. When they do, they become “enmeshed in a global system over which [they have] little control” (Britton 1982, 331).

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8 His is a distasteful and severe metaphor, for sure, but one that makes more sense in the context of the “Cannibal tours” that he is critiquing in New Guinea.
Countries that let foreign capital in to build luxury resorts see few benefits for the local economy because profits are later extracted in order to deliver a return on the investment. These resorts import foods and supplies rather than supporting local producers, and they deny local residents access to the private beaches (Britton 1982). India has seen some of these problems in the beach resorts of Goa, but by and large the luxury hotel market is controlled by Indian, rather than foreign, capital. Domestic capital, however is no less capable of dispossessing the poor. In many fast-developing tourist destinations, small-scale Indian entrepreneurs lack the means to compete with professional hoteliers from other parts of India, resulting in leakage of profits away from local communities (Shackley 1996, 215). This goes to show that neocolonialism does not always adhere to the old dichotomies of nation-based colonized and colonizer. In the new colonialism, the colonized and the colonizer can be found within the same country.

Nevertheless, tourists from Western countries who travel to developing countries like India are undoubtedly the beneficiaries of currency exchange rates biased greatly in their favor as a result of the historicity of colonialism. Yet, despite their built-in financial advantage, many backpackers travel with the specific objective of paying as little as possible (Desforges 1998, 183). This could be seen as a form of exploitation, extracting surplus value in the form of cultural capital (as discussed later in this chapter) for a pittance. This is but one of many ways in which backpackers contribute to neocolonialism in tourism in ways that less spendthrift tourists do not. Backpackers, who exercise greater agency over their spatialities, are far more attached to colonial discourses of discovery and adventure than tourists who are content to be shown around by guides on package tours. Noy (2004, 93) suggests that “the conduct and experiences [of backpackers] carry expansionist, semi-imperialist qualities” and that the “adventures, the search for exoticism, authenticity, and ‘virgin’ territory, when amalgamated in the experience of Western backpackers, inevitably entail and evoke imperialist and neocolonial themes.”

While the motives of colonialism and tourism are different, the effects may be similar. Tourists who seek "untouched" places that have not become "too touristy" and where the local culture is "authentic" are in fact demanding something extraordinary. They hope to be the first tourists ever to interact with a given people. Those people, once exposed to these tourists, are rendered, by the tourist's own standards, useless, and they are discarded. Tony Wheeler, founder of *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, writes that the truly “far out” places are the ones that his books do not cover. Although he claims not to advocate traveling to such places as a kind of “chest-
beating” exercise (McFerrin 2006), the fact that he even speaks of such places, and in appealing terminology like “far out,” speaks to a latent desire among backpackers to get as far “off the beaten path” as possible. Some travel agents have capitalized on such a desire and offer to take customers “even further” off the beaten track” or even to “tourist-free” areas (Munt 1994b, 53).

Expansionary tourism is driven by predatory urges with patriarchal and sexual overtones, reflecting a “symbiotic relationship between colonialism and sexism that constantly reinvents itself within the globalized tourism industry” (Aitchison 2001, 140; Blunt 1994). This is graphically illustrated in descriptions of uncharted terrain and unclimbed peaks as “virgin,” of tourists as “penetrating,” and of places being “written off” and people “done” (Oakes 1998, 1). The government of India, too, employs gendered images of female subservience and enticing sexuality in their tourism advertisements: “India awaits you…The timeless mystery and beauty of India has been waiting for you for 5,000 years. She is an indescribable and unforgettable land and only by visiting the country can the truth be experienced…Everything you desire can be found in India…every whim will be gratified” (Pritchard and Morgan 2000, 897).

The concept of neocolonialism in tourism is not only found in the ivory towers of academia. With the 1955 armed rebellion against Portuguese colonialism still etched in public memory, the Goan activist group Jagrut Goenkaranchi Fauz (JGF) frames its struggle against the problems of tourism very much in the context of colonialism:

Just like a war, modern mass tourism is an invasion by ‘armies’ of live human beings wielding their superior ‘weapons’ of a stronger currency and a materialist culture. These armies conquer local people and enslave them to their attitudes, values, lifestyles and culture. It is a culture of economic subjugation; a culture of exploitation; a culture of vandalizing the earth and environment; a culture of racist arrogance…It is this aspect of modern mass tourism—bringing with it real armies of live human beings, that makes it the most sophisticated and insidious form of neocolonialism and imperialism known to mankind (Saldanha 2002, 102).

Although JGF has not succeeded in halting the flow of tourists to Goa, they have succeeded in lobbying Lonely Planet to include guidelines for its readers on respecting local values and mitigating negative impacts (ibid).

Bhattacharyya’s (1997, 387) discourse analysis of Lonely Planet’s India guidebook rests on Said’s argument that texts written about the Other can actually reveal more about those who create and consume them than they reveal about those they describe. Lonely Planet’s Wheeler states that the purpose of his guidebooks is to “escort readers physically and intellectually...
through another culture and to tackle the stereotyping and ignorance that leads to fear and misunderstanding” (McFerrin 2006). He thus professes a neutrality that resists any culpability for reproducing the very stereotypes or ignorance he claims to “tackle.” According to Bhattacharyya, however, Lonely Planet is far from neutral. The cover image (see Figure 2.3) is modeled after traditional Indian paintings of women serving their lovers or masters and making offering to the Gods. In this cover image, five Indian women patiently wait on a Western backpacker in t-shirt and blue jeans. This suggests three glaringly false notions: that Westerners are revered in India and receive godlike treatment, that Indian women are sexually available to Western men, and

![Figure 2.3 Cover of Lonely Planet’s first edition India guidebook](Crowther 1981)
that the scale of economic inequality is so great that the luxury of five personal servants can be had by a Western budget tourist (Bhattacharyya 1997, 384). The overall message Bhattacharyya extracts is that the Western tourist is entitled to be discriminating and to expect a high level of service from Indians, while he himself has few or no responsibilities (ibid, 386).

The backpacker guesthouse offers a “verandah-view” of India and of the social relations between its tourists and hosts, according to Hutnyk (1996, 49). The term is borrowed from Pratt’s description of the insulated perspective of colonial travel writers and anthropologists who claimed to “understand” the people they wrote about, thus representing the “benign” face of colonialism (Pratt 1992, 221 in Hutnyk 1996, 49). Liberal tourists have a natural tendency to disassociate blame from their own actions. “We think we’re different because we don’t have a stars-and-stripes patch on our backpacks,” cautions Rufus (2006), for whom denouncing American imperialism in Iraq and symbolizing one’s politics with a Canadian flag is not enough. To her, it is hypocrisy to criticize one form of empire while benefiting from another. John Perkins, the author of Conessions of an Economic Hit Man, was not a tourist or a backpacker but he had the chance to live like one during his stint as a development economist in Indonesia in the early 1970s. While his colleagues stayed in five star hotels, he stayed in cheap guesthouses and “developed a genuine love for the land and its people” by interacting with everyday Indonesians (Perkins 2004). He claims to understand and sympathize with the struggles and exploitation Indonesians face, yet he still uses his position of power to push the debt-financed investment and structural adjustment policies that have caused so much hardship in Indonesians’ lives (ibid). In other words, being a culturally sensitive, liberal-minded Westerner is not enough to prevent the indirect, or even direct, execution of deeds in the service of neocolonial hegemony.

If the literature I have reviewed thus far paints a pessimistic picture of tourism and its neocolonial effects, my reader may rest assured that there is ample scholarship to indicate that tourism need not always be malevolent. Oakes (1998, 69) reminds us, “tourism is not just an outside force impacting local culture, but a dynamic component of that culture itself.” Tickell (2001, 52), who readily reads neocolonial tropes into travel literature and travel fiction, is less willing to condemn actual tourist practice itself: “Of course, within the diverse set of practices which make up tourism we should be wary of reading the encounter between guest and host as one of inevitable victimage.” Tickell’s subsequent claim that “host cultures show a resilient,
hybridising response to the appearance of the international tourist” (ibid) could be interpreted, on one hand, as an apologist’s rationalization of hosts who have no choice but to “respond” and “hybridize” to the onslaught of tourism against which they have no control. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as an attempt to reassert agency on behalf of the local subject, something that, too often, in both pro- and anti-tourist discourse, seems to have been forgotten.

Appiah is also concerned with what he sees as critical theorists’ replication of the very power structures they claim to oppose by controlling the script that determines who has agency and who is acting/being acted upon in the dynamics of tourism and cultural change. He is critical of the “postcolonial novelist who, in contrast to the tourism operator, presents a ‘dark vision’ of Otherness where indigenous culture is presumed to have been suffocated by the discourse of Western capitalism” (Appiah 1996, 69 in Aitchison 2001, 143). Spivak likewise claims that the field of critical tourism studies is little more than an “Otherness machine” and that it “allows little scope for the subaltern to speak” (Spivak, 1988 in Aitchison 2001, 143). But Duncan and Sharp (1993, 478) disagree, arguing that places considered marginal and disempowered do in fact “have potential to become nodes in a more decentered, less binary, and less hierarchical spatial organization of society.”

Wearing and Wearing (2006, 149) suggest that local agency and a new politics of “third space tourism” have the ability to destabilize the balance of knowledge-power that seeks to “construct the host culture’s otherness as inferior to the tourist’s own” and that can “overcome the highly commodified, normalizing, and marketized nature of globalized Western tourism.” They argue that it may be possible for tourists to “incorporate otherness into the self in a self-expansive way, rather than in the cannibalistic, narcissistic, self-restrictive, homogenized way described by MacCannell” (ibid, 152). This, however, is only possible when tourist destinations are not constructed as bounded places, whose meanings are dictated by marketers and outsiders, but rather as “third spaces” where “experiential interaction” leads tourists to replace the mentality of “self vs. other” with that of the collective “we” (ibid).

Munt (1994b, 59) pessimistically suggests that tourists feel a macabre sense of excitement when they fixate their gaze on scenes of extreme poverty. An example of this gaze is the “poverty tours” that have become popular in places like Mumbai’s Dharavi slums. Urry (2002, 150-1) argues that there are different variations of the tourist gaze that are less intrusive than the colonial/anthropological gaze, such as the spectatorial gaze, the reverential gaze, the
environmental gaze, and the mediatized gaze. Christopher Way, the founder of Dharavi Tours, would likely agree with Urry in that he insists that his company promotes education rather than exploitation or voyeurism. His company operates in partnership with Dharavi residents, who have given him permission to bring tourists into their community. Visitors are instructed on proper etiquette, cameras are prohibited, and after-expenses profits go to Dharavi charities. Way believes that when his clients see the human face of the slum, its strong sense of community, and its industriousness, their stereotypes about slums and the people who inhabit them will be shattered (Lancaster 2007). All travelers engage in forms of systematic knowledge acquisition. But whereas the colonial traveler collected knowledge on behalf of the institutional repositories of state, crown, and university, the contemporary traveler is more concerned with “the pursuit of individual knowledge and experiences” which are “recorded largely in personal memory” for personal, rather than institutional, gain (Urry 2002, 179).

Whereas colonialism primarily divided people along lines of race and nationality, neocolonialism is less rigid and predictable, and its divisions penetrate deep within nation-states, and along lines of class. Class and race hierarchies may parallel each other at times, but they also work along currents that are counter to the traditional hierarchy between colonial and post-colonial state. For example, the aforementioned Goan activist group JGF criticizes Western backpackers in particular yet turns a blind eye towards the hedonism of upper-class tourists (domestic and international) and their casinos, golf courses, and jet skis, even though their environmental impacts are far greater than those of backpackers (Saldanha 1998, 105). One JGF editorial contains a noticeable disdain for European working-class “plumbers and masons and bartenders” (Wilson 1997, 69).

The class divide within India, too, has been greatly accentuated by India’s turn towards free market, neoliberal governance beginning in 1991. During this period, inequality has increased dramatically and those at the bottom have seen their claims to public space, common property, social welfare, and economic rights jeopardized (Ghosh 2004). The Indian government has actively promoted the spatial expansion of tourism. As Brown (1988, 241) reported, “directing more visitors to lesser-known areas” was highlighted as a specific policy objective. In this context, state-led domestic tourism initiatives can be conceptualized as a form of “internal colonialism,” especially when the colonized are super-marginalized such as in the case of “fourth world” or indigenous peoples (Britton 1992, 465; Hall and Tucker 2004). Indian state
development discourse has specifically highlighted “backwards” tribal areas as amongst those with the highest potential for future tourism development (Ghimire 2001, 204). Within this domestic context, the “metropolitan core,” which represented the European colonizing nations under earlier colonialism, can be reconstituted as the urban metropolitan elites of India, while the rural and tribal hinterlands of India become the colonized periphery.

_Backpackers in India and their antecedents_

The subgroup of tourists that are the main focus of my attention in this thesis are known as backpackers. Although this term is a relatively recent one, there are many historical antecedents to contemporary backpackers. Perhaps the oldest is found in the Grand Tour of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Grand Tour was a rite of passage and socialization for the young men who were the future ruling class of Britain (Adler 1985, 337). Most Grand Tours followed well-trodden circuits through countries like France and Italy, incorporating historical, artistic, and picturesque sights. For the privileged few, India, the jewel in the crown of the British Empire, was a fitting capstone to the Grand Tour (Hottola 1999, 50). In the nineteenth century, steamships and railroads made travel easier and less expensive and Thomas Cook began marketing standardized versions of the Grand Tour to a wider audience of middle- and eventually working-class people, first in Europe and later to Britain’s overseas colonies (Brendon 1991).

Many of the British tourists in India during colonialism were officials in the colonial administration or army. Scientists, explorers, and surveyors were portrayed through heroic discourses, “braving remote areas, mountains, snakes, tigers, and hostile natives” in order to advance scientific knowledge on behalf of their country (Edney 1997, 126-130). But not every colonial traveler traveled under the aegis of empire. A remarkable number of British women ventured to India on their own for purposes of self-affirmation and later published their accounts (Ghose 1998; Blunt 1994; Miller 1984). Constance Gordon Cumming’s 1894 memoirs demonstrate that the desire to get “off the beaten path” is nothing new. Long before twentieth century hippies and backpackers did the same, she sought to “leave the beaten track” on the path “untrodden by white feet” where she hoped to “find out all manners of delightful nooks almost unexplored” (Cumming 1894, 132 in Ghose 1998, 131). She conveys through anecdote the
degree to which she sought to separate herself from other white travelers and her disappointment when that separation was broken: “While we were basking on our pleasant island…suddenly we beheld a most startling apparition…white men taking a day’s shooting on our beloved desert isle! Its romance was gone…we were conscious of no longer being the sole pale-faces in the district” (Cumming 1894, 538 in Ghose 1998, 131).

As noted earlier, Pratt (1992, 30-31) argues that all colonial travelers, whether in the official employ of empire or not, were embedded in and benefited from colonial power relations. But Guelke and Guelke (2004, 27) question Pratt’s assessment, acknowledging that while colonial travelers cannot be disassociated from colonialism, they must be understood in the context of their time. They argue that colonial travelers were not uniformly racist or imperialist, but that they demonstrated a wide range of moral and political views. It is not fair for contemporary critics to “condemn them for not being as enlightened as we are” today because we are products of a different time (ibid). The following excerpt from the memoirs of one female traveler is an example of one of the more enlightened perspectives to emerge from colonial travel writing:

During the whole of this journey, we were strongly impressed with a feeling of gratitude and good-will towards the natives of India, who, upon all occasions, manifested an anxious desire to assure us of their respect and attachment. The highly civilized state of the country, and the courteous manners of all classes of the people, render traveling both easy and agreeable (Roberts 1835, 163 in Ghose 1998, 128).

Many of the same tropes and discourses that can be found in travel literature from India during colonial times re-emerge after Indian independence, when a new group of European tourists began traveling to India. Cohen (1972) was one of the first scholars to describe this group. He labeled them “drifters” and described them as the “type of international tourist who…

Ventures furthest away from the beaten track
Shuns any kind of connection with the tourist establishment
Tends to make it wholly on his own
Tries to live the way the people he visits live
Has no fixed itinerary or timetable and no well-defined goals of travel
Is almost wholly immersed in his host culture (Cohen 1972, 89)

Cohen’s “drifters” overlap with and have alternately been described as “hippies,” “freaks,” “global nomads,” and, more recently, “alternative tourists,” “independent tourists,” “travelers,”
This subset of tourists proliferated in tandem with the counterculture movement of the 1960s. But as early as 1972, as Cohen wrote at the time, drifter tourism had already become largely “institutionalized” (ibid, 90). Cohen observed that although drifter tourism was spatially segregated from mass tourism, it in fact resembled mass tourism, at a smaller scale, and in parallel channels (ibid). Drifters maintained just enough distance from mass tourists so as to disassociate themselves from them, yet at the same time relied on parallel versions of the same basic services and were drawn to the same main regions and destinations.

This ideological distance, outwardly signified by drifter lifestyle, behavior, and appearance, belies the socioeconomic reality that drifters tended to come from the same middle and upper-class Western backgrounds as mainstream international tourists (ibid, 91). Not all liked what they found. Neville (1970, 212), for example, “met many a despondent traveler…awaiting, at the Post Restante, an air ticket home from his father.” For those who did take a liking to India, grungy, unkempt appearances and high tolerance for rustic living were not the result of economics, but a conscious choice reflecting the counterculture’s disenchantment with and rebellion against middle-class values and conformity (Cohen 1972, 93). They saw India as “last chance to see the world before…it slowly subsides into a deathly sea of uniformity” (Neville 1970, 221).

Romanticized images of drifters and hippies as generous, openhearted, peace-loving folk belie the reality that they were often stingy, ungracious, and just plain criminal. Describing his technique for bargaining with rickshaw drivers, one boasted: “I don’t listen to what they say. When they take me where I want to go, I give them what I think” (Wiles 1972, 140). Justifying their frugality in terms of a superficial spiritual asceticism, they contributed little to local economies, at least in proportion to their means. They came in buses on the overland trail from Europe, set up tents, and camped on beaches for months at a time, spending little on local transportation or accommodations (Davidson 2005, 41). Neville (1970, 213) describes several of the unscrupulous ways that hippies could make money in India: selling forged student cards, begging, smuggling drugs and guns, selling their Western-style jeans at inflated cost. He even recommends that “in emergencies girls can fuck repressed Moslems for a fortune, or couples can

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9 For uniformity’s sake, I will use the term “backpacker” throughout this thesis when speaking of the contemporary period. I will, however, defer to Cohen’s terms when speaking of the “drifters” and “hippies” of the 1960s and 1970s.
make money by letting them ‘just lookee’” (ibid). He has no qualms admitting, “when it comes to exploiting innocent primitives, hippie nomads can be ruthless” (ibid, 215). Yet, after all the illegal activity he describes, Neville has the gall to decry the hippies’ “persecution” and “clampdown on longhairs” by the Indian authorities (ibid, 227) suggesting that, for the hippies, India was not so very different than it was for the colonials who preceded them. It was very much a pleasure periphery, a place where they, as the beneficiaries of white entitlement, felt that the rules did not apply to them.

Although contemporary backpackers in India are very much the descendents of the drifters and the hippies of the 1960s and 1970s, they differ in several ways. For one, they are a far more diverse group. One researcher counted amongst her informants “teachers, filmmakers, drug traffickers, university dropouts, petty entrepreneurs, exporters, trustafarians, painters, ex-soldiers, anthropologists, charity workers, DJs, farmers, guitar-makers, and a goatherd” (Davidson 2005, 35). Europeans, Israelis, North Americans, and Australians and New Zealanders are the most represented nationalities (O’Reilly 2006, 1001). Teo and Leong (2006), however, have pointed out that the academic study of backpackers suffers from a Western-centric bias, and that there is a growing trend in backpackers from non-Western countries as well (particularly Japan, South Korea, and Singapore). Backpackers tend to come from the middle and upper-classes of their respective countries, although this is not always the case (see Chapter Five). Backpackers tend to travel for extended periods of time, between two and twelve months, and typically lack a rigid itinerary (ibid, 999). Much of their decision-making is based on word of mouth, which is shared both on the internet in travel blogs and forums, and on the road, in backpacker enclaves and guesthouses. In fact, according to a survey by Murphy (2001, 56), geography (i.e. where people have been and where they are going) is the most frequent backpacker topic of conversation.

Backpackers can often be identified by their clothing and outward appearance. They purchase clothes in India thinking it will help them to “blend in,” not realizing that these clothes are marketed only to backpackers and not authentic Indian clothing. This can result in humorous

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10 Eighty percent of foreign tourists in India are self-guided and not members of a package tour (Raguraman 1998, 538). While backpackers fit this description, one should not assume that every self-guided tourist is necessarily a backpacker.
exchanges, such as the following one in Sutcliffe’s satirical novel of a British fish-out-of-water backpacker in India:

Where did you buy that shit?
Mostly in Manali and Dharamsala.
I should have guessed. Is this because you thought that wearing Tibetan clothes would help you look like a local in South India? (Sutcliffe 1998, 184)

The concept of dressing in local clothing, or “going native,” has its antecedents in colonial literature, and particularly in the Kipling canon. Low (1993, 254) explains that the act of dressing as a native gives white tourists the “promise of ‘transgressive’ pleasure without the penalties of actual change” and alleges that “the fantasy of donning native costume [is an] attempt at control of subaltern peoples” (ibid, 260). Davidson, however, disagrees, arguing that “travellers are very aware that they don’t ‘fit’ the local iconography” and that their choices represent not “nostalgia for an exotically imagined Indian past” but rather “a postmodern form of nostalgia for another hedonistic experience of traveling in India” (Davidson 2005, 49). In other words, by donning “retro-hippie,” “pseudo-Indian” clothing, contemporary backpackers are not emulating Indians but rather are harkening back to their own cultural predecessors: the hippies. As I have shown, however, as objects of backpacker nostalgia, hippies are not immune from charges of Orientalism and neocolonialism.

When people who traveled in India decades ago describe the tourism landscape today, their reminiscences denote a degree of intergenerational resentment. The India they see today is different than the India of their early travels, and they often blame the most visible sign of change: the tourists themselves. In Sutcliffe’s novel, a journalist in forties harangues the eighteen-year old protagonist that “it’s not just hippies on a spiritual mission who come here any more, but morons on a poverty-tourism adventure holiday” (Sutcliffe 1998, 138). Even as early as 1979, one long-term traveler in India lamented, “We discovered these places, Afghanistan, Nepal, Goa. When we arrived everybody loved us. Now the whole damn world is on the trail we opened up, and the same people who loved us, fucking hate us now. There’s too many of them. They’re not in the same class as those of us who got here first” (Mehta 1979, 66). It is easy for people who have seen India change over time to complain that too much has changed and to yearn for a romanticized past, but young backpackers who are in India for the first time will inevitably still feel a rush of excitement, and resent being told by older travelers that India is not what it used to be (O’Reilly 2006, 1006). Indeed, to some in the younger generation of
backpackers, such old-timers are “transparent social failures…the sad, beardy basket-case generation…still trudging around India after all these years” (Sutcliffe 1998, 147).

Sutcliffe’s characters may be particularly cynical, but there is widespread agreement that today’s backpackers seek different things in India than their predecessors did. Although the hippie generation outwardly justified its sojourn in India as a quest for spiritual enlightenment, many simply sought escape, rebellion, and drugs (Cohen 1972, 94). Contemporary backpackers, in contrast, are thought to be far more driven. They are “(future) pillars of society, on temporary leave from affluence, but with clear and unwavering intentions to return to ‘normal’ life” (Sorensen 2003, 852). Their travels represent a postponement of their responsibilities back home, rather than a rejection of them (Westerhausen 2002, 155). The time they spend traveling is not aimless, but fits into a larger plan which usually involves returning to their own country and entering (or resuming) a mainstream career (O’Reilly 2006, 1007).

Plenty of contemporary backpackers, however, still display those bygone characteristics of aimlessness, escapism, and indulgence. Many backpackers begin their journey with the intention of “seeing the real India” and “blending in” as much as possible. Once they arrive, however, they find that this is more challenging than they anticipated. Instead, they end up spending much of their time in the backpacker enclaves that are located throughout India (Chapters Four, Five, and Six describe in detail examples of such enclaves). Backpackers “seek refuge” in enclaves because they provide some semblance of familiarity in a strange land. They are places where backpackers feel less disoriented and more in control of their surroundings (Hottola 2005, 2). They are places of recuperation, or “decompression zones” (Tickell 2001, 43). Thus, ironically, people travel to India to escape from familiarity, but once there, they escape back into familiarity.

These enclaves stand in contrast to what Hottola calls “Other space” or “the Other environment.” Here, he argues, backpackers feel disoriented, vulnerable, confrontational, and outnumbered (Hottola 2005, 3). As a result they spend as little time in Other space as necessary, often only to transit in between two enclaves (see Figure 2.3). Hottola identifies five different types of spaces where backpackers feel comfortable and safe:

1. Private spaces reserved for travelers (e.g. hotel rooms)
2. Semi-private spaces of restricted access (e.g. hotel common areas)
3. Public spaces of restricted access (e.g. museums, expensive restaurants, 1st class trains)
4. Spaces of temporary Western domination (e.g. beaches, festivals)
While there is definitely some truth to Hottola’s scheme, I find it too simplistic, too deterministic, and, most importantly, too cynical. While it is true that backpackers enjoy meeting other backpackers, most also like to “get away from the backpacker scene” (Murphy 2001, 61). Most do not find the “Other space” beyond the enclaves to be nearly as intimidating as Hottola seems to think they are. Furthermore, the fact that these enclaves are some of the few spaces in India where white people outnumber Indians does not make them homogeneous. White backpackers in India come from diverse backgrounds within the West and speak many different languages. Hottola believes that their shared experience of being white “in the presence of the contrasting Other” fosters a common bond (Hottola 2005, 14). Yet this is not always the case, as can be seen in the often problematic relationship between Israeli backpackers and other Western backpackers (discussed in Chapter Four). Yet even the whitest backpacker enclaves still retain characteristics of Edensor’s heterogeneous space. This is because they are often located adjacent to, or even in the middle of, existing villages and communities where local residents continue to go about their daily lives. In fact, backpacker enclaves do not fit easily in Edensor’s binary of enclavistic and heterogeneous space. Although some are certainly more homogeneous than others, very few
backpacker enclaves fit the definition of true enclavic space, which is found mostly in resorts where access is effectively restricted to foreign tourists. Davidson (2005, 33) argues that backpackers “colonize,” “carve out,” and “control their own exclusive spaces,” all of which would seem to be evidence of neocolonialism. The enclaves, however, are used, not “controlled,” by backpackers. That control lies more with the Indians who own and manage the businesses in the enclaves.

The scholarly literature that focuses on backpackers contains both praise and criticism. Much of the debate over the pros and cons of backpacker tourism revolves around differences between backpackers and other types of tourists. Scheyvens, for instance, counters the claim that backpackers contribute little to local economies. Although they may spend less money per day, because they travel for longer periods of time, their overall economic impact is higher (Scheyvens 2002, 151). Furthermore, “they spread their spending over a wider geographic area, bringing benefits to remote and otherwise economically depressed regions” (ibid). Backpackers purchase more locally grown food and locally made goods. Their high tolerance of downscale amenities means that serving the backpacker market is not as capital intensive as serving lower tolerance tourists (ibid, 152). Thus, Britton’s (1980, 159) argument that the geography of tourism is strongly determined by the geography of “pre-existing fixed capital originally developed to serve colonial interests” is not as relevant to the geography of backpacker tourism, which is dominated by the informal sector and low levels of fixed capital. This explains why small-scale entrepreneurs in Goa prefer backpackers to package tourists; profits accrue to them directly and are not siphoned off through foreign-owned subsidiaries (Scheyvens 2002, 151).

Aware of the critiques that tourism and backpacking perpetuate neocolonial social relations, Davidson (2005, 42) takes an active stance to defend backpackers, who, she claims, exhibit “values of a different planetary consciousness from colonial and neo-colonial travelers.” Furthermore, she argues, “they rarely express interest in the ‘mastering of otherness’ signified by heroic, discovery rhetoric, but are concerned with integrating themselves into their surrounding environments in India in the hope of transforming the ‘Self’ and their interpretations of the world” (ibid). Davidson is not alone in arguing that backpackers are somehow more conscientious than other tourists. Even Indian scholars have bought into the notion that backpackers “adopt completely the culture of the place and are blended into the general milieu” (Singh 2002, 183).
Much faith is placed in the fruits of backpacker-host interactions. Even MacCannell (1992, 7-12) loosens his usually cynical stance to suggest, “face-to-face interaction and dialogue between tourist and host may be enough to challenge the inferiorization of host cultures by the homogenizing forces of tourism.” Host-tourist interactions, in which both parties are equally imbued with agency and in which hosts are not merely passive subjects, are said to break down stereotypes and prejudices, in both directions (Erb 2000, 710 in Scheyvens 2002, 151). Tourism has even been hailed as a force for peace, helping to diminish psychological distance between cultures, and open up previously closed and hostile societies (D’Amore 1988, 152).

One study that tested this hypothesis, however, yielded less than promising results. Amir and Ben-Ari (1985, 113) studied the effects of interpersonal contact between Israeli tourists and Egyptian hosts and found that contact may in fact perpetuate and accentuate stereotypes and prejudices, rather than undoing them. Contact between tourists and hosts is usually short-lived, superficial, and often only occurs in the context of the procurement of goods and services. The assumption that it will instantly foster understanding is naïve. In order to effectively break down stereotypes, Amir and Ben-Ari (1985, 107) determined that individuals must be presented with new information, they must be psychologically prepared to accept such information, and the conditions of the encounter must include “equal status, interpersonal intimacy, cooperation, and social or institutional support.” They also determined that initial attitude (regardless of the nature of the contact) is the strongest indicator of how successful the contact will be. Tourists with positive initial attitudes saw their attitudes become even more positive, whilst those with an initially negative attitude saw theirs become more negative (ibid, 112).

Huxley (2004) administered a survey to find out exactly how backpackers “engage with local cultures.” Responses included “attending festivals, wearing local clothes, trying foods, listening to music, playing with children, watching local films, and driving through tiny villages in remote areas” (ibid, 39). While there is nothing wrong with any of these activities, in terms of true “engagement” they are somewhat superficial (and it is questionable whether driving through villages is a form of “engagement” at all). Huxley also found by interviewing backpackers that the majority of the “conversations” they have with locals revolve around run-of-the-mill topics

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11 After all, colonial travelers (not to mention colonial officials) engaged in close contact with Indians, but the results of such contact, engrafted in colonial geographical and anthropological literature, formed the very canon of racist stereotypes currently under scrutiny.
such as obtaining directions or basic information, and do not constitute “real cultural learning experiences” (ibid, 40).

Another ugly side of backpacker discourse is the tendency toward self-aggrandizement. Many backpackers truly think they are better than other tourists. Sutcliffe’s protagonist neatly sums up this common sentiment in the following excerpt:

Fat, rich, middle-aged tourists come here in air-conditioned buses on…two-week holidays…[They] really don’t have the slightest interest in the country. They just want to see a few palaces, buy some cheap carpets, then they go home happy, feeling they’ve learned something about Asia. I can’t stand the sight of them, myself. They ruin all the tourist sights for the real travelers (Sutcliffe 1998, 102)

Later, in pseudo-philosophical mood, he ruminates that “for the package tour member, the rhythms of life for hundreds of millions of Indians apparently are never to be known” (ibid, 235). The notion that the “rhythms of life of hundreds of millions of Indians” could ever be known by anyone, let alone a backpacker, and that the ability to know somehow lies in the thin distinction between backpacker and tourists is the epitome of self-righteous delusion. Such aggrandizement is common in academic literature as well. Weightman (1987, 228), demonstrates palpable disdain for package tourists, who, encapsulated in their chauffeured vehicles and hotels, see only an obscured view of India, which is “incongruent with reality,” (ibid, 231) implying that somehow backpackers have a stronger grasp on reality than other tourists merely because their vehicles are not as often encapsulating and chauffeured.

But while backpackers tend to think highly of themselves, state tourism officials in India do not. They often demonize backpackers in a similar fashion as their hippie predecessors: unkempt, unpredictable, and stingy (Scheyvens 2002, 145). Instead, the state promotes upmarket tourism as the key to economic development. On the cultural front, local authorities express concern that backpackers are invasive, self-centered, and engage in “culturally and socially inappropriate behavior” (ibid, 145-147). They show no respect for local values, consuming copious quantities of alcohol and drugs, wearing “scanty and excessively casual dress,” and engaging in “casual sexual liaisons” (Mandalia 1999, in Scheyvens 2002, 148) (see Chapter 4 for further discussion of drug use amongst backpackers). These behavioral traits mostly offend the conservative and religious factions in Indian society, whereas the young Indians who run tourist businesses that cater to backpackers have quite different opinions on the matter. Many of them,
in fact, participate in the same lifestyles as their customers (although, to their conservative elders, this is precisely the problem).

*Place preference differentiation and cultural capital*

The geography of mainstream or mass tourism in India is uneven, concentrated in just a handful of regions. The geography of backpacking tourism is more dispersed, with destinations in smaller, out of the way places not yet penetrated by mainstream tourism. Yet it, too, is still highly uneven (this can be seen in the maps in Figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix, which illustrate the geographic distribution and frequency of backpackers as surveyed by Hottola and myself, respectively). Backpackers concentrate in parts of North India, South India, and the Himalaya, while vast swaths of Central and Northeast India are virtually ignored. If backpackers are so fond of new, off the beaten path places, why have they left so much blank space on the map? As Oppermann showed, tourism development follows particular spatial patterns, diffusing along concentrated corridors from heavily populated and touristed areas to nearby places. It does not simply fill in blank space at random. Tourism development is guided by positive feedback mechanisms. That is, new tourism development is much more likely to occur near existing development. There is far greater risk involved in starting new development from scratch when supply and demand are unknown entities.

Guidebooks like *Lonely Planet* play an important role in shaping the geography of tourism by acting as arbiters of authenticity and place worthiness. They do not hesitate to describe certain places in such uninspiring terms as “of no particular interest” or “not very interesting” (Bhattacharyya 1997, 379). In its coverage of India, *Lonely Planet* gives far more attention to historical sights and relics of the past—temples, ruins, and palaces—than it does to the modern, technologically advanced side of India (ibid, 388). This imbalance between old and new is reflected in the strong preference of backpackers for the rural over the urban, the less developed over the developed, and the pre-modern over the modern. Davidson (2005, 44) suggests, “the utopic of the Indian countryside reveals a nostalgia for an imaginary past modeled on Third World rustic simplicity as a prototype for ideal living.” Most of the backpackers I interviewed simply state a preference for serenity and quiet, for peaceful villages and a slow pace of life, over the bustle and crowding of modern Indian cities.
A thread on the *Lonely Planet* Thorntree forum entitled “Worst city on the planet” offers the following assessment: “New Delhi. Full of scams, beggars, pollution and unfriendly Indians. Note this is not the case in the whole of India, only New Delhi according to my experience” (Anon. Thorntree 2007). It is significant that the author adds a geographic qualifier that his comments apply to the city of New Delhi only, and not to India as a whole. An incensed resident of New Delhi responds by pointing out that the same criticisms he used against New Delhi could just as easily be used against cities in the West:

I have seen Beggars in London! I have heard about the filthy back streets in New York! I know about the gangsters and drug dealers and prostitutes in European cities. So, what are you people trying to discuss here? Who asked you guys to visit India or Delhi? India is a developing country…People who live in small and economically advanced countries can come and talk any nonsense because they have been born with silver spoons in their mouth...If you think about a human being who can't even afford to have a decent meal a day, what do you expect? A greeting with smile and a discussion about the best wine and a gourmet? If you people do not like Delhi, why are you going there? Get out of this country! India doesn't need people like you to visit here (Anon. Thorntree 1997).

Other, (only slightly) more nuanced contributions to the discussion acknowledge that there is a socio-spatial distinction between hassle-prone areas marked as tourist areas and the rest of the city: “There are two Delhi's. The first is the one you arrive at, jet lagged, confused and full of culture shock. It's centered on that time warped, Israeli mafia-controlled hellhole called Paharganj. The second is the vibrant, cultured, Indian controlled place that you leave from…Stay out of Paharganj and 75% of your troubles will be avoided” (Anon. Thorntree 2007).

Capitalizing on backpackers’ preference for rural settings and nature is the rising subcategory of eco-tourism. Eco-tourism, or “ego tourism” as Munt (1994b, 50) calls it, entered the popular lexicon in the 1980s when environmentalism came into vogue. Eco-tourism, Munt argues, offered the petite bourgeoisie a way to fulfill its need to project an environmental conscience and alternative lifestyle while at the same time continuing to engage in the hedonistic desire to travel (ibid). Rufus (2006) argues, “there is no such thing as eco-tourism” because the very act of traveling by airplane is one of the least ecologically sound things a person can do. She suggests that if people were really serious about reducing carbon emissions, they would cease traveling altogether (ibid). McMinn (1997, 135) dismisses eco-tourism and its synonymous counterpart “sustainable tourism” as “politically correct buzz words” that are most useful as marketing gimmicks. He wants to know what precisely is to be “sustained—profits,
growth, environmental amenities, or livelihoods?” because they are all part of tourism, but they carry very different social, economic, and environmental costs (ibid, 137).

Eco-tourism has been adopted by mainstream development discourse and thus is fully implicated in global capitalism. A product of Western environmental and development logic, it is inherently interventionist and thus potentially neocolonial (Munt, 1994b, 52). Eco-tourism transforms environmental amenities into commodities for sale in the global marketplace (ibid, 53). It is being co-opted by the luxury tourism industry, which adheres to Western neoliberal environmental orthodoxy. To meet Western standards of certification, eco-tourism resorts in developing countries often must import expensive human and fixed capital, which is why they are increasingly recipients of foreign investment and loans and, thus, foreign control (Cater 2006, 30). Few of the people who have used their positions of power to elevate eco-tourism as the new exemplar of sustainable development seem to realize that tourism, and indeed life, in India, has, for most of its history, been far more sustainable and eco-friendly, and far less resource-intensive, than anything built today. India’s original tourists, religious pilgrims and wandering ascetics, have traveled the country and trod lightly by foot for centuries (Singh 2004, 59). Westerners do not have a monopoly on environmentally responsible discourse and practice.

Paul Theoroux’s novel *The Elephanta Suite* features a American who falls in love with India during a business trip. His company assumes that doing business in, and, indeed, simply being in, India constitutes “hardship,” and he is compensated accordingly. Upon his return to America, “it was nice to be thought of as brave, and he liked being regarded as a kind of conqueror. Although he was seldom inconvenienced in India, and lived in luxury, he played up the discomfort—the heat, the dirt, the rats, the beggars, the sidewalks so filled with people you couldn’t walk down them…He said nothing about his suite or the manservant who came with it” (Theroux 2007, 110). Pryer (1997, 230) describes tourists who collect “trophy destinations,” places where few others have been and are thus highly valued and given trophy status. And in a rare interview, *Lonely Planet’s* Tony Wheeler admits that he “feels like that kid trying to collect all the Star Wars toys, except [that he’s] trying to collect all the countries in the world” (McFerrin 2006). These amusing anecdotes illustrate a complex concept known as cultural capital and one that is central to understanding the intersection of colonialism and tourism. Historical colonialism was an “acquisitive process” in which surplus value was extracted from natural and human capital in the colonies in the form of land, commodities, and labor (Simpson
In neocolonial tourism, one of the key commodities being extracted is knowledge and information. This knowledge acquisition leads to the accumulation of cultural capital, or the bundle of symbols, meanings, ideas, and experiences that people accrue in “classificatory struggles” that confer status in a system of social exchange (Bourdieu 1994 in Munt 1994a, 106).

Backpackers spend time both “on” and “off” the “beaten path” but it is in the “off” places where the cultural capital can be found in the greatest quantities. The exchange value of this accumulated capital, however, is not activated until the backpacker returns to the main trail (or to his or her home country) and finds other backpackers or interested parties to acknowledge it (Sorensen 2003, 858). Accumulation of cultural capital may not be the primary motivation or impetus for most backpackers, but when and if it is recognized, it can provide beneficial side effects on which backpackers can capitalize (O’Reilly 2006, 1011).

Cultural capital exists primarily in the discursive and symbolic realm and thus is not physically extracted per se. Because of this, cultural capital could be said to be a more sustainable or nonrenewable form of capital accumulation than colonial accumulation. Multiple tourists can draw upon the same physical locations and collect cultural capital in their own unique ways. Thus, the physical landscape is like a never-ending fountain from which potentially commodifiable culture springs.

O’Reilly (2005, 152) suggests that tourists “who in the [colonial] past might have chosen to become colonial administrators or missionaries now ‘see the world’ as global nomads—long-term travelers or employees of multi-national corporations—or both in succession, the former providing valuable experience for the latter.” Cultural capital is important to trendsetting backpackers and tourists who may not yet have accrued much economic capital but who aspire to join the professional class. They draw upon their travel experiences and accumulated cultural capital to pontificate on what is happening in the world and claim to be authorities on what is hip and trendy. In turn, international investors, always looking for actionable tips in the global casino that is international finance, may pay attention and give them jobs. If these tourist-cum-investors are lucky, they have a chance to cash in their cultural capital for financial capital (Munt 1994a, 107). Even if the tourist does not take the path of investment banker or venture capitalist, cultural capital can be transformed into other forms of capital such as social and economic capital. International travel experience is valued in the discourse of the cultural elite and those who can boast it might portray themselves as “broad-minded, discerning, energetic, experienced, keen,
imaginative, independent, intrepid, and modern” (Munt 1994b, 51) and possessing “strength of character, adaptability, sensitivity, and worldliness” (Munt 1994a, 108).

Not all tourists, however, are as adept at managing cultural capital. Some go to great lengths to acquire symbolic victories despite having little appreciation for the undertaking itself. To travel merely as a means to an end seems a shame, as this Thorntree post implies: “Some folks just can't escape their plans and ego. They land in India and hate it from day one but are determined to see the trip through, lest the lads at the local back home take the piss. They hang on grinding their teeth at every new place. Just go home folks, you know it makes sense” (Anon, Thorntree 2007). The incensed journalist in Sutcliffe’s novel likewise sees the cultural capital young backpackers seek in India as a charade:

Going to India isn’t an act of rebellion these days, it’s actually a form of conformity for ambitious middle-class kids who want to be able to put something on their CV that shows a bit of initiative. All the top companies want robots with initiative these days, and coming to the Third World is the ideal hoop for you to leap through. You come here and cling to each other as if you’re on some kind of extended management-bonding exercise...It’s a badge of suffering you have to wear to be welcomed into the tribe of Britain’s future elite (Sutcliffe 1998, 138).

The strength of the sign value of cultural capital as a commodity is bolstered and maintained through the processes of intellectualization, or adding educational value to travel, and professionalization, or adding work or volunteer experience to tourism (Munt 1994a, 110-111). In other words, simply being a tourist is not enough to acquire the kind of cultural capital that employers take seriously. The tourist experience must be enhanced and qualified to meet the standards of informed global knowledge that is fast becoming a prerequisite in the global capitalist marketplace (Simpson 2003, 448). As a result, the professionalization of travel has become a major new market niche. British students increasingly take a “gap year” before entering university, during which they volunteer, work, and/or travel. The gap year is being institutionalized, claims Simpson (ibid, 449). It is no longer just “for rebels, dropouts, and people with nothing better to do. Now it is for hopeful professionals and future kings”¹² (ibid). They are marketed as opportunities for young people to build “character, confidence, and decision-making skills” and to provide competitive advantage in the job market (ibid, 453). Simpson critiques the gap year industry, however, as reinforcing the Orientalist stereotype of the primitive, helpless

¹² Prince William’s gap year in Belize and Chile is thought to have attracted newfound attention and popularity to the phenomenon.
Other, by convincing inexperienced young Westerners that they can both improve the lives of people in developing countries and experience adventure at the same time, not unlike the colonial civil service (Simpson 2003, 457). An aura of danger in the developing countries is constructed and maintained, she argues, mainly to justify charging extra for insurance and safety measures (ibid, 458).

As this review of the relevant background literature comes to a close, and this thesis moves into data gathered in the field, it is worth noting that the concepts and terminology introduced in this chapter have been introduced for a reason. Enclaves, heterogeneous space, tourism development models, tolerance ranges, Orientalism, colonial discourses, host-tourist relations, the tourist gaze, place preferences, eco-tourism, and cultural capital, just to name a few, will reoccur throughout the next five chapters as I demonstrate through firsthand observations and interviews how they manifest themselves in the contemporary dynamics of tourism in India. If, however, such concepts appear to be straightforward and uniform as they are presented by theorists in the academic literature, I will show that, when put into the context of actual practice and discourse, they are multi-layered and far more complicated. Chapter Seven, in particular, complicates many of the claims made in the research I have presented thus far. As I will show, the results of my interviews reveal far more nuanced and introspective, and anti-colonial, tendencies among backpackers than much of the literature I have reviewed would acknowledge exists.
CHAPTER THREE: SHIMLA

From colonial to postcolonial leisurescape

If any evidence of neocolonialism is to be found lingering in India today, the historical geography of colonialism in India might seem a fertile ground for clues. Given its history as both a seat of imperial power and an exclusive enclave for leisure-seeking British colonial officials, Shimla might seem an ideal candidate. Indeed, the historic heart of Shimla today still looks much as it did when it was populated by the elites of British India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The prominence of Neo-Gothic, Bavarian, and Neo-Tudor buildings (TCPD 2007, 22-47) are testament to the imprint that British capital and culture once had upon this hilltop town perched 7,260 feet high in the foothills of the Himalaya.

Climate, and its corollary, health, lay at the heart of the colonial discourse that justified the hill stations’ existence. It was a discourse heavily reliant upon environmental determinism, and thus rife with racist underpinnings. According to colonial scientific logic, the heat and humidity of the Indian subcontinent were the root cause of disease and illness, as well as the cause of the supposed racial inferiority of Indians themselves (Kennedy 1996, 19). The British feared that they might succumb to equally “degenerating” effects themselves if they did not take steps to mitigate them. The first hill stations were sanatoria-cum-cantonments. Under the banner of “public health,” they provided space for rehabilitation and eased “anxieties about sanitation,” which Kennedy (1996, 9) calls “a familiar trope for racial fear.” The new hill stations soon gained the attention other colonial officers and administrators whose appreciation of the climate had more to do with leisure and comfort than public health.

Yet, if Shimla’s built landscape (or leisurescape, as it is a landscape built for leisure) reflects a history of colonialism, its contemporary social and cultural landscapes tell a different story. It is the story of the growth and dynamism of Indian domestic tourism, and of how Indians have taken an anachronistic landscape, reinscribed it with new meanings, and reconfigured it to fit the needs and desires of a post-colonial, capitalist society. Shimla today is an overwhelmingly Indian place, socially, economically, politically, and touristically. The administrative and commercial heart of the state of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla is today a city of 163,000 permanent residents, its built-up area sprawling over 10 square miles of mountain ridges. Although modest
by Indian standards, it is nonetheless a sizable city, especially given the extreme relief of its
topography. At any given time during the tourist season its population is easily doubled. In 2006,
Shimla hosted 2,061,824 tourists, a six-fold increase in just twenty years (see Table 3.1). The
vast majority of those tourists (95%) are Indian citizens, members of an ascendant middle-class
that increasingly spends its money on luxuries, travel and leisure.14

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<th>Foreigners</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Foreign</th>
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<td>343,107</td>
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<td>44,400</td>
<td>1,418,035</td>
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<td>3.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1,971,417</td>
<td>90,407</td>
<td>2,061,824</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Indian and foreign tourists in Shimla District (HPTDC 2007)

All tourists help to shape the collective public meaning of the places they consume. This
ability to shape meaning, however, is mediated by factors of access and power. As agents in
social space, foreign tourists in Shimla are at a competitive disadvantage. Power lies in numbers,
and in spending power, and today it is concentrated in the hands of a vast and growing Indian
middle-class. No one from outside India is dictating that Shimla’s built heritage be preserved,
either through political means or market demand. Instead, the forces maintaining Shimla the way
it is are indigenous to India. This is why Shimla stands out as amongst the four case studies in
this thesis as the one with the evidence of neocolonialism, at least as neocolonialism is to be
constituted vis-à-vis social relations between foreign nationals and Indians (whether Shimla
shows evidence of internal colonialism, however, is a different matter, and will be addressed
later in this chapter). Shimla is a place where British colonialism has not only been undone, but
turned inside out. India has domesticated Shimla, transforming what was once both a symbol and

13 Tourism statistics in this paper are from unpublished records obtained by the author from the
statistician at the Himachal Pradesh Ministry of Tourism. The data are available at the city-level
but rather at that of the district, of which there are twelve in the state. It can be safely assumed,
however, that nearly all tourists recorded in Shimla district were in fact visitors of Shimla town.
14 Indian nationals, who easily outnumber foreign tourists in their own country, are also
spreading their wings internationally. The Times of India expects the number of Indians traveling
abroad to double by 2011, adding that “many countries are now competing with each other to
woo Indian travelers” and that “Indian tourists are big spenders and as such are a boost to the
tourism revenues of any country” (Times of India 2007).
concrete manifestation of colonial power into a backdrop against which the movers and shakers of India take their holidays.

The same Indians whose money and power are filling India’s metropolitan skylines with malls and skyscrapers have a vested interest in keeping Shimla as it is: a place of quaint architecture, clean air, and leisurely ambience (see Figure 3.1), yet modern and upscale in its reputation, services, and connectedness. These Indian tourists are yet further examples of MacCannell’s (1976, 3) premise that modern metropolitan elites take their holidays in places they deem to be less modern, and evocative of “other historical periods” and “purer, simpler lifestyles.” Indian tourists flock to hill stations like Shimla for the exact same reasons that the British did two centuries ago. They come to escape from their harried, modern lives in cities on the plains, to partake in leisure, and to engage with others of their class in a space designed for people to see and to be seen. But above all, they come for the mountains’ clean air and temperate climate.

Decolonization of a colonial leisurescape

Most of the features of Shimla’s leisurescape, originally designed for British tastes, are in fact just as well suited and appealing to Indians. That is, despite the Britishness that the heritage spaces of Shimla exude, at least in their appearance, their essential character has ceased to be British and has become Indian because it is overwhelmingly Indians who gaze upon, occupy, and interact with such places. Indians, in other words, have a monopoly on the construction and inscription of social meaning upon this landscape.

One such feature is the Mall, Shimla’s high street (see Figure 3.1), where fashionable chain stores like Barrista, Café Coffee Day, Domino’s Pizza, and Baskin-Robbins reside behind colonial-era facades. Kalpana (2002, 2405) argues that the Mall at the same time references its colonial past (by retaining its British etymology, meaning a place to promenade) and ascribes to it new meaning, having “deconstructed that [colonial] discourse and reconstructed a new one.” In the space of the Mall, young female Indian tourists can “indulge themselves” and “seek identity” (ibid, 2403) in ways that are more difficult elsewhere in India where women’s mobilities and public performativities are highly restricted by social taboos. I can affirm Kalpana’s statements in scenes I witnessed that are striking for the degree to which they contrast with the general
pattern of women in public space elsewhere in India. In Shimla, Indian women cavort in public, unaccompanied by men, in fully modern attire, laughing, playfully interacting with their girlfriends. Kennedy (1996, 117-147) notes that in colonial Shimla, too, women played a prominent role, as the hill stations provided some of the few spaces in British India where white women and children were common and in found equal numbers as men. Although British women, too, enacted the daily promenade on the Mall, theirs was far more scripted to fit within the boundaries of the Victorian social conventions of their day. Ironically, the Indianized Mall today is the opposite: a transgressive thirdspace where contemporary Indian social norms are challenged rather than reinforced.

Figure 3.1 The Mall in Shimla

Other formerly British spaces, too, have been Indianized and divested from their colonial roots. The Naldehra golf course, once a haunt of Lord Curzon (Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905), is now popular with Indian businessmen and jetsetters. The old British skating rink blasts Bollywood soundtracks. The Bavarian-style bandstand where British brass bands once played on summer days now serves as a performance space for Pahari and Tibetan ethnic folk dancers, Hindi pop stars, and the Miss Shimla beauty pageant. The Gaiety Theater where Kipling once

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15 Nowhere else in India have I witnessed such a dearth of “traditional” female attire. Even in the hypermodern spaces of major cities, saris and salwars kameez predominate, but in Shimla, jeans, t-shirts, blouses, and even miniskirts are more common.
performed is now an amateur theater club where Indian army officers don silly costumes and sing songs (Palin 2004, 77). On the Ridge, the large open space on the crest of the mountain upon which the city is situated, hawkers peddle pony rides, remote control toy helicopters, and cotton candy in front of the 1857 Christ Church (now closed).

Some of the foreign tourists I spoke to told me that Shimla did not seem “Indian enough” because of its visible paucity of beggars, cows, dung heaps, temples, poverty, grime, and honking horns. They are correct in that these Orientalist images are lacking in Shimla’s “heritage zone,” or tourist zone, but that does not make it any less “Indian.” The rest of Shimla, where most of its 163,000 residents live, spills down the sides of the mountain and across the surrounding hills. In its morphology and atmosphere it much more closely resembles more stereotypically “Indian” settlement patterns: narrow alleys, buildings stacked one atop another, piles of refuse, street vendors and small shops, and honking horns and traffic. This is what one finds in Shimla’s bazaar, the marketplace whose vendors meet the everyday needs of the local population.\(^{16}\) The bazaar has in fact been in this same location and labeled as such (officially demarcating it from the British commercial space on the Mall) since colonial times.

As Kennedy points out, the notion that Shimla was ever a true enclave set apart from India was, at best, wishful thinking on the part of the British. In reality, the British colonial lifestyle demanded on average ten servants for each man, woman, and child. Before the completion of the Shimla Railway in 1904, some officials were known to travel with entourages of servants in the hundreds, who carried everything from furniture to pianos up and down the mountain each season (Kennedy 1996, 191). Indians followed the British to Shimla, seeking work as domestic servants, porters, and construction workers. The more entrepreneurial among them saw a latent demand and established business selling food and fuel to both the British and their domestic servants (ibid). The British had no choice but to begrudgingly tolerate this Indian presence, upon which they relied for services. They tried, however, everything in their power, often in the form of public health ordinances, to establish boundaries segregating the Indian

\(^{16}\) In *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power, and Environment*, King (1976) writes extensively on the morphology of urban space in colonial India. *Bazaars* are found in cities throughout the Middle East and South Asia. In India, King discusses the stark juxtaposition between formal colonial space and native spaces like the bazaar. The bazaar has long been a key setting for Orientalist literature (Cohen 1983).
spaces of the city from their own. They even financed a tunnel under the Ridge so that Indians could pass from one side to the other without crossing the Mall (ibid, 196).

The tunnel remains, and is still used by porters, but today tourists use it as well. The former demarcation between the “British” and the “native” zones is still apparent where the wide-open pedestrian malls straddling the Ridge give way to the narrow, steep paths of the bazaar. The social boundary that once accompanied this morphological boundary, however, has dissolved. Indian tourists, foreign tourists, and local residents commingle and pass freely between the zones on a daily basis with little ado. Tourists have ample reason to enter the bazaar, as it is the only way to get between the Mall and Ridge and the many tourist-related services at the bottom of the hill, such as the railway station, bus station, and many of the less expensive hotels. Tourists shop in the bazaar and local residents walk along the Mall. In fact, I was surprised by the number of Indians to whom I spoke on The Mall whom I assumed at first to be tourists because of their clothes and demeanor. It turns out that local residents enjoy spending time in the public social and heritage spaces of their city as much as tourists do.

Although the Shimla of tourist brochures is marketed with allusions to its colonial past and grandeur, this nostalgic discourse belies significant modifications and challenges to the historical narrative inscribed in Shimla’s heritage spaces. A number of elements in Shimla’s celebrated heritage landscape today focus not on the heyday of colonialism, but on the period immediately leading up to, and following, independence in 1947. Some of the most overt examples of this alternative historical narrative are the statues of Indian nationalist heroes that have been erected at prominent locations throughout the city. The bronze likenesses of Lala Lajpat Rai (see Figure 3.2), leader of the Indian independence movement, stands prominently in one of the busiest and most central spots in the city. The pedestal proclaims him “The Great Patriot of Punjab” and the symbolic significance of the statue is confirmed by the date commemorating its erection: “15 Aug 1948,” the one year anniversary of Indian independence. Other prominent statues found on the Mall and Ridge include Dr. Y.S. Parmar, founder of the Himachal Pradesh, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, chief architect of the Indian constitution and champion of the Dalit rights movement, and Rajiv Gandhi, assassinated prime minister and son of Indira Gandhi.

A commemorative plaque (see Figure 3.3) near the Town Hall recounts the history of Shimla. What this narrative includes, and leaves out, says something about Indian attitudes
towards its colonial past. Absent is any critique of the problematic aspects of colonialism. Included are examples of Indian agency in the hill station even when Indian agency was suppressed, such as an etymology of Shimla’s name, which is based on a variant of the Hindu goddess Kali. Also included are points of pride such as descriptions of Shimla’s natural amenities, with the explanation that the British enjoyed Shimla’s setting for the same reasons Indians enjoy it. It goes on to boast that “the [British] Government of India ended up spending more time in this little town than in the ‘real’ capitals Calcutta and later, New Delhi.” This historical narrative reframes colonialism as the story of outsiders who liked Shimla so much that they decided to stay for a while. During their stay, the British invested in dams, railways, and civic infrastructure, and the Indian narrative recognizes that Shimla is better off for it. But rather than view those improvements as permanent imprints of colonial power, it sees them as gifts left behind to their rightful owners, who have now reclaimed what was theirs all along.

The final paragraph of the plaque adds a new chapter to this capsule history by making it clear that agency and the power to make history now, and for the last 60 years, has been in the hands of Indians:
The town was regularly visited by the leaders of the Indian struggle for freedom—Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, Maulana Azad, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and C. Rajagopalachari. Momentous political decisions that affect our lives to the present day were taken in Shimla—the most significant being the plan to partition Indian and carve out the state of Pakistan from the Indian sub-continent in 1947. In the post-independence era, the historic ‘Simla Agreement’ was signed on 3rd July 1972 between India and Pakistan. The Agreement declared that all issues between the two countries would be settled bilaterally.

Figure 3.3 Commemorative plaque recounts the history of Shimla
The fact that Shimla, of all places, was central to events unfolding in the modern history of the Indian state is of crucial importance. It means that the modern fascination with Shimla is not dependent on its legacy of a seat of imperial power that worked to dispossess and dominate India for centuries. Any humiliation that was suffered in this place was ameliorated when India’s nationalist heroes brought an end to colonialism, and did so in colonialism’s own backyard.

This fact is not lost upon those who tour the Viceregal Lodge, the building from which “a staggering one-fifth of the human race was ruled,” as the tour guides happily inform visitors. The English-language guided tour I joined consisted of an Australian couple, about twenty-five Indians, and myself. The guide began by recounting the colonial history and use of the building. But a full half of the tour was devoted to its more recent, post-colonial use as the Institute of Advanced Studies, a post-doctoral research institute for social science scholars from around India and the world. The guide pointed out with irony that the former Imperial Ballroom is now a research library. One could detect a sense of pride in the guide’s narrative that whereas the British used the building for ostentatious and frivolous functions, the current Indian incarnation is sober and intellectual. The tour ended in the conference room where Gandhi, Nehru, and others planned for the independence, and which now houses a small museum about the independence movement. Just as with the statues, the Viceregal Lodge tour demonstrates the decolonization and subversion of formerly colonial spaces and functions and their reinscription with new symbolic and functional meaning.

\textit{Regulation, preservation, and segregation}

Shimla’s heritage infrastructure is not preserved by will alone. The Town & Country Planning Department (TCPD), a branch of the Shimla’s municipal government, has jurisdiction over a designated Heritage Zone, a belt spanning the length and width of the Mall and Ridge, plus 25 meters on either side. Within this zone, the TCPD enforces a regulatory regime that is unusually strict by Indian standards in which all construction must maintain, or faithfully recreate, the features, style, and appearance of Shimla’s pre-independence architecture. Incentives and subsidies are provided to landowners to induce compliance with such rigid
regulations. The department defends the regulations by appealing to the logic of interconnected scales. It argues that what happens at the scale of the individual structure also determines the character, and thus the value, of the whole of Shimla as a “single entity”:

The entire city that existed when the British left in 1947 is required to be viewed as a single entity, in the context of development, in order to ensure proper growth and conservation of the Heritage of the city. Shimla has a name in the international market, due to its unique architecture and beautiful buildings that dot the cityscape (TCPD 2007, 74).

Analysis of this passage offers some interesting insights. The concern with heritage and preservation has less to do with preserving the essential Britishness or colonial character of the town, and everything to do with place branding and marketing. The “heritage” image, or brand, that Shimla presents to its chief market is one of a quaint, old-fashioned, leisurely, British-style town in a breathtaking mountain setting. The TCDP’s mission is accompanied by a public awareness campaign that disseminates the ideology of preservation through public signage imploring citizens with slogans like “Our Built Heritage is Our Identity, Let’s Preserve it” and “Drive Slowly, Heritage Building.”

The TCPD promotes an imaginative geography that celebrates colonial architecture for its façade without questioning the meaning behind it. The presence of British architecture could be a reminder of a colonial history that meant oppression and inequality for its Indian subjects, but that is not the meaning that the TCPD or Shimla’s tourism promoters choose to emphasize. Rather, Shimla is (re)packaged as a sanitized, domesticated, historical landscape fit for the tourist gaze and wallet. Whatever problematic history lies behind them seems of little concern to the two million annual Indian tourists for whom Shimla is little more than backdrop for photographs in between ice cream cones and pony rides.

The protectionist impulse amongst those Indians who manage Shimla’s image and environment has, at times, taken on almost reactionary proportions that, oddly enough, parallel discourses that were alive and perpetuated by their colonial counterparts. The TCDP 2007 Report identifies serious problems facing Shimla such as “increases in commercial activity, unplanned physical growth…wanton degradation caused by the ‘wheels of progress’…congested built up areas, traffic hazards, over-concentration of activities in the central area, unauthorized constructions, [and] land degradation” (TCPD 2007, 73). It warns that “if heritage is lost in the maze of development, the city would suffer enormously both economically and environmentally”
Such admonitions belie an age-old trope—that change is a threat to stability and order—and one that is no stranger to the politics of tourism development. Indeed, it is one that appears in discourses of tourism and change throughout India (see Chapter 4).

In the case of Shimla, hostility to the perceived negative changes wrought by overdevelopment and (over)commercialization is not limited to civic leaders and city planners. It finds voice in the popular press, as in a local newspaper article entitled “Mall, Ridge, adjacent markets losing charm” (Mallica 2007). The author laments, “the once admired pedestrian stretches in the heart of Shimla...are gradually losing to overcrowding and encroachments.” And who is to blame for these offenses? According to the author, the blame lies with “small-time mobile vendors and makeshift shops dotting the area...vendors and hawkers [who] lure customers...[and] beggars who trouble both the locals as well as the tourists” (ibid). In other words, the informal sector of the tourist economy, upon which many peoples’ livelihoods surely depend. This reactionism suggests that perhaps some of the hill station’s colonial ideologies do, in fact, persist in the present day. The semiotic parallels between this protectionist discourse and colonial discourses of superiority and exclusion are robust. They employ similar tactics and language, such as the spatial terms “overcrowding” and “encroachment” which imply that there are insiders who deserve access to certain spaces and outsiders who do not. When the insiders make use of a contested space, it is their given right, but when the outsiders attempt the same, they are branded “encroachers.”

Kennedy describes the thinly disguised racism prevalent in colonial Shimla that manifested itself through discourses and policies of spatial exclusion. Shimla was always home to a population of servants and other Indians, but in the early years, their presence posed little threat of encroaching upon British space because their economic situation ensured their relegation to the Indian side of town. But towards the latter part of the nineteenth century, the British community in Shimla felt increasingly under attack by what they saw as an alarming influx of Indians (Kennedy 1996, 199). As its reputation as a premiere leisure space spread, and as transportation and communication links improved, Shimla became an attractive option for a growing class of prosperous Indian professionals and entrepreneurs, as well as India’s many aristocratic princes (ibid, 204). While India’s middle-class nouveau riche mostly purchased land in neighborhoods that were predominantly Indian, the princes, whose wealth often far exceeded...
that of most colonial officials, purchased property and built vacation homes in the British enclaves (ibid, 187).

The British welcomed the princes at first, as they were deemed to be similar to the British in social status. When the princes threw lavish parties and balls, the British gladly attended. The British also appreciated the contributions the princes made to the city in the form of capital investment, taxes, and civic infrastructure such as theaters and hospitals (ibid, 198). Class parity (or assumed equivalence), however, was not enough to extinguish colonial racism. Many in the British community in Shimla resented the presence of Indian middle and upper-classes in what were supposed to be their exclusive, all-white enclaves away from India. Attempts were made to police residence through municipal ordinances restricting certain spaces on racial grounds, but they met with little success, mostly because the economic power of wealthy Indians began to outweigh the political power of British racists. The failure of colonial Shimla to insulate itself from the forces of demographic change at the apex of colonial rule was foretelling of the waning of imperial power that would soon be set in motion. As Kennedy put it, “if the Indian princes drove the initial wedge into these highland enclaves of Britons, the Indian bourgeoisie split them wide open through the sheer force of their numbers” (ibid, 207).

How does the lesson of this colonial saga bode for the contestation over space in Shimla today? The two conflicts are similar in tone, mode of discourse, and spatial conceptions of exclusion and accessibility. Both, the case could be made, exemplify colonialism in practice. That is, both involve people in positions of power who monopolize, or colonize spaces they desire. In both cases, spaces of inclusion and exclusion are socially constructed and spatially enforced by differences in class and power. Shimla today is a leisurescape for the beneficiaries of Indian capitalism. For these modern Indian capitalists, a vacation in Shimla appeals for the same reason it appealed to British colonials: it offers the chance to leave behind, if only temporarily, the social realities of the vast majority of India and socialize in a semi-exclusive space with others of the same class. In terms of class privilege, Shimla is just as much of an enclave today as it was then.

If capitalism and its agents are the new colonizers, their rapid ascendancy does not bode well for social justice and equality in India. One key difference in this new colonialism, however, bears some tidings of progress. While British colonialism was fundamentally an exercise in capital extraction, it was based upon a discourse heavily steeped in racism (notwithstanding the
few cases where class seemed, at least on the surface, to overrule race such as with the Indian princes). For all intents and purposes, British racism was the primary factor maintaining Shimla and other colonial spaces as whites-only enclaves, not just at the local scale of who could and could not enter its confines, but in the entirety of social, political, and economic relations in the subcontinent. Today these racialized social relations appear to have broken down, and while the conflict still persists between haves and have-nots, at least there is one less front on which this battle will be waged.

*Foreign tourists in Shimla*

This chapter has thus far diverged from the main subject of my research, that of foreign tourists and backpackers in India. I will now return to this subject and explain the significance—or rather insignificance—of foreign tourists in the landscape of tourism in Shimla. Of the more than two million tourists who visited Shimla in 2006, a mere 90,407 (4.38%) were foreigners (see Table 3.1). Such a small part percentage is not, however, unique to Shimla, and in fact is common throughout Himachal Pradesh and India. What is unique to Shimla in the context of the geography of tourism in the Indian Himalaya is that it functions mainly as an articulation point, somewhere to stop *en route* to somewhere else. Tourists who travel halfway around the world to see the Himalaya have little interest in 7,000-foot mountains when peaks two and three times that height beckon to the north.

As the commercial, administrative, and transportation hub of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla is the traditional transfer point for tourists coming from the cities on the plains bound for destinations further into the mountains. Indeed, the Himachal Road Transport Corporation (HRTC) continues to send buses from its terminal in Shimla to the far corners of the state. But new mediums of transport have emerged in recent years, allowing tourists to bypass Shimla altogether. Motorcycles and hired jeep taxis allow tourists to set their own itineraries. Privately operated, air-conditioned luxury buses with sleeping births court tourists by offering direct, 17 For sake of comparison to the other locations considered in this paper, foreign tourists account for 4.58% of tourists in Manali/Kullu District (Chapter Four), 4.02% of tourists in Dharamsala/Kangra District (Chapter Five), and 3.54% of tourists statewide in Himachal Pradesh. A notable exception is the district of Lahaul and Spiti, where foreign tourists account for 36.79% of tourists, the reasons for which will be discussed in Chapter Six.
point-to-point connections between major tourist destinations. Thus, it is now possible for tourists to arrive in Delhi and take a bus straight to Manali or Dharamsala without ever stopping in Shimla.

Those foreign tourists who do stop in Shimla do not spend much time there, especially compared to places like Manali, Dharamsala, and Ladakh, where they often stay for weeks or even months at a time. While the total number of foreign tourists in Shimla and other destinations is similar, the total number of bednights spent in Shimla is lower, which helps explain what, to the in-the-field observer, is a visible paucity of foreign tourists. And why would foreign tourists, most of whom are European, avoid Shimla, with its highly touted European “heritage”? Writing about India’s other famous hill station, Darjeeling, Simmons (2004, 50) suggests that it appeals to the European tourist “because she can surround herself with familiarity in an unfamiliar place: with reminders that this place is well connected to her colonial origins.” She further argues that “narratives of an English colonial heritage lingering on India’s landscape portray colonialism as if it still exists in present-time for postcolonial tourists” (ibid) as if this is somehow an appealing thing to European tourists. The tourists I interviewed, however, showed little interest in reliving any sort of colonial heritage. Rather, the dominant rationale for avoiding Shimla was the same one they used for avoiding Indian cities in general: it is simply “too big,” “too noisy,” and “too dirty.” Such was the impression of Daniel, who arrived in Shimla after an all-night bus ride from Delhi, took one look at the surroundings of the bus station at the bottom of the hill, and promptly caught the next bus out of town. Had he seen the markedly different, and, by comparison, serene, environs of the Mall and Ridge on top of the hill, would he have changed his mind? Probably not; he also admitted that he arrived with a predisposed aversion to Shimla because of the high hotel rates listed in Lonely Planet.

Daniel is not alone. Many backpackers feel “priced out of the market” in Shimla. Hotel rates in Shimla are expensive relative to other destinations in Himachal Pradesh and India due to a number of factors. In most Indian towns, budget-conscious tourists with a high tolerance range

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18 Although bednights spent is a common metric in the tourism industry in general, the Himachal Pradesh Ministry of Tourism unfortunately does not report it. Therefore, my claim that foreign tourists spend less time in Shimla than other destinations is inferred through observations and interviews.

19 Which is slightly ironic given that hotel rates in Shimla are still fall lower than hotel rates in their respective countries of origin.
have little trouble finding inexpensive guesthouses or dormitory accommodations. Shimla does not share most Indian cities’ longstanding tradition of inexpensive travel infrastructure because, from the very beginning, it was designed as exclusionary space where access was governed by race and class. Today this latter limitation is largely still in place. Also pushing up the price of hotels is the real estate market, influenced in no small part by the steep topography which puts developable land is at a premium. New hotels are likely to be large-scale projects to maximize the utility of parcels, thus requiring substantial capital investment, and pricing in accordance. Finally, a major factor influencing price is simply supply and demand. The Indian middle-class grows every day, and with it, the number of people willing to spend 15,500 Rupees (US $500) for a weekend at the Cecil Oberoi Hotel (see Figure 3.4). Hoteliers have little reason to lower their prices during peak tourist season as long as there is a sustained demand for rooms, of which, judging by my observations and difficult obtaining a hotel rooms, there is plenty.

Those foreign tourists who do come to Shimla by and large enjoy the town. They find the European-style infrastructure interesting and impressive and very much a part of the uniqueness and charm of the city. But they see it in the same light that the Indians do: as a backdrop to their leisure activities, more interesting as anachronism and pastiche than as symbolic of the realities of the history of colonialism. Judging by their interview responses and the dearth of white people on the Viceregal Lodge tour, there does not seem to be much nostalgia for colonialism on the part of foreign tourists in Shimla.

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20 In another sign of the shift in power from British colonialism to Indian capitalism, the Oberoi Cecil is a flagship hotel in the famed Oberoi chain, which owned by the Oberoi family of India. Founder Rai Bahadur Mohan Singh Oberoi began his career as a clerk at the then-British-owned Cecil Hotel in 1922. When its owner returned to Britain in 1934, he sold it to Mr. Oberoi, who, together with his children, have turned their investment into an internationally recognized brand, named by Travel and Leisure magazine as the top hotel in the world for 2007 (Lohumi 2006).
THE MAGIC OF SHIMLA, NOW JUST A FLIGHT AWAY*
GIVE YOUR FAMILY A MEMORABLE HIMALAYAN VACATION

"Himalayan Vacation" offer  Valid till 30th June 2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Price for 2 persons in a Deluxe Room including breakfast daily</th>
<th>2 nights</th>
<th>3 nights</th>
<th>4 nights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rs. 15,500</td>
<td>Rs. 21,750</td>
<td>Rs. 27,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prices are exclusive of taxes. Terms and conditions apply.

SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS:
Additional room for up to two children below 12 years at 50% discount, subject to availability.
Spa, indoor heated swimming pool and Jacuzzi, gymnasium, steam and sauna, children's Activity Room, billiards.

Figure 3.4 Advertisement for the luxurious Oberoi Cecil Hotel
CHAPTER FOUR: MANALI

Travel and tourism in the Kullu Valley before hippies and backpackers

Manali is situated deeper in the heart of the Himalaya than Shimla, but at a mere 1,000 feet higher in elevation, it still enjoys a mild summer climate. From its location on the Beas River in the Kullu Valley, tourists ski, fish, ramble, trek, or simply enjoy the panorama of 20,000-foot mountain peaks that surround Manali to the west, north, and east (see Figure 4.1 for a regional satellite image that shows the locations mentioned in this chapter relative to each other and, more importantly, to the surrounding topography). Recent developments have transformed this once-quiet corner of the world into one of the more popular tourist destinations in India, both with foreign tourists and domestic tourists. The ebb and flow of tourists in and out of this valley, the demographics of these tourists, their impacts on the local environment and community, and the particular geographies of those impacts will form the basis of this chapter. Before I discuss the transformation of Manali, most of which has occurred in the last thirty years, I will provide some historical background to put the modern developments in context.

Kullu is etymologically derived from Kulantapitha, which means “end of the habitable world” (Chetwode 1972). It is difficult to understate the formidability of the Great Himalaya Range, which looms just to the north and in clear sight of Manali, as a barrier. For centuries, it has divided the people of the Indian subcontinent, culturally, linguistically, religiously, and geographically, from the Tibetans and Buddhists on the other side (see Chapter Six). That is not to say, however, that this barrier was impenetrable. Though the lands to the north were culturally closer to Tibet, they were still politically in the nominal jurisdiction of the Indian Prince of Kashmir and, later, the British Empire. Trade caravans plied across Rohtang Pass, linking India to Lahaul, Spiti, Kashmir, Ladakh, Tibet, and Central Asia (Gardner 2002, 12). Some traders stayed over in Sultanpur (later known as the town of Kullu), the main settlement in the Kullu Valley, and operated caravanserais, or inns for itinerant traders and their animals (Rizvi 1999, in Gardner 2002, 12).

When the British first entered the Kullu Valley in the mid-1800s they must have been disappointed to find that this travel infrastructure already existed. Even as late as 1894, John Murray’s Handbook for Travellers in India was still advising its readers to “leave the beaten
Figure 4.1 Satellite image of Kullu Valley region (copyright: Google Earth)

track with the intention of shooting, or for the purpose of visiting remote or ruined cities” (Murray 1894, xx). In order to maintain the pretense of discovery, these colonial travelers spurned the existing indigenous infrastructure and instead brought with them their own supplies (carried, of course, by hired labor) to “set camp” in the field (ibid). They were largely colonial administrators and military officers who sought the adventure of hunting, fishing, and mountain climbing and the heightened sense of masculinity exuded by such activities that they could not achieve in the domesticated leisurescape of Shimla (Chetwode 1972 in Gardner 2002, 11). Although the Kullu Valley is mentioned in Murray’s 1894 *Handbook*, it was not until 1901 that the journey was described in detail (see Figure 4.2). It was a daunting expedition, consisting of twelve days’ march through wild terrain (Murray 1901, 192). As the “Accommodation” column of the table of marches in Figure 4.2 shows, by this time travelers on this route no longer needed
to camp as frequently as dak bungalows are listed at nearly every stop (ibid).

![Figure 4.2 Marches from Shimla to Kullu](Murray 1901, 192)

In the 1930s a road and tunnel were excavated through the previously impassable Mandi-Larji gorge, linking Kullu to points south along the gentle grade of the Beas River. This dramatically shortened travel time to Shimla and Delhi and laid the groundwork for the Kullu Valley’s growth as a tourist destination (Kuniyal 2003, 5). While the town of Kullu grew as the administrative hub of the Kullu District, the town of Manali thirty kilometers to the north became the destination of choice for travelers. Despite Manali’s growing popularity, the valley’s reputation as “the end of the habitable world” persisted well into the mid twentieth century after independence, mainly because the precipitous route beyond Manali over the mountains remained unimproved and accessible only by foot and mule. Even as late as 1969, Fodor’s advised its readers that if they planned to cross Rohtang Pass, their jeeps must be disassembled, carried over the pass, and reassembled on the other side (Fodor 1969, 343).

In the 1980s the road over Rohtang Pass was improved, linking Manali to Lahaul and Ladakh (see Chapter Six). The new road fundamentally altered Manali’s relative geographical
importance vis-à-vis regional patterns of transportation and connectivity. No longer an outpost at the end of the road, Manali became a mid-route transit and supply node (Gardner 2002, 13). For the nascent tourism industry, this meant that Manali would become a base camp and service center for adventure travel, trekking, and jeep safaris. The breakout of violent conflict between India and Pakistan in Kashmir in 1989 would further hasten the realignment of regional linkages around this corner of the Himalaya as Kashmir’s perennial tourists sought safer alternatives for their holidays and Manali was the most logical candidate (ibid, 14). These historical and geographic precedents assured that the ingredients for Manali’s tourism boom were in place.

According to the dominant narrative in the pages of _Lonely Planet_ and backpacker discourse, Manali was “discovered” by Western hippies in the 1960s (Crowther 1981, 163). These hippies (or “freaks” as early _Lonely Planet_ refers to them) are remembered as pioneers, who chose Manali for its “Shangri-La”-like setting, and whose presence set in motion the cycle of tourism development. This story is convenient for contemporary backpackers who see themselves as the successors to the hippies, but it is not borne out by evidence. Murray’s _Handbook to India_ resumed publication in 1955 following a hiatus during the Second World War and tumultuous years following independence. Yet this was still a full decade before hippies began arriving in India in sizeable numbers. Seven years later, in 1962, Allen Ginsberg would travel to India (Ginsberg 1970) in what was a watershed for countercultural interest in the country.

In the mean time, geographies of tourism were being inscribed in the Kullu Valley that cemented Manali’s reputation as a rustic adventure tourism destination and idyllic mountain resort that pervades to this day. Between Murray’s _Handbooks_ from 1955, 1965, and 1975, Manali and the Kullu Valley are given progressively more coverage and appear to eclipse Shimla as the most popular destination in Himachal Pradesh, as measured by word count, page space, and the number of hotels listed (Murray 1955, 1965, 1975). This suggests that foreign tourists in India during the decades following independence were not interested in seeing India’s colonial heritage. Although the readers of _Fodor’s_ were probably the mid-twentieth century’s equivalents to colonial travelers in their race and class position, they exhibited drastically different tastes and tolerance thresholds. Many of them gladly exchanged the European-style rooms of colonial hotels like the Cecil in Shimla for the relatively spartan quarters of log huts and small family guesthouses in Manali (Murray 1975, 755). These tourists were willing to accept a downsizing
in comfort far below their means as a tradeoff for the increased social cultural, or presumed authenticity, that came with less-developed places. Fodor’s buoyed its claims on authenticity by depicting the people of the Kullu Valley through the trope of primitivity as “simple, unsophisticated, and superstitious” (Fodor 1969, 341). When the hippies began to arrive in the 1960s, they competed with each other to see who could withstand the most primitive conditions. They thought themselves original in this regard, but they were in fact merely replicating patterns already inscribed by colonial travelers and upper-class foreign tourists before them.

**Hippies and backpackers in the Kullu and Parvati Valleys**

According to informants who were in India several decades ago during what they call the “hippie era,” early hippies in India did not use guidebooks and had no need for hotels. Some rented rooms in village houses. Some camped in the woods. Information on places to go and places to stay was spread through word of mouth, or circulated in mimeographed notes. By the time *Lonely Planet* published its first guidebook to India in 1981, hippies had been in India nearly two decades. In its early years, *Lonely Planet* was clearly written with the youth market in mind, and at this place and time, the youth market was synonymous with “hippies,” or backpackers as their progeny would come to be called in the 1990s and 2000s. There is no rigid categorical definition of a hippie. In fact, in the 1980s *Lonely Planet* used the word “freak” synonymously (a term I avoid except in quotation). Whether or not every young European in India at the time considered him or herself to be a “hippie” or a “freak” is not important. Whatever they are called, they formed a distinctive subgroup, shaped by common culture and ideology.

*Lonely Planet’s* author, Geoff Crowther, references “freaks” in the third person with a detached but sympathetic voice. Although he never admits openly to being a “freak” himself, it is clear that he interacts with them and that their spatialities influence his scouting of locations for the book. Crowther provides readers with spatial cues to help pinpoint hippie hangouts. The cues, however, are sometimes vague, for instance in the passage that reads: “the resident freak population tends to head out to the villages around Manali” (Crowther 1981, 166). He is not explicit about the actual location of such villages, simply advising readers, “you just have to ask around, talk to people, don’t expect to find something the first day” (ibid, 167). Crowther might
be intentionally withholding information to “protect” places that hippies might prefer stay under the radar. Perhaps his ambiguity is designed to give the reader a chance to “play the discoverer,” to piece together clues in sort of geographical game. Or perhaps (least cynically) he is not withholding information at all, but simply representing the reality of the situation, which is that the location of hippie settlements in Manali circa 1981 were constantly shifting.

Subsequent editions of *Lonely Planet* are less guarded in their dispensing of geographic locations. The 1984 edition clearly identifies the two most important spots where hippies congregate as “Old Manali” and Vashisht, villages located a few kilometers further uphill from the original settlement, now known as “New Manali” (Crowther 1984, 200) (see Figure 4.3). The previous chapter showed that Indian domestic tourists dominate the tourist economy and tourist landscape of Shimla. Domestic tourists easily outnumber foreign tourists in Manali as well (see Table 4.1). Unlike Shimla, where the few foreign tourists shared the same spaces as domestic tourists, there is a sharp spatial division between domestic tourists and foreign tourists in Manali. Domestic tourists concentrate in New Manali while foreigners concentrate in Old Manali and Vashisht. By 1996, this pattern had become pronounced, and *Lonely Planet* offers clear cues to

![Figure 4.3 Satellite image showing Old and New Manali](copyright: Google Earth)
its readers that their “proper place” is in the surrounding villages and not New Manali: “the surrounding villages still have semi-permanent hippie populations, but the character of Manali has changed considerably over the last decade. With literally hundreds of hotels, it’s now one of the most popular places in the country for honeymooning Indian couples” (Finlay 1996, 294).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indians</th>
<th>Foreigners</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Foreign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>206,954</td>
<td>6,037</td>
<td>212,991</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>451,919</td>
<td>3,933</td>
<td>455,852</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>430,130</td>
<td>2,517</td>
<td>432,647</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1,072,695</td>
<td>48,352</td>
<td>1,121,047</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1,290,438</td>
<td>57,833</td>
<td>1,348,271</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1,477,324</td>
<td>69,649</td>
<td>1,546,973</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1,641,007</td>
<td>67,933</td>
<td>1,708,940</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1,867,984</td>
<td>89,751</td>
<td>1,957,735</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Indian and foreign tourists in Kullu District (HPTDC 2007)

This spatial separation between foreign tourists and domestic tourists is pronounced and immediately visible to any observer in the divergent characteristic styles of the two zones. Old Manali is home to rustic, funky guesthouses and cafés that employ somewhat clichéd, pseudo-spiritual, drugged-out motifs (e.g. Bob Marley posters and black lights) that appeal to hippies and backpackers. Shops sell jewelry, musical instruments, Buddha ornaments, hippie clothes, and drug paraphernalia. Restaurants serve pancakes, muesli, porridge, cornflakes, omelets, pizza, lasagna, spaghetti, and falafel. Bakeries sell croissants, cakes, and pies. There is even a cheese shop selling Swiss cheese\(^{21}\) and a café with a real espresso machine. Internet cafes and travel and trekking agents abound. But for all the apparent luxuries available in the consumer landscape of Old Manali, accommodations have traditionally been relatively spartan. Rooms are small and simple. Outhouses with squat toilets are common. Restaurant seating is outdoors, perhaps under a tent, and furniture is plastic. Kitchens are small and improvisational, with cooking done over propane stoves. It might seem, at first glance, that a great deal of effort went into the creation of menus and the training of chefs. But most menus are based on a standard set of dishes that appear to have circulated throughout the backpacking circuits of India and Asia (typographical errors and all).

\(^{21}\) Hard cheese is a rarity in India, where the climate normally limits cheese-making to the fresh, un-aged variety (*paneer*), but it is somewhat more plausible in these alpine surroundings, which are not so different than Switzerland itself.
If Old Manali is a strange blend of cosmopolitan hipness and slow-paced rustic living, New Manali is, by contrast, much more of a typical small Indian city. Hotels are built of concrete and rise up to five floors. They feature large suites for Indian families and honeymooners. Modern amenities not so readily found in Old Manali, such as parking lots, *en-suite* bathrooms, and restaurants with formal table service, are common. The partition between the two Manalis and their respective tourist populations is not mandated or enforced. It is the result of self-imposed segregation, mostly on the part of the backpackers. That is, it is backpackers who deliberately sought out alternatives locations. Indian tourists, by contrast, see little reason to seek alternatives because New Manali satisfies all their touristic needs. The typical Indian tourist’s vacation is infrequent and of short duration. For Indians on vacation, the break from one’s daily routine and work life is as important as the actual location in which it takes place. Indian tourists, who largely come from the middle and upper-classes of Indian urban society, have come to expect certain minimum levels of comfort, and do not place the same value in the rustic charm of village guesthouses that backpackers do.

That is not to say, however, that Indian tourists never venture into Old Manali. One evening I found myself in the company of several foreigners and a trendy young Indian couple from Mumbai. He was a Bollywood producer and she was a screenwriter and they were on “creative retreat” in Old Manali, writing a screenplay by day and mixing with the international clientele of Café Bom Shiva by night. The couple made patronizing references to “Indian tourists” in the third person, implying that they considered “Indian tourists” to be a separate entity of which they were not a part. In other words, simply being “Indian” and “tourists” does not make one an “Indian tourist,” which to them denotes a separate cultural class.

The Mumbai couple’s stance towards “Indian tourists” is one that is shared by many backpackers, whose exodus to Old Manali probably has more to do with their dissatisfaction with New Manali’s social milieu as it does with its built environment. The latter of these two factors, however, is the more likely one to be voiced. New Manali, backpackers complain, is “noisy,” “crowded,” and “full of traffic.” They limit their time in New Manali to functional necessities: arrivals and departures at the bus station, travel agents, and, most importantly, ATM withdrawals. The reasons given for avoiding New Manali are the same that backpackers give for
avoiding Indian cities in general. Backpackers will less readily admit their prejudices against Indian tourists as a social group because it is politically incorrect to do so. But they are nevertheless apparent in many backpacker conversations. It is common to speak of Indian tourists in contempt, to characterize them as mass tourists who follow the crowd and demonstrate poor taste. These comparisons are inherently tinged by differences in ethnicity and therefore ethnic power relations, and might therefore give way to racial prejudice. I believe, however, that the differences, as drawn discursively and spatially, have less to do with race and more to do with plain snobbery. The discourse against “Indian tourists” is analogous to the same discourse that pits backpackers against “package tourists” and “mass tourists” everywhere, regardless of ethnic differences.

The Parvati Valley branches off the Kullu Valley about forty-five kilometers south of Manali (see Figure 4.1). A comparison of three main tourist destinations in the valley—Jari, Kasol, and Manikaran—makes for an interesting case study of differential rates of tourism development. In 1981, Lonely Planet declared the Parvati Valley to be “much wilder and more rugged than the Kullu Valley” and listed only two places to sleep (Crowther 1981, 169). In 1992, a decade later, Hardy (1995, 31) found that the Parvati Valley was “still preserved and is a reminder of what the Kullu Valley was like before it became a main stop on the hippie trail” [emphasis added]. Whether or not the Parvati Valley constitutes a “main stop” on the trail today, it certainly sees more foreign tourists than it did in 1992. But because of its geography, being a side valley with no outlet, it may never constitute the “main trail” in the sense that the Kullu Valley does. As testament to its “less than main trail” status, I came across a number of older travelers and hippies who report that, while they no longer go to Manali because it has become “too commercial,” the Parvati Valley is still quiet enough to enjoy. But even that is changing.

Furthest up the valley of the three tourist settlements is Manikaran, a temple and hot springs town that drew Hindu and Sikh pilgrims long before the hippies arrived. Today it features the typical trappings of religious tourism in India: a bus-filled parking lot, chock-a-block souvenir stands, dhabas, and modern hotels. In the middle of the valley is a backpacker enclave called Kasol. In 1984, according to Lonely Planet, the tourist population there was still small and limited mostly to French and Italian “freaks” who had been in the area “so long it’s hard to tell

22 Although, with a population of 30,000, Manali is hardly comparable to urban metropolises like Delhi or Kolkata.
them from the locals” (Crowther, 1984, 193). Today, Kasol attracts a largely Israeli crowd and is known colloquially as “Little Israel.”

Jari is the closest of the three communities to the mouth of the valley, but it has somehow remained the quietest and least developed of the three, probably because the village is perched uphill and a short climb from the main road. There are only three guesthouses in the village, and no tourist shops or restaurants other than the ones attached to the guesthouses. This means that regular village life proceeds without much interference from tourists. This is where I met and interviewed Elana, a young Israeli woman who wanted to get away from other backpackers. One might presume that places listed in guidebooks are the antithesis of “off the beaten path,” but Elana illustrates how that is not always the case. She explained that had it not been for her guidebook, she would have been forced to rely on word of mouth, which would have steered her straight into the heart of the backpacker scene she was trying to avoid: “All the people I met in Dharamsala, they were all directing me to Manali, Manali, Manali. But I looked in the book a little bit, and saw Jari, and decided to come here instead. If I didn’t have the guidebook, I probably would have done what most of the people did and gone to Manali.” Perhaps Elana was just lucky. In 1999, *Lonely Planet* defined Jari as “spillover” for hippies who had “outgrown” Kasol and Manikaran and were looking for something more peaceful (Finlay 1999, 322). When Elana and I were there in 2007 that was still an accurate description. But in another few years, that may no longer be the case.

*Development, segregation, and contestation in Manali*

Singh attributes recent growth in domestic tourism to the India’s growing mass media and entertainment culture. Television and Bollywood have projected Manali, and the adventure, sports, and recreational opportunities found in the Himalaya, into the national consciousness (Singh RB 2002, 182). As a result, the number of domestic tourists to Manali increased tenfold in the last twenty years (Table 4.1) The number of foreign tourists, while much lower in absolute numbers, has increased at an even greater rate—nearly fifteen fold—and foreign tourists now make up a larger share of total tourists (4.58%) than ever before. The number of foreign tourists may, in fact, be higher than officially reported because they tend to patronize accommodations in the informal sector that may not always keep accurate records or report them as frequently.
licensed hotels do. Another, more easily measured, indicator that illustrates the exponential growth in tourism in Manali is the number of guesthouses and hotels. Singh tabulates this data for the period 1975-1996 and shows the number of guesthouses growing from two to six hundred and forty (see Table 4.2). In another metric with similar implications, the number of registered travel agents in Manali grew from nine to one hundred and eight between 1988 and 1996 (Sandhu 1998 in Gardner 2002, 16).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Guesthouses and hotels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Number of guesthouses and hotels in Manali (Singh RB 2002, 185)

In theory, development in Manali is regulated through an official permitting process. Himachal Pradesh Planning Department (HPPD) code mandates building styles, setbacks, drainage requirements, and floor area ratios (HPPD 2007, 100-107). New hotels are permitted only where “basic services like paved roads, drainage, water supply, sewerage disposal, electricity, and street lighting” exist, and when they do not, developers are responsible for installing them (ibid, 109). Hotels are even required to provide one parking space for each room, a policy that promotes private automobiles at the expense of public transportation (ibid, 118). Old Manali, however, is outside the municipal boundaries of Manali (see Figure 4.3), and enforcement of the state’s guidelines, which in New Manali are undertaken by the municipal government, is more lax. Abesh, who owns a guesthouse in Old Manali, explains that when it opened in 1989, it was one of just a handful of guesthouses in the village. But now, he exclaims with dismay, there are dozens of them, with new ones being built all the time, and no “regulation” so to speak of. Instead, baksheesh (bribes) are paid to officials to look the other way.

The contrast between New Manali’s modern infrastructure and Old Manali’s more rustic infrastructure is narrowing. Developers are running out of space in which to build in New Manali, and are increasingly looking to expand to the periphery of the town (HPPD 2007, 17).
There they come into conflict with the existing infrastructure of informal sector guesthouses. In these spaces of contestation, modern, multi-story, concrete hotels often win out because their investors possess more capital, and, thus, more power vis-à-vis planning code and regulation. The Indian-led formal tourism sector, then, could be said to be colonizing and displacing the Western-centric informal sector. This statement, however, is too simplistic. Old Manali is not merely the victim in this process, sitting back and letting itself be displaced by the incoming formal sector development. Rather, the informal sector of Old Manali is itself moving in the direction of formalization by modernizing facilities, raising prices, and offering amenities reflective of backpackers’ growing appetite for consumption.

These changes are fueled by demand. Backpackers today may romanticize the frugality of their hippie predecessors, but their demands and consumption levels are substantially higher (or, their tolerance thresholds are substantially lower). One clear example of a medium for which demand has increased is communication technology. Backpackers have come to expect high-speed internet wherever they travel.²³ Many backpackers today are not content with squat toilets andouthouses. They prefer in-room bathrooms with Western-style toilets. Guesthouse owners respond by renovating and raising prices. Backpackers today also demand a “good view.” To meet this demand, multi-storey concrete hotels are being erected in the apple orchards around Old Manali (see Figure 4.4). Guests staying in Old Manali can walk the two kilometers to New Manali in a twenty-minute stroll through apple orchards and pine forests, yet they increasingly traverse the distance on rented motorbikes, or by hiring auto rickshaws. They chastise mass tourists and Indian tourists for being “too commercial” yet their propensity to spend large quantities of money (by Indian standards) on goods and services has transformed Old Manali into a consumer’s paradise, where backpackers can purchase Western comfort food, massages, and all sorts of consumer goods.

Abesh laments the changes he sees taking place in his community. Backpackers have become “more demanding, more greedy,” he says. The communal dormitories and shared space of the 1960s and 1970s have given way to private rooms (Hottola 2005, 11). Backpackers today

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²³ Manali is still wired to the main grid well enough that high-speed internet access is cheap and plentiful. In more remote places (e.g. Spiti and Ladakh), however, internet access is less reliable and more expensive.
will sit in their rooms all day and demand room service (without tipping). Baba, a local sadhu, recalls, “when it was just the hippies, [Old Manali] was much nicer, more social place. Everyone got along. Now it’s ‘tourist time’…there are too many cars, too many buildings, too many people.” Listening to Baba’s ruminations I realized that the desire to get away from cities and find solace in a quiet, shanti (peaceful) place is not only held by Westerners in India. That there are Indians who feel the same way led me to rethink what I once assumed to be a discriminatory preference by Western tourists for the rural over the urban. There is nothing wrong with preferring rural surroundings. But it verges on hypocrisy when tourists clamor for a peaceful, less “developed” space removed from the “urban problems” of New Manali, and yet demand the same full-service infrastructure and amenities that give New Manali its urban character. When tourists try to have it both ways, they are hastening the transformation of the place they supposedly value into the place from which they purport to escape. Perhaps this is why the literature and discourse that address the negative impacts of tourism in Manali make little
distinction between the impacts of Indian tourists in New Manali and those of foreign tourists and backpackers in Old Manali.

*Environmental impacts of tourism*

Several researchers have written about tourism’s environmental impacts in Manali and the Kullu Valley. Cole (2000, vi-vii) calculated Manali’s changing ecological footprint. In 1971 it was twenty-one square kilometers, of which tourism accounted for eight percent. By 1995, however, it had mushroomed to ninety-seven square kilometers, of which tourism accounted for sixty-five percent. She attributes eighty percent of the growth in the ecological footprint to the growth of tourism (ibid). Concrete examples of the negative environmental impacts of tourism are plentiful. Hotels and guesthouses are built haphazardly in marginal sites formerly used by agriculture (Gardner 2002, 18). Construction in these sites, which are often on steep slopes, is hazardous, and causes deforestation and erosion, heightening the risk of landslides (Singh RB 2002, 187). The quality of the water in the Beas River watershed has declined measurably because of the waste produced by tourists and the lack of a proper solid waste management system (Kuniyal 2003).

The increasing number of vehicles on the road is another problem. As recently as the 1980s, most tourists arrived in Manali by bus. Since then, however, private automobiles and jeep taxis have become increasingly common (Singh RB 2002, 182). At the same time, improvements in highway infrastructure have not kept pace with the growth in traffic, resulting in bottlenecks and traffic jams at key chokepoints (Gardner 2002, 18) (see Figure 4.5). Traffic, exhaust, and diesel fumes cause air pollution in any environment, and their effects are even more pronounced at high elevations where the air is thin (Kuniyal 2003). More than half of the tourists who visit Manali also undertake the fifty-seven-kilometer climb to Rohtang Pass, at 13,500 feet. During peak tourist season, the saddle of Rohtang Pass is transformed into a large parking lot (see Figure 4.6). Makeshift cafes and winter coat rental shops are strewn across the glacier, serving the thousands of tourists who come here to ski, sled, snowmobile, and see snow for the first time. Two-thirds of the traffic at Rohtang Pass is tourist traffic, and of that, one-third uses private rather than public transportation (HPPD 2007, 57).
The Himalayan Ski Village (HSV) is set to begin construction just north of Manali in 2009. This 250-520 million dollar project is the largest-ever foreign direct investment in India’s tourism sector (Sethi 2006). Blueprints call for 700 five-star hotel rooms, 300 chalets, and a 1,000-car garage (luxurylaunches.com 2007). The HSV will be built at the northernmost end of the Kullu Valley, on the incline to Rohtang Pass, adding additional burden to already congested transportation infrastructure. Despite promoters’ and government officials’ pronouncements that the HSV is “essential for the survival of Manali” and “will rejuvenate Manali’s tourism
industry…and create 3000 local jobs,” local residents are less than enthusiastic (Sethi 2006).
Opponents of the project have not been placated by its “eco-friendly” discourse and see features such as “traditional wood-and-stone houses with sloping roofs [which] will be designed in keeping with traditional Himalayan architecture” (luxurylaunches.com 2007) as little more than corporate greenwashing. They claim that the HSV violates Article 118 of the Himachal Land Act, which prohibits foreign ownership of public land (Himachal Land Act 2007). The HSV circumvents Article 118 because its sixty-five hectare acquisition is technically a ninety-nine year lease. Opponents, however, argue that this amounts to de facto privatization and dispossession of public land, which will be irreparably altered (Sethi 2006).

The HSV is the brainchild of Alfred Ford, great-grandson of Henry Ford and brother of the CEO of Ford Motor Company. Based on this information, the HSV project would appear to be a routine case of neocolonialism in its most blatant form: a Western corporation dispossessing powerless people in a developing country. But a closer examination of the HSV and Alfred Ford complicates the picture. Ford is not the average corporate investor. He is a Hare Krishna devotee, a self-proclaimed hippie, and anti-establishment crusader who followed the Beatles to India in the 1960s (Sangghvi 2005). He has a personal guru, trades Indian art, is married to an Indian woman, is a vegetarian, funds several charities in India, and claims to live a simple, immaterial life and have deep respect for Indian culture (Sangghvi 2005). Ford’s particular biography makes it difficult to dismiss him as just another unscrupulous developer. Yet, the magnitude of the social, economic, and environmental impacts the HSV threatens to inflict upon the Kullu Valley is undeniable. In the end, the HSV is just more evidence that the most insidious forms of neocolonialism are those that disguise themselves behind discourses of beneficence and innocence.

Social impacts and the issue of drug use in tourism

Prior to the tourist boom of the last few decades, the people of the Kullu Valley were subsistence agriculturalists, who sometimes supplemented their livelihood by selling fruit or wool in local and regional markets. When a force such as tourism is introduced into a simple economy such as this, social change is inevitable. Tourism brings the promise of easy money and draws labor away from traditional sectors such as agriculture (Sandhu 1998, 36). This alters the
balance of power within, and livelihoods of, families. Children were once socially obligated to assist with agricultural labor, the proceeds of which were shared by the entire household. But as young people (usually men) enter the tourist economy, they tend to keep their profits to themselves, engaging in conspicuous consumption, rather than sharing them with their families (Sandhu 1998, 97). Tourism does not affect everyone equally, however, and not all traditional practices are abandoned. While hiking in the hills above Vashisht, I saw two sisters who were pasturing their family’s cows. Their father, they explained, owns one of the backpacker restaurants in town. So it would appear that traditional practices and the tourist economy can, in fact, coexist, even within the same family.

This is apparent in Old Manali, where villagers, carrying the day’s harvest on their backs, walk right through the middle of the backpacker enclave on their way to and from their fields each day. Some backpackers choose to stay in village homes-cum-guesthouses rather than in the enclave because they enjoy the heterogeneous space of the village, which is still dominated by indigenous uses and not by tourism. They walk through working apple orchards, past cows and hay bales, step nimbly over piles of manure, and join in games of volleyball with village children. Some might interpret this as an intrusion upon, or colonization of, indigenous space by tourists. But that interpretation must be qualified by the fact that this intrusion is hastened, even encouraged, by the villagers themselves, who lead tourists along convoluted paths through their unmapped village lanes with posted signs and arrows. Tourists might not navigate these village backspaces so easily, or even know that guest accommodations were available, were it not for the spatial cues provided for them by residents. Because these villages are not “off” the “beaten path” but rather are directly adjacent to it, most villagers are nonplused by the presence of foreigners in their midst. While some tourists recount adventures in remote villages where their whiteness made them temporary celebrities and objects of fascination, white tourists in Old Manali receive no such fawning attention from its residents. To them, tourists are not a novelty; they are just part of the background.

The relaxed setting of Old Manali makes some amount of cross-cultural and cross-class interaction possible. Although the relationship between hosts and guests is undoubtedly unequal when analyzed along lines of nationality and class (that is, hosts are in the clearly subservient position of serving guests, upon whom their livelihoods depend) there also appears, in certain cases, to be room in the relationship for less hierarchical social relations. Edensor describes “the
relationship between buyer and seller [in India as] not as contractual and delimited as in the West but allow[ing] for wider communicative expression, producing the sensual and congenial etiquette of barter in a convivial setting” (Edensor 1998, 171). Many of the guests in Old Manali stay for extended periods of time, allowing them to develop routine daily geographies, choose their “favorite” cafés or businesses, and build rapport and even friendship with their hosts.

The HPPD lists, in the *Manali Development Plan*, what it sees as the harmful social impacts of tourism. It places the greatest blame on foreign tourists, despite the fact that they account for less than five percent of the total tourists in Manali:

The uniqueness and distinctive lifestyle of Kullu culture is getting diffused due to consumerism and commercialisation forces and overcome by westernisation. The ancient landmarks of Manu and Vashisht are witnessing an unprecedented pressure on their characteristic charm. The haphazard slum-like development around these historical monuments has adversely affected their aesthetic grandeur. In the by-lanes of these monuments, foreign tourists stay in the private houses, for a longer duration even for months and staying as paying guests, they are polluting the local environment (HPPD 2007, 17).

This passage provides discursive evidence of the negative perceptions government officials have of foreign backpackers. I agree with the statement that tourism has ushered in unprecedented levels of “consumerism” and “commercialization,” but I am less sure whether these forces fall within the domain of “Westernization.” The tourist landscape of New Manali is just as, if not more, dominated by consumerism and commercialization, but it is largely driven by the demand of Indian domestic tourists. While there is certainly some Western acculturation affecting the Indian middle-class, there is nothing uniquely “Western” about consumption or commerce. To characterize Old Manali and Vashisht as “ancient monuments,” as the passage does, is somewhat of a stretch. They are villages like so many others in India. The “slum-like development” to which the planners refer is ostensibly meant to (negatively) characterize the rustic, small-scale, and informal nature of much of the tourism infrastructure in the backpacker enclaves. It is also, perhaps, a thinly veiled statement of class contempt. Even with their increasing consumption habits, backpackers in Old Manali spend far less money per day than domestic tourists do in New Manali. This might be a source of resentment by the business community and local authorities.

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24 India’s tradition of entrepreneurship stretches back long before contact with the West. Lakshmi, the Hindu god of wealth, is one of the most popular gods in India.
Village families may not mind that Westerners stay for months in their homes as paying guests, as they provide a solid source of income. The connotation, however, is that tourists should not stay so long, for to do so is a form of permanent residence. Unacknowledged in this discourse is that some residents are in fact benefiting from backpacker spending. But because these residents most likely reside in the informal sector, the municipal government and planning department do not benefit from their business. This conflict, then, is as much the story of division between Indians with different *modus operandi*, business models, and power (that is, influence vis-à-vis state and local authorities and relations between different vessels of capital), as it is between foreigners and Indians.

The economic and environmental impacts of backpacker tourism may dominate the rhetoric of official grievances with foreign backpackers in Manali, but it is one short passage of the *Manali Development Plan* in particular that reveals what may be the greatest source of the authorities’ ire: “People are also getting prone to hippyism and drug abuse. Crime graph is showing an upward trend in these areas” (HPPD 2007, 17). The affixation of “ism” is not intended to normalize or lend legitimacy to hippie culture, but rather to signify that it is an affliction and a social disease. The association of hippies with drugs is not unwarranted. Cannabis use has long been integral to Western perceptions of, and ritual (pseudo) participation in, Eastern spirituality. The ready availability and reputedly high quality of the *charas* (hash) in Manali and the Kullu Valley was undoubtedly a key factor cementing this place in the hippie geographical imagination (Cohen 1972, 94). The 1987 edition of *Lonely Planet* (before the publication became more mainstream and acquired a team of lawyers) openly condones cannabis use, tempting readers that Manali’s crop is “esteemed by connoisseurs”25 (Crowther 1987, 197).

Manali’s reputation as a drug haven prevails to this day. Tourists routinely defend their cannabis use by invoking a discourse that sanctions its use in the context of Indian history and religion. It is true that the cannabis plant is native to the Himalaya, the abode of gods, and that it is strongly associated with the god Shiva, who, according to Hindu scripture, consumes the drug in copious quantities. Although contemporary Indian law prohibits cannabis use, an exception is made for India’s ascetic *sadhus*. For these holy men, or *Babas*, cannabis use is legally sanctioned

25 The author then takes a defensive tone and lambastes the Indian authorities for cracking down on drug use amongst tourists, stating, “Recently the police have become a damn nuisance over drugs in all respects” (Crowther 1987, 197).
in acts of devotion to Shiva (Blum 1969, 11). Neville, writing in the heyday of hippyism in India, promotes the Orientalist discourse that blends drug use and Eastern culture when he argues that “the aim of all Eastern religion…is basically to get high, that is, to expand the consciousness and find ecstasy and revelation within” (Neville 1970, 148). He even has the audacity to suggest that drugs “break down cultural/racial prejudice” because, under their influence, “instead of being denigrated, African and Oriental lifestyles are romanticized” (ibid, 142).

True sadhus are disconnected from the market economy and rely on alms to live a humble life devoid of material possessions. This has not stopped entrepreneurial Indians from capitalizing on foreign tourist demand for drugs and authenticity by adopting the personae and orange robes of the sadhu and entering the lucrative business of drug dealing. These money Babas, as John (one of my interview informants) calls them, ply their trade in the cafés and guesthouses of Old Manali, where a steady stream of backpackers guarantees a reliable market for their product. Cannabis permeates the informal tourism sector of Old Manali. Trekking guides often double as procurers (Sandhu 1998, 91), and I expect that guesthouse and café owners whose premises drug dealers frequent must enjoy some sort of profit-sharing scheme in exchange for turning a blind eye. These tourism providers know that their business depends on a permissive attitude toward drugs (Dayan 2004). While a handful of guesthouses advertise drug-free policies, most guesthouse owners cannot afford to limit their clientele to the narrow niche of backpackers who abstain from drugs.

The economic impacts of the drug trade extend beyond the tourist enclave to the villages that dot the Kullu Valley. Many agriculturalists have traded apple orchards for cannabis fields. This far more lucrative cash crop can earn a household more than $6,000 a year, provided they also perform the time-consuming process of hand rolling the harvested plant to produce the value-added charas. This money, when reinvested in the community, can foster development and prosperity, but some villagers fear that because it is immoral, it will bring about the wrath of the gods (Singh T.V. 2004, 56). It is more likely, however, to bring the wrath of law enforcement, which has been known to eradicate entire fields of cannabis without warning, eliminating income sources upon which villages have become dependent.

Not all tourists use drugs in the same way. Some limit their use to evenings at the café or the private and semi-private spaces of the guesthouse. Others, however, especially young tourists fresh out of high school or the military, indulge in excessive drug use to the point of abuse. They
are also more likely to engage in a party lifestyle, listen to loud techno music, and generally cause a public nuisance. Uriely (2006, 352) suggests that tourists are more likely to engage in risky behavior while traveling than they would at home because tourism provides a liminal space for the “temporary suspension of normative behavior” as well as “freedom from public scrutiny.” Uriely argues that tourists lack respect for the laws of the countries in which they travel, or, rather, they simply believe themselves to be above the law. This is because their economic standing, they believe, insulates them from punishment (ibid, 349). This does, indeed, appear to be the case most of the time, as local authorities largely turn a blind eye towards drug use in Old Manali, and can usually be bribed with baksheesh in an emergency. But the risk of actual punishment does exist, and it is higher than most tourists realize (ibid, 350). Western tourists who learn this the hard way have been sentenced to years in Indian prisons.

Authorities worry that Manali, with is magnet for organized criminals and other shady characters, both Indian and foreign. Some of the foreigners who take up semi-permanent residence in India, wintering in Manali and summering in Goa, finance their lifestyles through drug trafficking. One kilogram of charas costs $500-750 in Manali, where supply is ample, but can fetch up to $2500 in Goa where demand is high. Some even attempt to smuggle drugs across international borders. A number of Western tourists have “disappeared” over the last decade. There are three possible options: a) they intentionally “dropped out” of society and are now living alone in the hills; b) they died in trekking accidents; or c) they got mixed up with the drug mafia (either intentionally or unintentionally) and were murdered (“Death Valley” 2003).

Given the degree to which drugs are central to backpacker lifestyle in Manali, and the problems that this can cause, Indian authorities and families have a right to be concerned. Families, in particular, worry that their children are being corrupted by modern (and foreign) influences. Indian youth are impressionable, so the discourse goes, and they imitate foreign tourists’ behavior, clothing, consumption habits, and, yes, drug use (Singh RB 2002, 188). It is true that Indians in the tourism sector who interact with backpackers are exposed to drug use. But a number of Indians today use illicit drugs of their own accord, and there is little evidence of a direct correlation between tourist drug use and Indian drug use. In fact, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reports that drug use among youth is on the rise across India, including places where foreign tourism is very low (UNODC 2008). Some of the anti-drug
discourse is simply one of the more vocal sides to the alarmist critique of backpackers and their cultural traits in general.

_The discourse on Israeli backpackers_

An Indian asks an Israeli backpacker, “So how many Israelis are there?”
The backpacker answers, “Five million.”
The Indian responds, “Yes, but how many in _Israel_?” (Dayan 2004).

So goes a popular joke amongst Israel backpackers in India. Israel, a country of seven million people, sends more than 50,000 tourists to India annually. In other words, more than one percent of Israel’s total adult population can be found in India in any given year (Maoz 2005, 159). Though Israelis represent less than two percent of total foreign tourists in India, they are highly visible in certain concentrated enclaves. They also stand out from other foreign tourists because of their relative homogeneity—nearly all belong to the same cohort of 22- to 25-year olds who have recently completed their mandatory service in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). A complex, pervasive, and often hostile discourse surrounds Israeli backpackers in India. This discourse draws heavily on the language and metaphor of colonialism and neocolonialism, employing some of the most blatant and conspicuous uses of the terms that my reader will find in this thesis. Although I am interested in what this problematic discourse itself has to say, I am also interested in questioning those who employ it, and why they do so.

Israeli backpackers and their behavior are a common topic of conversation, and source of consternation, among backpackers from Europe, North America, and Australia and New Zealand. They are stereotyped as rude, loud, greedy, aggressive, and disrespectful. Much of the resentment towards Israeli backpackers stems from the fact that they tend to travel in large, boisterous groups, and that they speak Hebrew rather than English (the generally accepted _lingua franca_ of backpackers around the world). Non-Israeli backpackers resent the fact that Hebrew appears on signs, menus, and computer keyboards in internet cafés throughout India’s backpacker enclaves (see Figure 4.7). They also criticize Israelis for their heavy drug use, which is curious considering that backpackers of all nationalities engage in drug use. The rumor, however, is that the Israelis are into hard drugs, and the fact that the Israeli Anti-Drug Authority sponsors a drug counseling center in Manali seems to bear this out (Uriely 2006, 355). Some
have warned that Israelis in India should not be seen as a representative sample of all Israelis, but as a self-selecting group, which travels to India specifically to take advantage of the cheap drugs. Israelis, Kadosh (2006) explains, “go to different places for different reasons after the army…they go to South America for hiking, climbing, outdoors stuff. They go to America to work or go to school. And they go to India to do drugs.” Israeli travelers in China concur. They claim that, for Israeli backpackers, “China is about seeing the place” whereas “India is about partying” (Haviv 2005, 62).

Anthropologist Darya Maoz wrote her doctoral dissertation on Israeli backpackers in India. Given that she herself is Israeli and, thus, can lay greater claim to “insider” status during her participant research, her insights would seem to carry some weight. Describing the character of the enclaves, she writes, "When you arrive at the Israeli enclaves in…Manali you feel as if

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26 The banner translates as follows: "Long leave our lord, teacher and Rabbi, the Messiah king forever more."
you were in Israel itself. With the exception of the Indian backdrop, everything there is Israeli. All you hear walking down the street is Hebrew and everyone you meet is Israeli. Even the rickshaws have signs posted in Hebrew advertising trance parties” (Maoz, in Dayan 2004). Maoz uses the word *colony* to describe Israeli enclaves in the literal sense of the word: “Israelis take control over whole districts in India by establishing Israeli “colonies”…they have turned these places into enclaves—flooding them in hundreds or even thousands…creating a stable ongoing colony with changing inhabitants” (Maoz 2006, 227). For Maoz, the colonial aspect of these “colonies” or enclaves is not merely spatial (i.e. monopolization of space). She also argues that Israeli backpackers manifest a colonial sense of entitlement in their social relations with Indians: “The Indians who enter these Israeli enclaves, mainly cooks and maids, are treated as decor and as porters and runners of errands” (Maoz 2006, 227). She sees the relationship between Israelis and Indians as exploitative and based on servitude but notes that Indians have no choice but to grudgingly tolerate Israeli bad behavior because they are dependent on Israeli patronage. They “accept all the Israelis' conditions; they let them post signs without knowing what's written on them; they don't argue when someone refuses to pay and they don't complain to the police when the parties disturb them” (Maoz, in Dayan 2004).

Even when they do everything they can to please their Israeli customers, Indian tourism providers cannot rely on their continued patronage. This is because a number of Israeli citizens have taken up long-term residence in backpacker enclaves and started their own resorts catering to Israelis (Maoz, in Dayan 2004). These resorts are often hidden from view, off the main path, and their location is revealed only to those who can read the directional signs, which are in Hebrew (see Figure 4.8). Such foreign entrepreneurial activity, which takes place largely under the table, is analogous to foreign venture capital (although clearly on a smaller scale) in that it is a form of dispossession. It marginalizes Indian entrepreneurs and workers who might otherwise meet the tourist demand with Indian-owned and managed facilities and services. It creates a closed economy where money circulates only amongst Israelis and gives little back to the community in terms of income or livelihoods.

Any discussion of neocolonialism vis-à-vis Israelis inevitably must bring into question the tense issue of Israeli-Palestinian relations. Mandatory military service, Noy and Cohen (2005, 13) argue, can have the effect of socializing young Israelis into a belligerent, aggressive
mindset. The pronounced sense of nationalism cultivated in the IDF also accentuates perceptions of otherness and an “us vs. them” attitude. This mindset and attitude is still with many Israelis when they arrive in India. Years of pent-up frustration and anger may then be projected upon Indians, whose darker skin, relative poverty, and “primitive” and “dirty” conditions equate them with Palestinians in some Israelis’ eyes (Maoz, in Dayan 2004).

Expansion of the cultural and territorial frontier figures prominently into Zionist ideology and discourse. As their traditional “frontier” of settlements in the West Bank face an uncertain future, some Israelis see tourist enclaves in the developing world as a more practical frontier (Noy and Cohen 2005, 17). Within Israeli backpacker discourse and commonly used in self-identification by Israeli backpackers are two colloquialisms borrowed from Zionist discourse:

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27 This is especially true of recent cohorts of ex-IDF forces who have served during the violent and tension-filled years since the Second Intifada began in 2000.
“Settlers” are more adept cultural relativists and more likely to engage with Indians as equals, and try to learn from them, rather than looking down upon them as “conquerors” are more apt to do (Maoz 2005, 176). “Conquerors” try to “mold” the places they visit to their liking (ibid, 180).

Noy and Cohen (2005, 12) stress, however, that although these linguistic conventions, when translated to English, seem overtly colonial or militaristic, they are, in fact, better understood in a “ludic,” or playful manner, and not should not be taken literally. Nevertheless, Israelis sometimes have a difficult time escaping militaristic symbolism. One informant of mine scoffed that Israeli backpackers’ methods of finding the cheapest guesthouse in town resemble “military maneuvers” and “covert operations” in the way they split up and fan out to “gather intelligence” from multiple guesthouses before converging on the one offering the best deal. In other, more serious arenas, Al Qaeda, perhaps seizing upon the fact that Israelis have taken a liking to the country with one of the world’s largest Muslim populations, threatened in 2006 to carry out a “Bali-like” attack on the Israeli-dominated beach resorts of Goa (Haaretz 2006).

Yet, for all of the bluster surrounding Israeli backpackers and their supposedly poor behavior and neocolonial chauvinism, my personal experiences in the field failed to corroborate the most alarmist rhetoric. True, it is not difficult to observe cases of rudeness, obnoxiousness, and condescension among Israeli backpackers. But such behavior is hardly limited to Israelis. While it may be convenient to draw linkages between Israel’s neocolonial policies of territorial expansion and ethnocentrism in Palestine and Israeli backpacker practice in India, the fact remains that the accusations commonly made against Israeli backpackers—that they are arrogant, lazy drug abusers—could just as easily be made against tourists of any nationality. Moreover, the discourse against Israeli backpackers veers dangerously in the direction of essentializing an entire society as a homogeneous entity. I imagine some of this tendency is born out of European views of Israel as a pariah state. In reality, half the Israeli population opposes its government’s policies in Palestine, and those who leave Israel to travel abroad are largely drawn from the ranks of pacifists and liberals, disaffected by years of war and failed neocolonial policies.

During the course of my fieldwork, I met a number of Israeli tourists who defied the negative stereotypes. Elana, one of my interview informants, travels alone because she intentionally chooses not to be part of a large group of Israeli tourists. She explains, “many
backpackers, they have this wrong state of mind that ‘I’m coming to this place and this place is here for me! You know? I don’t agree with that. I mean, you come to this place, you need to behave like you are the guest. You don’t belong here. They’re not here for you, for your satisfaction. They don’t have to make you feel comfortable. They don’t have to give into your demands and needs. You have to adjust yourself to the place.” Frank, one of my American interview informants, acknowledges some of the complains against Israeli backpackers but also defends them and puts some of those complains in a broader context:

If a guesthouse is full of Israelis, I might stop there for some food, because chances are it’s going to be fantastic. But, it seems that a large percentage of them just come here to party with each other after spending three years in the army, and, you know, it’s not my thing. And a lot of travelers are very sort of anti-Israeli. But, you know, if ten or twelve army guys from America decided, after they got through with the army, to travel, they would probably be the same way, probably even more obnoxious.

To conclude this section, I return to the notion that discourses often reveal more about the people and motives behind them than they do about the discursive subject itself. It is significant that the propagators of the anti-Israeli discourse are largely Europeans and North Americans. This discourse, I believe, is a strategy to deflect blame from their own practices and project it upon a more politically expedient scapegoat. When tourists criticize Israeli tourists for what they believe is poor behavior and cultural insensitivity, they are taking the moral high ground, implying that they themselves are innocent of any such wrongdoing. As I hope this thesis proves, such claims to innocence are ill-founded. The strategic motive behind the anti-Israeli discourse is strongest when it is employed by citizens of the historically colonial countries of Europe and North America, because it serves to assuage their (perhaps subconscious) guilt associated with their own nations’ histories and legacies of colonialism.
CHAPTER FIVE: DHARAMSALA

Historical background and demographics of tourism in Dharamsala

After Shimla and Manali, Dharamsala\textsuperscript{28} is the next most popular destination of foreign tourists in Himachal Pradesh. Dharamsala is best known as the home of His Holiness The Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile. As such, it attracts a slightly different demographic of foreign tourist that tends to be politically, intellectually, and/or spiritually engaged with Tibetan culture. Established by the British as a hill station in 1849, Dharamsala fell into disrepair after a devastating 1905 earthquake. When the Dalai Lama and his entourage fled China in 1960, India not only granted them asylum but gave them land in Dharamsala on which to establish a new community and government. Since then, thousands more Tibetans have fled China, followed in their footsteps, Although Tibetan refugees are allowed to live anywhere they want in India, and many young Tibetans move to cities to take advantage of education and job opportunities, the majority settle in Dharamsala so that they can remain close to their spiritual leader and take advantage from the concentration of charities and services available there.

Unlike Shimla and Manali, which were sites of tourism and leisure throughout the twentieth century, Dharamsala did not appear on the tourist map until after the Dalai Lama’s arrival, which roughly corresponded with the arrival of Western tourists in India on the hippie trail (Prost 2006, 234). As a tourist destination, Dharamsala drew both visitors with a serious interest in Tibetan culture and religion and hippies who also expressed interest in Tibet but whose interest was more superficial\textsuperscript{29}. Today, Dharamsala continues to attract Western tourists

\textsuperscript{28} The location that is the subject of this chapter is known by different names at different scales. Dharamsala is the most widely recognized name and is used to in regional, national, and international contexts. At the local scale, however, “Dharamsala” actually refers to the modern Indian city at the base of the mountain, while the Tibetan community 500 meters above is known as “McLeod Ganj.” This chapter focuses entirely on this mountaintop settlement. However, in this thesis I eschew its local-scale name for the more recognizable name Dharamsala.

\textsuperscript{29} Timothy Leary’s 1964 book The Psychedelic Experience drew heavily from the Tibetan Book of the Dead and became enshrined in 1960s hippie culture, recommending the use of Tibetan mantras during LSD experimentation. To this day, there is a misplaced association between things Tibetan and Western psychedelic culture. In fact, Buddhism forbids all forms of drug use.
with varying levels of interest in Tibetan culture, and Indian tourists well. In fact, Indian tourists outnumber foreign tourists twenty-five to one (see Table 5.1)\(^{30}\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indians</th>
<th>Foreigners</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Foreign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>54,933</td>
<td>1,435</td>
<td>56,368</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>126,381</td>
<td>8,427</td>
<td>134,808</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>118,742</td>
<td>4,335</td>
<td>123,077</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>828,653</td>
<td>29,060</td>
<td>857,713</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>891,516</td>
<td>32,146</td>
<td>923,662</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1,012,567</td>
<td>38,713</td>
<td>1,051,280</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1,080,520</td>
<td>40,923</td>
<td>1,121,443</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1,133,314</td>
<td>47,412</td>
<td>1,180,726</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Indian and foreign tourists in Kangra District (HPTDC 2007)

The number of foreign tourists relative to Indian tourists has increased only slightly in the last ten years, but the total numbers of both foreign tourists and Indian tourists have increased dramatically and at fairly comparable rates (about tenfold in ten years). I also predict that, if I were able to measure bednights spent in Dharamsala, foreign tourists would equal, or even outnumber, Indian tourists. This is because most Indian tourists stay in Dharamsala for a single weekend, whereas foreign tourists often stay for weeks or even months. Thus, the number of foreign tourists in Dharamsala at any given time is likely to be much higher than one might infer from the annualized numbers.

Based on my observations, and an unscientific count I conducted in main bazaar, Tibetans constitute the clear majority of people in the public spaces of Dharamsala, outnumbering Indians by about two to one, and foreigners by about four to one. This mix of people, including resident monks and refugees, Indian tourists, foreign tourists, and long-term visitors, is evidence that, as a tourism landscape, Dharamsala can best described as heterogeneous space rather than enclavic space. It should be noted, however, that about half the Indians observed were riding in tourist vehicles whereas almost all foreigners and most Tibetans observed were pedestrians. Pedestrians are far more visible and able to participate in heterogeneous space, while vehicular passengers are more sheltered constitute their own...

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\(^{30}\) It should be noted, however, that these data represent the entire district in which Dharamsala is located, and not Dharamsala itself. While it is safe to assume that the foreign tourists in these data visit the district for the specific purpose of going to Dharamsala, that is not necessarily the case with the Indian tourists in the data, who may be visiting other parts of the district.
movable enclavistic spaces. Vehicles also infringe with greater impact upon the safety and serenity of the heterogeneous public space of the bazaar.

Consumption, commercialism, and commodification

Foreigners who spend time in Dharamsala include NGO workers, volunteers, teachers, and students, many of whom evade categorization as tourists per se because of their semi-permanent resident status and integration into the community. Not every long-term foreign guest in Dharamsala, however, can be said to be a productive member of the society. Many come to Dharamsala to pursue spiritual development for personal reasons, rather than out of solidarity with Tibetans. They constitute a kind of “new leisure class,” to borrow a phrase from Dean MacCannell’s (1976) classic take on the modern tourist whose leisure time is spent on a quest for authenticity.31 There is nothing new about the leisure class, or about theorizing tourists as a leisure class, as Veblen (1899) and MacCannell have shown. What I propose is new is that the leisure class, more and more, is coming to encompass a loose amalgamation of backpackers and hippies. Tourists of this shade were once known for eschewing conspicuous consumption, but they are now consuming more than ever (and at the same time hypocritically disparaging mass tourists for their conspicuous consumption). This consumption involves both goods and services but it is perhaps the latter that has seen the most growth and commercialization in recent years. Dharamsala offers a panoply of classes, lessons, workshops, and other opportunities for self-improvement…all, of course, for a price. Long-term visitors can study any number of schools of yoga or meditation, take sitar or tabla lessons, or study reiki, astrology, palm reading, crystal healing, or massage. Fliers and signs advertising these classes plaster across walls and telephone polls (see Figure 5.1).

Faced with so many options, it is no wonder that some visitors extend their stay by weeks or months. Some fill their weekly schedules with activities, taking advantage of inequalities in foreign exchange rates to invest in classes that would cost them ten or twenty times as much money in their own countries. Such lessons are an easy way to accumulate cultural capital at a

31 MacCannell’s theory of the leisure class is itself borrowed from Thorstein Veblen’s Theory of the Leisure Class (1899), the classic critique of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure (leisure as consumption) as means of maximizing utility and social status (what Bourdieu later re-theorized as cultural capital)
cheap price. With culturally specific “authentic” skills and talents in tow, these tourists can claim that they are “more than just tourists,” that they “get to know the community,” and that they “do what the locals do.” Never mind that the average Tibetan refugee has neither the time, interest, nor money to take commercial yoga classes or tabla lessons. These “educational services” take cultural practices, once passed down through tradition, and commodify them into consumable assets. The ability to accumulate such assets denotes membership in a leisure class.

Belonging to a leisure class means more than just the ability to pay for cultural consumables. It is also the ability to live in a place like Dharamsala for weeks and months without an income flow, free from worry about mortgage payments or credit card bills, not to mention job responsibilities. Foreign tourists in India tend to have middle to upper-class backgrounds. Despite the fact that the hippies of the 1960s lived like paupers, most of them, in fact, also came from the middle and upper-classes. Working-class people could not afford to be hippies, or, at least, could not afford to “drop out” of society and hitchhike across continents. Although many backpackers and alternative tourists today share the same class privileges as their hippie predecessors, they do not attempt to replicate the low-consumption lifestyle of the hippies. Today they come armed with debit cards and trust funds. Butcher coined the term “Hilton
Hippies” to describe backpackers read *Lonely Planet* because it is hip and youthful guide, but who have no need for its budget hotel recommendations and instead stay in the most expensive hotels32 available because they can afford it (Butcher 2003, 42).

This narrative of increasing class power (or, at least, increasing *displays* of class power) is complicated by some countervailing trends. In my fieldwork, I met some tourists who do not easily fit the leisure class model. In the United States, Charlotte lives out of her truck and relies on low-paid temporary work and odd jobs. Her “secret” (her language, not mine) is that she works hard for six months at home, living a frugal lifestyle and saving up enough money to then spend the next six months traveling somewhere in the developing world, where she can afford to live modestly but comfortably. She owns no property and has no fixed obligations at home, so she has the freedom to travel, which is what makes her happy. She feels frustrated, though, because people often assume that because she is able to travel for extended periods of time, she must be fabulously wealthy. I would still argue that Charlotte belongs to *some* form of leisure class. Charlotte may not be wealthy when she is in the United States, but when she travels, she is able to enjoy, if not the bank account and security of a wealthy person, then at least the lifestyle of someone of the leisure class. Even a modest lifestyle in backpacker guesthouses in India is still a lifestyle of leisure, because of the freedom from work, freedom from responsibility, and the peace of mind that a modest lifestyle is affordable (as long as exchange rates remain as unequal as they are). Lest one forget what a privilege it is to be able to live such a six-months-on-six-months-off lifestyle, one must realize that a similar pattern would never be possible the other way around. That is, working-class Indians would never be able to save up and spend six leisurely months in Europe or North America. Westerners who are able to live this lifestyle are indeed privileged.

Unequal currency exchange rates are behind this class mobility and elasticity. Tourists with yen, dollars, euros, and pounds are able to purchase a far larger basket of goods or services in India than the same amount would purchase in their own country. There is nothing accidental about this inequality; it is a direct remnant of hundreds of years of underdevelopment imposed on India resulting from the wholesale extraction of capital by force. When tourists take advantage of exchange rates biased in their favor to extend their purchasing power, they are

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32 Indeed, *Lonely Planet* has caught on to this phenomenon, and has greatly expanded its range of hotel listings to accommodate readers both on a budget and with money to spare.
passively and indirectly benefiting from colonial exploitation. In the tourist’s defense, he or she has no control over the exchange rate or the prevailing prices in India. Indian tourist sector providers, in fact, benefit from comparative advantage in the Ricardian sense that India’s undervalued currency gives their “product” (tourist services, hotel rooms, etc) an advantage in the global tourism market over countries whose baskets of goods are relatively more expensive. Tourist consumption can also be conceptualized as socially mediated distribution of wealth. That is, the money tourists spend in the informal economy is transferred directly into the hands of primary producers where it sustains livelihoods.

When discussing the consumption and spending habits of tourists, defining what is “modest,” “basic,” and “essential” is a highly subjective endeavor. One might begin by defining basic tourist necessities as a room, a bed, food, and transport. Each one of these necessities, however, comes in many gradations, and with those different gradations come different prices. Does the room have a bathroom? Is the bed free from bedbugs? Is the transport public? Sooner or later, additional “necessities” start emerging: park entrance fees and trekking fees, internet and communications, travel agent commissions. As individual tastes factor into personal “necessities”, the list can grow to include alcohol and drugs, particular foods, and massage and beauty services. Goods and services above and beyond basic necessities make up much of the commercial landscape in Dharamsala. They include Italian restaurants, theme bars, cinemas, broadband internet centers, and French-style bakeries. One not atypical cafe in Dharamsala features an espresso bar, halogen lights, jazz music, black-and-white framed photographs on the walls, and menu items such as chicken with mango-lime sauce and banana bread.

What exactly does it mean that such a cafe, which could just as easily be in California, is in Dharamsala? Some might say it is evidence that Dharamsala is “too touristy” or “too Westernized.” Others might decry the “commercialism” that has overtaken the town, and attribute it to tourists. When we say places are “touristy” what we really mean is that the economy, or at least the visible face of the economy (i.e. stores that front the main bazaar), is more oriented to providing goods and services to tourists than to locals. But to suggest that there is a direct causal link between tourism and commercialization is misguided. Commerce is nothing new in any Indian, or Tibetan, city. The early hippies in India were not non-commercial;

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33 Massage therapy centers are commonplace in nearly every tourist center in India. Backpackers get sore backs, and deep tissue massages are offered for the equivalent of $5 or less.
they patronized the same local commercial infrastructure that Indians did. What may be new about the commercial landscape of tourism is that goods increasingly come from geographically dispersed supply chains rather than from local producers.

To gain a better empirical sense of how the commercial landscape of Dharamsala is structured, I conducted transects (see Table 5.2) on the two main commercial streets, Bhagsu Road and Jogibara Road (otherwise known as the “main bazaar”) (see Figure 5.2). The results revealed the degree to which tourist-oriented businesses dominate the commercial landscape and public space of Dharamsala. Out of one hundred fifty-eight storefronts and commercial parcels, one hundred six appeared to be predominantly geared towards the foreign tourist and long-term visitor market, while only twenty appeared to be geared primarily towards the local Tibetan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primarily patronized by tourists</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gift shops (clothing, souvenirs, art, handicrafts, jewelry)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurants, bars, and cafés</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hotels and guesthouses</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>massage parlors</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>travel agencies</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tourist services (laundry, photos, money changer)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bookstores (English language)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classrooms (astrology and music for foreign students)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mixed tourist/local patronage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>grocery and convenience stores</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internet cafés</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhabas (local eateries)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drugstores</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confectioners</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>video halls</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial services (bank and Western Union)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liquor stores</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>traditional Tibetan services (scrolls and astrology)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibetan-Jewish Youth Exchange</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Primarily patronized locals</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>local services (beauty parlors, tailors, produce, gas and electric)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>state services (clinics, welfare office, education, outreach)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>temple</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Results of commercial transects in Dharamsala
population (and an additional thirty-two were presumably split between both local and outsider use. All of these businesses and services can be considered part of the formal economy of Dharamsala, as they occupy the prime commercial space on the two main roads. In addition, I observed fifty-one street vendors. Some of these street vendors are fully mobile, thus very much belonging to the informal sector, while others sell their wares from semi--stationary carts and tables and thus may fall somewhere in between a regulated formal sector and unregulated informal sector. These vendors are also almost exclusively geared towards the foreign market. Their wares include postcards, jewelry, shawls, books, clothing, CDs, instruments, purses, and *mamos* (Tibetan dumplings).

![Figure 5.2 Commercial landscape in the main bazaar, Dharamsala](image)

The three categories that I used and the method by which I assigned commercial establishments into categories are by no means scientific. The objective of this exercise was simply to present a general picture of the unevenness with which space (and the forces of capital and ownership that go into the production of these spaces) is distributed between different groups. I would caution my readers not to interpret my categorizations too rigidly for fear of essentializing any group, particularly Tibetans. I do not wish to imply that Tibetans are barred
from any of the establishments in the “tourist only” category. Tibetans may very well shop at the same stores that sell souvenirs and t-shirts to tourists. In fact, this is highly likely, as the same clothing stores that sell tourist t-shirts also sell the modern fashions that Tibetan youth wear. Likewise, travel agents may serve Tibetan as well as foreign clientele. And although Tibetan residents have little reason to patronize hotels, Tibetan patronization of cafes and restaurants is not uncommon, even if they seem to be “touristy.” At this point my reader may be wondering: if I am so willing to undermine my own categories, why did I bother creating them in the first place? I would answer that they still have some utility, if not in understanding the reality of patronage and clientele, then at least in understanding the demographic orientation and business models that predominate the commercial space of Dharamsala. And if the patronage and clientele appear to undermine or contradict the outward categorization, that is something worth knowing.

There is a distinct cultural shift underway between the older and younger generations in the Tibetan community. One can see it manifested most visibly in the outward appearance and mannerisms of Tibetans with their Western fashions, cell phones, and foreign boyfriends and girlfriends. The interaction between foreign tourists and long-term guests and Tibetan refugees and their offspring has produced a cosmopolitan hybridized culture uncommon in the rest of India. Foreigners in Dharamsala, many of whom are politically active in the cause of social justice for Tibetans, get more involved in the community than foreign tourists do in other Indian cities. Not only are foreigners a fixture in the physical and cultural landscape of Dharamsala, but they are also embedded in the financial structure of the community. Long-term foreign guests form friendships, business relationships, and marriages with Tibetans (Prost 2006, 237). So, when Tibetans eat at touristy restaurants, it is probably because their foreign girlfriends, boyfriends, or spouses are paying the bill. At the interpersonal scale, money is exchanged through these relationships, and is sometimes formalized through sponsorships, in which foreign benefactors continue to communicate with and send money to their Tibetan contacts even after they leave, usually with certain caveats, such as that the money be used for education. These financial flows are mirrored at the larger, institutional scale in the direct aid contributed by NGOs and governments around the world.

Prost (2006, 244) argues that sponsorship is problematic because it risks commodifying Tibetans and Tibetan culture by creating idealized expectations to which it is difficult for beneficiaries to live up. Sponsorship can involve a kind of unspoken stipulation that beneficiaries
should maintain a certain “authentic” lifestyle. Sponsors may worry that their assistance is being squandered on a “materialistic” consumer culture, which can lead to cultural degradation, laziness, and dependency (ibid, 243). Tibetan youth can gain access to the same kind of lifestyle that their Western friends enjoy—sunbathing, relaxing at cafés, partying, using drugs—while gaining little sense of financial responsibility because everything is paid for by their friends. This can lead to dependency and vulnerability should the funding stop and they find themselves dependent on financially unsustainable patterns of consumption (ibid, 237). Youth, after all, are the "entry-point for external influences" into traditional cultures, or the first front in globalization (Massey 1998, 121).

The village of Bhagsu

The village of Bhagsu is to Dharamsala what Old Manali is to New Manali. It is just three kilometers away from Dharamsala, but is on the eastern slope of a mountain ridge on which Dharamsala is on the western slope (see Figure 5.3) It has developed as the “alternative”

![Figure 5.3 Relative locations of Dharamsala and Bhagsu](Copyright: Google Maps)
destination for backpackers in the Dharamsala area who want something more peaceful and secluded than the hustle and bustle of Dharamsala itself. The first time I heard of the place was from the Israeli backpacker sitting next to me on the bus to Dharamsala. He had not even been to Dharamsala yet, but he had already made up his mind, informed by what he read in his guidebook and what he heard from other backpackers, that Bhagsu was where he wanted to be.

I went to see what all the fuss was about, and I have to admit, the popularity of the place puzzled me at first. I could understand why Old Manali existed as an “alternative” to New Manali. Backpackers preferred it because it felt more in tune with the awesome natural setting of the Kullu Valley than the chock-a-block of modern concrete buildings in New Manali. But unlike New Manali, Dharamsala has strong character of its own. Its Tibetan community makes it a one-of-a-kind destination that draws people from around the world. Why would anyone come all the way to Dharamsala only to miss out on the cultural milieu of that unique place and spend his or her time in a banal village instead? The answer, I would learn, is that some people are simply looking for a quiet place to sit, eat, talk, contemplate, smoke, hike, meditate, do yoga, or any number of other things that do not involve hobknobbing with Tibetan refugees. Most of the backpackers who stay in Bhagsu do venture into Dharamsala at least once or twice, but it Dharamsala’s milieu was not what drew them to the region. For these tourists, location is irrelevant. This could be any village in Himachal Pradesh.

Yet, its location is not an accident. Bhagsu is no longer a sleepy village, but is attracting tourism development like iron filings on a magnet. And the reason for its growth, and for existence in the first place, is very much a function of its proximity to Dharamsala, even if that function has waned over the ensuing years as Bhagsu has developed into a destination in its own right. Since the first backpackers came to Bhagsu looking for a quieter, more rural setting close to, but not in, Dharamsala. Today, however, for a place whose reputation is as a “quiet village,” Bhagsu has an astonishing amount of tourism infrastructure. I conducted a survey to try to quantify the pace and scale of this development. I started at the bottom of the mountain and walked to the top, speaking to managers or employees at every place where tourists can rent a room, creating a database of hotels and when they were established (see Figure 5.4).

It took me a full day to reach the furthest extent of tourism development in Bhagsu. Development in the village has been largely vertical, beginning at the bottom of the mountain, where the road from Dharamsala ends in a parking lot, and proceeding up the mountain, where
where the road from Dharamsala ends in a parking lot, and proceeding up the mountain, where access is still limited by steep footpaths. Each time I thought I had reached the guesthouse furthest up the mountain, another sign painted on a rock or mounted on the path announced that yet another guesthouse beckoned still further uphill, offering a “better view” (see Figure 5.5).
The temporal development of hotels correlates roughly with elevation, with the oldest hotels at the bottom of the mountain and the newest at the top. One guesthouse owner at the top explained that there are always going to be tourists who want to be higher up the mountain than anyone else, in search of the most shanti (peaceful) place and best view possible. The oldest hotel I surveyed opened in 1991. By 2001, the number of hotels had reached twelve, and by 2007 it had reached thirty-eight. As more places opened further and further up the mountain, the older hotels at the bottom were losing business so they invested in modern renovations and began to attract more diverse clientele other than just backpackers. Today, the five hotels that skirt the road and parking lot are full-service, multi-story, concrete hotels catering to middle-class Indian tourists. Bhagsu’s first multinational chain hotel, a Best Western, opened two weeks before my arrival. It was charging the highest prices in the village, 1650-4500 rupees ($42-112) a night. With cozy family guesthouses offering rooms for a mere eighty rupees ten minutes’ walk further uphill, it is perhaps no small wonder the Best Western appeared to be having difficulty filling rooms.

By talking to those thirty-eight different proprietors, I gained some insights into the microgeographies and economics of development in ascendant tourist villages in India like Bhagsu. Every proprietor knew his or her establishment’s place in a three-tiered hierarchy. At the most formal tier are full-service hotels like the ones at the bottom of the hill. They charge the highest prices, pay taxes, and are fully regulated and licensed by the state. The next level is guesthouses. Guesthouses are family homes that are usually renovated and expanded, often with detached annexes, by entrepreneurial families into configurations more amenable to hosting guests. They are not formally taxed or licensed by the state, but they still follow certain norms, such as keeping records of guests’ names and passports. In general, they are left alone by the authorities, with whom it is said they have a tacit agreement (presumably for the right amount of baksheesh). Most guesthouses have attached restaurants, bakeries, and lounges and serve standard backpacker cuisine.

Finally, the least formal in the hierarchy is the “family house.” These are literally the homes of villagers, unadulterated for the purposes of tourism, and they simply rent out spare rooms to guests on an as-need basis. This is what the most intrepid backpackers find at the advancing frontier of tourism if they are willing and able to climb to the top of the mountain. Family houses do not follow any formal business models. They do not use aggressive marketing.
If people show up looking for a place to stay, and the proprietor happens to be nearby, they might be in luck. More likely, the owner will be out working in the fields and it is the tourist’s responsibility to track him down.

As I conducted the survey an interesting phenomenon occurred. Many of the proprietors I spoke with were curious about my survey. They wanted to see the data I was collecting. They did not seem to know many details about their neighbors’ guesthouses such as how many rooms they had, how much they charged. My arrival presented them with an opportunity for a sort of “industrial espionage.”34 One guesthouse owner told me frankly that tourism has not been good for the community. As tourism has replaced agriculture as the primary livelihood source, guesthouses are increasingly forced to compete against their neighbors, destroying the once strong sense of community. Signs strewn about the public paths of Bhagsu pointing backpackers to this guesthouse over that are evidence of this new spirit of one-upsmanship (see Figure 5.5).

One guesthouse owner admitted that it was the lure of easy money that enticed him to enter the tourism business. But, as he later discovered, running a guesthouse is hard work. He has to be on-call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, accommodating guests who arrive after hours and dealing with problem guests and rude guests. He tells me that there is a constant pressure to add new amenities, like TVs, hot water, internet, and faucet showers, all of which would involve substantial investment costs. Yet, he cannot raise prices to cover such costs because the other guesthouses create severe competition and price undercutting, and backpackers are known to walk from place to place and bargain until they find the cheapest room. He says the guests have little grasp of the economics of running a guesthouse. They assume that because he charges higher prices in his restaurant than Indians pay for food, he must be wealthy. But he insists he is not. It takes money to maintain the guesthouse, and to supply the restaurant. He laments that “there is no more traditional life in Bhagsu” and that the villagers have “forgotten their traditions,” but he also acknowledges that change has come to his village and that there is no going back now.

Bhagsu is a microcosm of the kind of intense, rapid tourism development that is occurring all over India. The insatiable demand by backpackers for shanti places has driven them further and further up the mountain, pushing the frontier of development with them. Most of the current thirty-eight hotels began as regular family houses in the village. As backpackers started

34 Not wanting to accentuate any social acrimony in the village, I kept my data confidential.
arriving and knocking on doors looking for places to stay, villagers saw an opportunity to make money. Soon they were drawn into a cycle whereby they must constantly expand, innovate, and compete to keep the tourism income they have become dependent on. Developments like Bhagsu will not happen everywhere in India. Most of India’s 640,000 villages will never see such development because they are too isolated. For a Bhagsu or an Old Manali to develop, there must first be a “magnet”: a Dharmasala, or a Manali. One thing we can learn from these examples is that the frontier of tourism is not seeking out more and “new” remote places. Instead, it is seeking out wider peripheries around already-existing, established places.
Ladakh is one of the most remote and sparsely populated regions in India. Administratively part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh has more in common culturally and geographically with Tibet, with which it shares a common border (indeed, Ladakh is known colloquially as “Little Tibet”). Although it is politically distinct from the much larger portion of Tibet that is under Chinese rule, it is nevertheless situated on the Tibetan plateau, at an average of over 10,000 feet high. Like Tibet, it has an arid and extreme climate, which results from being in the rain shadow of the Himalaya. The Ladakhis bear little resemblance to their Indian compatriots on the other side of the mountains. Rather, they are ethnic cousins of the Tibetans, practice Tibetan Buddhism, and speak a language closely related to Tibetan. Its geographic isolation helped to maintain and insulate its culture for many centuries, but Ladakh was never fully isolated. Although the mountains that encompass Ladakh are indeed a formidable barrier and quite impenetrable during the winter, when the snow melts each summer, the passes are cleared, and seasonal transportation linkages are reopened. Although it occupies difficult terrain, Ladakh is also situated in a historically strategic location between China, Tibet, and Central Asia to the north and east, and India to the south. For centuries, Ladakh’s capital, Leh, was a bustling stop on the trans-Himalayan trade routes that connected the Indian subcontinent to the Silk Road, and its bazaars were home to a cosmopolitan mix of merchants and traders (Rizvi 1996, 192).

When William Moorcraft in 1812 became the first recorded British person to enter Ladakh, it was for the purpose of incorporating that lucrative trade into the dominion of the East India Company (Jina 1995, 21). In 1846, Ladakh did come under nominal British colonial rule, as a tributary region to the princely state of Kashmir. British colonial officials, adventurers, and tourists trickled into Ladakh sporadically. The 1904 Murray guidebook to India mentions that Leh is 19 marches from Srinigar (the capital of Kashmir) but warns that “provisions are not easily obtained” and, tellingly, that “there are no bungalows”; no further information is provided (Saba 1904, 219). The British invested little in the way of infrastructure in Ladakh, instead channeling resources into construction of the Hindustan-Tibet Road, which connected Shimla to
Tibet through the Sutlej Valley in what is now Himachal Pradesh. This engineering project, which widened the ancient caravan trail into a full-fledged road, provided the British with their main trade route into Tibet, bypassing Ladakh (Murray 1909, 220). In the 1919 Murray guidebook, the Hindustan-Tibet Road is described in detail for tourists, with Public Works Department rest houses and *dak* bungalows listed as optional places to sleep along the way (Buckland 1919, 292). During the same period, Ladakh was still accessible only by two weeks’ yak caravan from Manali or Srinigar (Jina 1995, 95) (for a map of the region and locations mentioned in this chapter see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 Map of Ladakh and Spiti region (Copyright: Google Maps)

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35 The British used an extensive network of *dak* bungalows (first established by the Mughals) primarily for the relay of mail and other goods across the empire. They were spaced roughly one day’s travel time apart and provided lodgings for traveling officials (King 1995, 44). As such, they were not always available for independent travelers, and when they were, it was only on a first-come, first-served basis and for no more than twenty-four hours (Murray 1894, xxiii).
In 1948 the newly independent Indian state declared Ladakh off-limits to foreigners and tourists. In the ensuing years, its strategic location in the trans-Himalaya would become a liability given the bellicose geopolitics that would play out between the new states of India and China over a 42,000 square kilometer area known as Aksai Chin. India claimed the area to be a part of Ladakh, while China claimed it to be part of Tibet. At first, these competing claims were little more than rhetoric as the territory was even more sparsely populated and isolated than the rest of Ladakh, but when the Chinese army annexed Tibet in 1950 and the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959, Sino-Indian relations neared the breaking point. In 1962 the conflict erupted in all-out war, which the better-equipped Chinese army promptly won after slightly more than one month of high altitude fighting. China controls Aksai Chin to this day, but the dispute is still alive and, as a result, all borders between India and China are sealed. With the borders closed, Ladakh could no longer rely on the old trade routes, so the Indian government began to take steps to modernize Ladakh’s economy and integrate it more fully with the rest of the country (Michaud 1991, 610). In the 1960s, it invested in agriculture, irrigation, hydroelectric, and road-building projects (Dawa 1997, 370). These efforts had as much to do with national security and establishing a military presence in this sensitive border region as they did with local development. Many scholars and activists have argued that the effects of these modernization programs have destabilized Ladakh’s economy rather than enhanced it. Whereas Ladakh was once largely self-sufficient, they argue, it has since become dependent on imported food and petroleum, and agricultural yields have steeply declined (Dawa 1997, 371).

Dependency has also been used to describe Ladakh’s relationship with tourism. In the 1970s, Ladakh’s M.P., Kushok Bakula, recommended that the ban on tourism in his district be lifted so as to encourage development (Jina 1995, 134). Ladakh was formally opened up to foreign tourists in 1974. Almost immediately, it was promoted as the “newest” destination in India, a “lost Shangri-La” long hidden but now thrown open for foreigners for the first time (Bestaggini 1998, 24). During the first five years, the only way in was two days’ journey from Srinigar by bus or jeep over rough roads and some of the highest mountain passes in the world. Yet for many tourists, the difficulty in getting there was not a disincentive at all but rather part of its allure. Foreign tourists and hippies, and, later, backpackers, were already spending their summers in mountain resorts like Manali and Dharamsala. When word got out that they could go even further into the mountains, and even further away from “civilization,” many seized the
opportunity. In the first three years Ladakh was open, the number of foreign tourists rose from 500 to 7,127 (see Figure 6.2). Visitors in the late 1970s were already complaining that “much of its aura of mystery has already been lost” (ibid). If access to Ladakh was at first limited to tourists with relatively high tolerance thresholds (i.e. those willing to endure two days’ bus ride), the introduction of scheduled air service in 1979 opened Ladakh to a wider market with not quite as high a tolerance threshold. This market was the kind that a mainstream guidebook like *Fodor’s* had in mind when it wrote that “One of the newest adventure travel opportunities in India is the remote and rugged Himalayan region of Ladakh, only recently opened to air travel” (Fodors 1982, 273). In the year after air service was introduced, the number of foreign tourists in Ladakh rose from 9,213 to 13,104.

![Figure 6.2 Foreign tourists in Ladakh, 1974-2007](image)

*Lonely Planet* describes Ladakh in glowing terms its first edition India guidebook in 1981, devoting nearly eleven pages to the region, or more than its coverage of Shimla, Manali, and Dharamsala combined. This level of attention given to a region that was still among the most inaccessible and least developed in India is demonstrative of the proportionally skewed influence that tourism has in the region. Although the total number of tourists in Ladakh is lower than that in most states in India (with the exception of some northeastern states which are still off-limits to
tourists to this day), the ratio of tourists to residents is among the highest in India. In other words, tourism in Ladakh is all the more pronounced because of Ladakh’s small population. Roughly one foreign tourist visits Ladakh each year for every ten residents (see Figure 1, Appendix for the data demonstrating this). Only Goa has a higher ratio (one to four) and that is because Goa is an easily accessible state full of beach resorts with a relatively small resident population. To put this ratio in perspective, the ratio of foreign tourists to residents in Himachal Pradesh is one to thirty-six, which is also one of highest in India. More typical ratios are under one to one hundred, while some are even below one to 1,000 (in the state of Chattisgarh it is an astronomical one to 18,000). The wide range in these values is revealing of the geographic unevenness of tourism in India.

Following the initial rapid growth after its opening up, the number of annual foreign tourists in Ladakh hovered between 13,000 and 15,000, marked by periodic downturns which can be explained by political instability in nearby Kashmir. Even though the number of tourists remained relatively stagnant during the 1980s and 1990s, the effects of tourism upon Ladakhi development continued to increase. The population of Leh has multiplied nearly four times since Ladakh was opened to tourists, from 7,453 in 1971 to 26,680 in 2005, and is projected to reach 45,337 by 2010 (Dawa 1997, 373).

Some observers have issued alarmist critiques of Ladakh’s development, modernization, and integration into the wider Indian—and global—economy, and they blame tourism as one of the causes. But, as Rizvi (1996, 195) points out, the problems with development in Ladakh are “an extension of problems inherent in the whole process of modernization, of which tourism is only a part” [emphasis added]. That is, there is no simple causal relationship between tourism and development, and tourists cannot be blamed as the source of all problems associated with development. Later in this chapter I will describe efforts to decouple tourism from the downsides of development and to mitigate the negative effects of tourism. But first, I will discuss in greater detail why those mitigations are needed.

Tourism development in Ladakh and its impacts

Rizvi (1996, 197) postulates that because of its unique culture as well as its inaccessibility, Ladakh attracts a self-selecting “higher breed” of tourist who is less interested in
drugs and parties, and more genuinely interested in Ladakhi culture, Buddhism, and sustainable living. Based on my observations in Leh, I would agree that the youth culture, and its associated drug use, is less prominent than it is in Manali (Manali being a primary production site for cannabis while Ladakh is not). Aspects of Manali’s backpacker culture, however, have indeed diffused to Leh. Leh is not as inaccessible as it once was, and many of the same backpackers who go to Manali also go to Leh. In fact, during the time I spent in Manali, one of the most common topics of conversations was “when does the road to Leh open?” and “who else is going there?”

For backpackers who have come as far as Manali from halfway around the world, the prospect of another two days on the road is not much of a deterrent. Furthermore, the mystical aura that surrounds Ladakh in the backpacker’s geographic imagination promises to make the extra effort worthwhile. The Manali-Leh Road, opened in 1987, has rendered that extra effort slightly less burdensome. This 450-kilometer road conveys trucks, buses, jeeps, and cars across a stark, unpopulated terrain of mountain peaks. It is still a bumpy ride, full of unpaved segments and kept in flux by run-off and landslides. As of 1996, Rizvi (1996, 8) recommended the Manali-Leh road only for those “with more time than money and a high discomfort-threshold” or “the rich and adventurous, looking for a new and exciting experience, but able to pay for the individual vehicles and sophisticated camping equipment that minimize the journey’s rigors.” Conditions have since improved, but many foreign tourists today still opt for private transport. Jeep taxis offer a privileged form of spatial accessibility to those who can afford them. For tourists who want to explore areas not served by public transportation (which, in Ladakh, is most areas), jeep taxis are the only choice, short of hitchhiking. Tourists watching their budget often organize carpools with other tourists headed in the same direction.

Given the importance of transportation infrastructure to Ladakh’s accessibility and development, some discussion of the Border Roads Organization (BRO) is warranted. The BRO (2007) is responsible for building and maintaining roads and other civil infrastructure in India’s largely mountainous border regions. It publicly celebrates its accomplishments in conquering some of the most difficult terrain on Earth, as well as opening India’s “remote, backwards” regions for economic development (ibid). As a wing of India’s Ministry of Defense, its primary goals are related to security. The BRO glorifies its “patriotic” role in subduing “Naxalite infested areas” and “terrorism prone areas” (ibid). These terms are state euphemisms for India’s
indigenous and tribal hinterlands in India’s northeastern borderlands with Burma, where separatists seek independence and where the authority of the central government is fractured and weak. In these areas, the BRO works to extend and consolidate Delhi’s surveillance, power, and hegemony into India’s periphery, not unlike the way the colonial British used railroads, telegraphs, and other infrastructure to consolidate their power and subdue resistance in the subcontinent. Thus, the BRO can be seen as an instrument of internal colonialism. Tourists undoubtedly benefit from BRO engineering, which opens up previously inaccessible places in areas of great interest to tourists. In turn, tourists should be mindful that they are beneficiaries of power-laden apparatuses and that just because a road goes somewhere, people who live there are not necessarily going to be welcoming of outsiders.

Some argue that the benefits of Ladakh’s newfound connectivity to the rest of India flow more in one direction than the other. That is, they are better at enabling outsiders to enter and take advantage of Ladakh than they are at enabling Ladakhis to leave Ladakh and take advantage of opportunities elsewhere in India. The benefits that connectivity has brought to “outsiders” can be seen in the segmentation of the informal tourism economy in Leh. On the plus side, Rizvi’s (1996, 193) research revealed that two-thirds of the guesthouses in Leh were owned by local Ladakhi families and that the cost of entry to the tourism market was low. The other third of the hotels, however, were larger in scale than family guesthouses, and owned by non-Ladakhis. Nearly all of Leh’s hundreds of travel agencies and tourist shops, too, are run by outsiders, according to Michaud (1991, 613), who conducted ethnographic research on the relationship between the formal and informal tourism sectors in Leh. These outsiders, he found, typically belong to large family networks that manage businesses across India in popular tourist destinations (ibid, 614). This could help to explain why the menus of backpacker restaurants often seem so similar across India. One Ladakhi who fixes local food for guests at his guesthouse explained to me that the local tourism authorities actually distribute menu guidelines to all the restaurants in town, mandating that they serve specific and multiple cuisines (Indian, Italian, Chinese, etc) because “that’s what they think tourists want.”

Goering (1990, 25) posits that independent tourists and backpackers often assume that by staying away from obviously large-scale tourism companies and package tours, their consumption benefits local economies and livelihoods. But tourists’ understanding of “local economies” is constrained by language barriers, time, and cultural bias (ibid). The finer details of
the intra-national differences in class and race that shape the political economy of tourism likely elude the average tourist. Many of the businesspeople who receive the bulk of backpackers’ money, such as travel agents, are successful entrepreneurs. For every successful tourism entrepreneur, however, there are a dozen people struggling to survive in the informal tourism sector. These are the part-time guides, rickshaw drivers, and vendors who are pitted against their friends and neighbors in an increasingly competitive tourism market. Most struggle to make ends meet and occupy marginal positions in their societies. Because they are not licensed and do not pay taxes, they are ineligible for government subsidies and legal protection, and vulnerable to extortion (Michaud 1991, 606).

In a tourist landscape like Leh, tourists have a great deal of choice in their consumption habits and thus a great deal of agency in shaping the local economy and environment. Goering (1990, 21) alleges that one manifestation of this agency is that tourist demand exerts inflationary pressure on the price of staple goods, making them less affordable for locals. To make choices wisely, tourists must possess a high level of information and interest. Tourism sector providers rely on the fact that most tourists probably won’t seek out such information, and will instead base their decisions on visual cues placed in the landscape such as signs and advertisements that induce tourists to consume impulse items. This is why the consumer landscape of Leh is on its way to emulating the consumer landscape described in Chapter 5 in Dharamsala. An increasingly wide array of consumer goods can be found in Leh (See Figure 6.3). Tourists may not come to Leh thinking that they will find, or need, imported processed foods like Pringles and Fruit Loops, but when they see them for sale, they figure “why not?” They probably do not consider the hundreds of kilometers that those products had to be trucked in over the mountains, or the diesel used to do so, or the effect that this might have on local production and markets. It is easy for tourists to disassociate supply from demand, not realizing that the available of such products is a direct response to the latent demand catalyzed by their presence.

Dawa (1997, 378) proposes a solution to what she sees as the problem of growing concentration of tourism in central Leh. It is to encourage the spatial dispersion of tourism from the old town center into the surrounding villages, where, she argues, tourism has the potential to be more “eco-friendly” (ibid). I believe her reasoning lies on questionable grounds. Density or concentration of tourism is not necessarily a bad thing. If there is a desire to limit the effects of
tourism from spreading everywhere, concentration can be a means of containing those effects within a designated area. Her proposed solution accomplishes the exact opposite. It means that the spatial impact of tourism, while perhaps less densely concentrated, inhabits a larger area. In this case of Leh, Dawa’s projections have come true. Leh’s agricultural hinterland has been functionally and spatially colonized by tourism. There are few buildings left in the fields surrounding Leh that have not been converted into guesthouses. The roads that radiate from central Leh are lined with tourist services and businesses. This exodus of tourists to peripheral locations somewhat mirrors the trends described in Chapters 4 and 5 wherein backpackers relocate from the initial tourist settlement to bucolic enclaves a few kilometers away. Given, however, that Ladakh’s physical geography poses more spatial constraints on potential locations for tourism dispersion, the pattern in Leh looks slightly different. Rather than establishing a spatially distinct enclave separated from the main town, backpackers in Leh have simply migrated outward wherever possible (largely to the north and west) in a pattern not unlike suburban sprawl (see Figure 6.4).
As Rizvi notes, there is risk in this trend. Ladakh’s near absence of precipitation means arable land is scarce and dependent on irrigation from glacial melt. Leh is ideally situated in a valley to harness such a water source, but dispersion of tourism into Leh’s hinterland threatens to replace this prime agricultural land with a non-productive form of land use (Rizvi 1996, 195). Rizvi’s concern is tempered, however, by the fact that guesthouse proprietors are not rushing to pave over every their fields. While it is true that tourism is displacing agriculture as a main source of income, most of the farmouses-cum-guesthouses in Leh’s rural periphery have retained their gardens, fields, and trees because they know that it is precisely these features—which create a “quiet, clean and lush green environment”—that attract tourists.
The “lush green environment” quote comes from a large billboard posted at the edge of Leh’s urban center (see Figure 6.5). It appears to have been purchased by a consortium of guesthouses located in Leh’s rural periphery, or, what the billboard refers to as “Leh Park” (sounding a bit like a suburban development in the United States). The billboard’s map is geographically informative, showing tourists a whole new area full of “rural character” and quiet guesthouses of whose existence they might not have otherwise known. For those who may be drawn to the activity and consumer landscape of the main bazaar, the billboard promises to let them have it both ways. “Leh Park” is “within walking distance of the main bazaar,” yet, should tourists desire rest and respite, they can retreat to their serene guesthouse away from the “hustle and bustle of downtown Leh.”

![Figure 6.5 “Leh Park” billboard encouraging rural dispersion](image)

*The trekking industry: Pursuing the “frontier”*

Another form of spatial dispersion of tourism can be found in Ladakh’s trekking industry. Ladakh’s trekking networks use Leh as an administrative and service hub but extend far beyond that city into the high mountains and secluded valleys of the district. Trekking is an altogether
more serious business than backpacking, representing the most extreme form of “off the beaten path” travel available. Treks are overnight hiking expeditions in backcountry areas lacking roads and generally lacking most other visible signs of development (although they can share paths with remote, roadless villages). Trekking is available for different skill levels and lengths of time. Long-term travelers and backpackers who travel to Ladakh often include a trek on their itineraries, but they tend more towards the casual end of the spectrum. The most serious trekkers, whose ranks also include mountaineers, will often fly into Leh for two weeks for the specific purpose of trekking. Seeing as the most intensive treks are also the most expensive, these people tend to be older than the typical backpackers and in the midst of professional careers.

Although India in general is an inexpensive country for foreign tourists, trekking is one of the most expensive activities tourists can engage in, with fees often running $50-100 a day, or more than the average Indian earns in a month. Organized treks ironically have much in common with the “package tours” that independent tourists so famously disdain, in that they involve an up-front fee to a trekking agent who in turn makes all the travel arrangements. A typical all-inclusive trekking package includes pre-trip organization, permits, equipment, maps, guide, food, cook, and porters. Trekking in India involves much higher levels of human capital than it does in Western countries. Backcountry hikers in Europe and North America do not typically hire guides, cooks, and porters because the labor costs would be prohibitively expensive. In India, however, labor is cheap and easily exploited.

The modern-day labor-intensive trekking industry in India has parallels with colonial travel in India. No British person traveled in India without the accompaniment of several “traveling servants.” In addition to the normal functions that servants performed, traveling servants cared for travelers’ extensive wardrobes, made hotel arrangements, set up camp when traveling in rural areas, and acted as translators and guides (Murray 1894, xxi). Murray’s 1894 guidebook to India provided tips on hiring traveling servants such as: “up-country servants are often cheaper and more reliable than those to be met with on the coast, but their knowledge of English is not generally very good” and “it may be added servants should be quietly kept in their proper place” (ibid). Coolies, or porters, were a step below servants. Their job was to carry travelers’ luggage (and sometimes, even the travelers themselves!) (Murray 1919, xxvi). Even as late as 1965, the Murray guidebook still recommended traveling servants “for those [tourists] who travel off the beaten track” because “such a servant is necessary to wait on his master in un-
staffed rest-houses” (Murray 1965, xii). Colonial nostalgia is still alive in the trekking industry today. Advertising and marketing for travel and trekking agencies in Leh is rife with language invoking colonial discourses of exploration of “exotic lands” and “frontiers” (see Figure 6.6). But there are no real “frontiers” left to “discover.” The notion of the frontier is merely symbolic, an image that trekking agencies use because they think it projects an aura that appeals to tourists. Organized treks follow established routes that have been followed many times. Some may be more remote and less traveled than others, but nowhere in Ladakh can tourists, or even trekkers, go and claim to be “the first white person there.”

![Figure 6.6 Trekking agency signs in Leh](image)

Portering is a thankless and dangerous profession. Serious mountaineering expeditions require several porters for every climber, and every expedition carries risk of death. For porters who make a career out of these expeditions that risk is magnified greatly. Fortunately for the young Ladakhi men attracted to portering and guiding as sources of income, most trekking in Ladakh is more focused on hikes through valleys and over mountain passes to see remote villages than it is with climbing dangerous mountains. In the best of situations, locally run trekking agencies emphasize local knowledge and local culture and the guides serve a double role as educators for interested trekkers. But as mentioned earlier in Michaud’s (1991, 613)

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36 On Mount Everest, one of the more extreme examples of a mountaineering destination, one porter dies for every six climbers (Herring 1991, 21). Fortunately, most trekking in Ladakh
37 Michael Palin, who visited both Ladakh and Everest in his BBC series Himalaya, compared trekking in the former favorably to mountain-climbing in the latter, noting that climbing the highest peaks just for the heck of it isn’t something locals do on a regular basis: “The Himalayan peaks are seen by the people who live among them as awful places, abodes of jealous gods and…I have the feeling they’re right. What do we know, we who romanticize them? We who fly in and use them to prove something to ourselves, to plant our flags, talk of ‘conquest’, and then go home.” (Palin 2004, 266)
research, the vast majority of trekking agencies are not locally owned. They employ local labor, but that labor is paid only a fraction of the substantial fees the agencies extract from tourists. Sandhu (1998, 67) has observed another threat to guiding as a local livelihood. He notes that tourists’ reliance on hired guides is decreasing as better quality trekking maps are published. The human capital that tourists once relied on in the form of guides with local knowledge to gain their geographic bearings is being dispossessed by foreign human capital in the form of cartographers, who are largely from Germany, Switzerland, and Austria.

Further frontiers: The case of Spiti

Spiti is one of the two valleys that comprise the furthest north and most remote administrative district in Himachal Pradesh. Spiti shares much in common with Ladakh. It, too, is tucked behind the Himalayan rain shadow, has an average elevation of over 10,000 feet, and is home to people who are ethnically and religiously more Tibetan than South Asian. Like Ladakh, Spiti was also declared off-limits to foreign tourists after Indian independence because it shares a sensitive border with China. Lacking transportation linkages and closed off by snow-covered mountain passes for most of the year, Spiti was even more remote than Ladakh, even to Indian citizens (who were not subject to the same restrictions as foreigners). Captain Padam Singh of the Indian army conducted maneuvers there in 1963 and later recalled that Spiti was “the most godawful place…we dragged ourselves over some of the worst passes…with no proper maps…for nothing, absolutely nothing. Just empty valleys and villages full of simple people” (Hardy 1995, 16). Since Captain Singh’s visit, though, Spiti has seen significant modernization efforts and investment from the state. Between 1973 and 1994, for instance, Spiti was fully electrified, and new road construction connected 35% of the villages and 60% of the population (Verma 1997, 151-154).

In 1992, the longstanding travel ban was lifted. As one of the most recently opened places in India, Spiti provides an interesting case study when compared with Ladakh, which was opened two decades earlier. Connecting Horizons, a travel agency specializing in eco-tourism, capitalizes on this point of comparison on its website when it pronounces that “unlike Ladakh, where uncontrolled tourism has disturbed the delicate ecological balance and brought drastic socio-cultural changes, Lahaul-Spiti has yet to face the full force of tourism” (Connecting
Horizons 2007). The fact that Spiti’s exposure to tourism can be pinpointed precisely on a chronological scale relative to other places has led observers to attempt to extrapolate its rank vis-à-vis other places to other, less precise scales such as level of development, level of modernity, or level of impact from tourism. Since Spiti has been open to foreign tourists for 18 years less than Ladakh has, and 30 years less than places like Shimla, Manali, and Dharamsala have been exposed to large tides of foreign tourists, the assumption is that its lesser time exposure to tourism will result in lesser levels of development and lesser tourism impacts. The truly ambitious observer might even attempt to find indicators to measure such changes, and then use the discrete time period in question to infer a rate of change.

I, however, will make no such attempt. While certain indicators such as population counts, number of electrified villages, or kilometers of paved road are straightforward enough, I do not believe it is possible to amalgamate them into any single quantitative measure of “development.” Nor do I believe that such a measure is desirable, for it would only serve to reinforce hierarchical power relations and uneven geographies. Instead, I rely on qualitative observations and the written record to describe some of the changes that have been wrought since Spiti opened up to tourists. One quantitative indicator that I will disclose without misgiving, however, is the numbers from the state tourism ministry (see Table 6.1).

Unfortunately, these numbers are imperfect. The years 1994-2001 are missing, and the numbers for 1992-1993 seem suspect. Furthermore, these numbers encompass the entire district, including Lahaul Valley, and are not available for Spiti only (a rough estimate would be to simply halve these numbers). Regardless, they do reveal a clear trend that in the decade and a half since Spiti was opened, it has seen a fast and dramatic increase in the number of tourists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indians</th>
<th>Foreigners</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Foreign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1,244</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>1,567</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>28,175</td>
<td>20,130</td>
<td>48,305</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td>58,996</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>40,897</td>
<td>28,615</td>
<td>69,512</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>44,148</td>
<td>22,997</td>
<td>67,145</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>52,107</td>
<td>31,525</td>
<td>83,632</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1 Indian and foreign tourists in Lahaul and Spiti (HPTDC 2007)

Although domestic tourists outnumber foreign tourists in Lahaul and Spiti, they do so at a far lower rate than in any other district in the state. Whereas foreign tourists constitute less than
five percent of the total tourists in Shimla, Kullu, and Kangra districts, respectively, they comprise nearly forty percent in Lahaul and Spiti. To put the distinction between domestic and foreign tourists into a wider context, I calculated the percentage, out of all tourists who visit the state of Himachal Pradesh, who visit the district of Lahaul and Spiti (see Table 6.2). This measure of geographic specificity shows that while less than one percent of Indian tourists who visit Himachal Pradesh go to Lahaul and Spiti, the proportion of foreign tourists who do is far greater: between eleven and fourteen percent. The likely reason for this has been explained elsewhere in this paper, but to reiterate: for foreign tourists who have already traveled halfway around the world, the extra effort needed to reach a remote district like Lahaul and Spiti is marginally insignificant compared to the extra burden a similar itinerary would place on Indian tourists with shorter time windows. As a result, even though Indian tourists still outnumber foreign tourists in Spiti, the data warrant the impression that the valley is more influenced by, and geared towards, foreign tourists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>13.94</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>14.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>11.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>11.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2 Percentage of Himachal Pradesh tourists who visit Lahaul and Spiti (HPTDC)

The opening of Spiti in 1992 triggered a revival of interest in the “discovery” discourse as eager tourists and would-be explorers saw a unique opportunity to be among the first foreigners to set foot in this remote place (notwithstanding the colonial explorers who were there over a century earlier). One such person was travel writer Justine Hardy, who secured a book deal to write about her planned excursion into Spiti, which she claimed would be the first by any foreigner. Hardy spent months obtaining the permits and assurance from bureaucrats that she would, in fact, be the first foreigner in Spiti (Hardy 1995, 32). She and her team embarked on a trek across the Pin-Parvati Pass and entered Spiti “through the backdoor” and by foot on the day the district officially opened. At first, all seemed well as she walked through villages of Spitians quite surprised to see a foreigner in their midst. But she received a rude shock when she reached Kaza, the administrative hub of Spiti, and happened upon a group of twelve other foreign
tourists. She wrote, “it transpired that they were a group from a company who had sold a heavily overpriced package tour with the premise that these people would be the first foreign visitors into Spiti since time immemorial” (ibid, 124). Initially taken aback, Hardy was amused by the encounter, but the other tourists were not. It seems that “when they had signed their large cheques they had not expected to bump into other white faces” (ibid). They clearly placed great symbolic value (which they were willing to match with considerable financial value) on being the first to lay claim to the mantle of discovery. It appears, however, that it was the bureaucrats and travel agents who conspired to aid Hardy and her adversaries in their respective quests who had the last laugh, and who realized the “value” in allowing as many white people to think they were the “first” as possible.

As she spent more time in Spiti, Hardy realized that the place of her pre-trip geographic imagination owed more to the Shangri-La syndrome than reality. That is, she imagined Spiti to be more isolated and “untouched” than it actually turned out to be. It had not occurred to her that the pre-1992 travel ban, while effective at keeping foreigners out, did nothing to keep Spitians in. Spiti may have been among the more remote and least accessible parts of India, but Spitians with the means to do so were always free to come and go as they pleased.38 While foreign tourists were unable to spread their cultural influence in Spiti prior to 1992, outside cultural influences nevertheless had begun diffusing into Spiti well before the first foreigner arrived, thanks to flows of people, goods, and ideas between Spiti and the rest of India. This fact was driven home for Hardy when she when met a young girl in a small rural village in Spiti who spoke perfect English and who claimed to know “all about” the United States, where, it turns out, her brother attended university (Hardy 1995, 136).

Kapadia, a non-Spitian Indian citizen, visited Spiti multiple times after its opening up. Within just a few years, he observed, change was everywhere. The valley was crawling with foreign tourists, new guesthouses were being built, and prices were rising considerably (Kapadia 1996, 160). Surprisingly, Lonely Planet was somewhat slow to reflect the changes underway in Spiti. The first edition to have been written after Spiti was opened was published in 1996 and devoted a mere six-tenths of a page to Spiti, mainly describing the hub city of Kaza with its

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38 The average Spitian would be considered poor by Indian standards, but a number have benefited from the government’s affirmative action programs that reserve space in civil service and universities for people in the “scheduled castes” and “scheduled tribes.” Spitians, as an ethnic minority in India, are classified by the government in the latter of these two categories.
“several cheap lodges catering to travelers” (Finlay 1996, 303). By 1999, however, the Spiti page count had increased six fold (see Figure 2a, Appendix) and multiple destinations within the valley were described. Kaza had by now expanded to the point that it could be separated into an “old town” and a “new town” (Niven 1999, 336).

Tabo is a small village in Spiti that has seen a marked increase in tourism over the last decade. Its primary draw is a monastery boasting one of the oldest and best-preserved collections of Tibetan thangka paintings in the world and attracts art historians from around the world39. The monastery’s librarian is a woman of Belgian nationality who has lived in Tabo for many years and has seen it change with her own eyes. When the monastery opened a guesthouse within its walls in 1996 it was the only place to stay in town. That was the year the Dalai Lama visited, and ever since then the place has been on the map, with new guesthouses opening every year. The summer I visited (2007) was the busiest she had ever seen. It was also the year Tabo received its first “German bakery,” run by the younger brother of the proprietor of the popular bakery by the same name in Manali (a third brother from the same family runs the third “chain” in Kaza). The librarian constantly hears from tourists visiting Tabo for the first time how much they enjoy the town for its tranquility, which is bittersweet for her because, from her long-term perspective, Tabo loses some of the tranquility that she once knew with every passing year. Demonstrating the sway that guidebooks can hold over readers, she also laments the fact that Lonely Planet incorrectly printed that there is a thangka painting school in Tabo when no such school exists, or has ever existed. As the burden of turning away disappointed tourists falls on her, and she harbors a deserved grievance against Lonely Planet.

Sonam is the owner and manager of the guesthouse where I stayed in Tabo. He told me that all of the guesthouses in Tabo (with the exception of his and the monastery guesthouse) are run by ‘outsiders,’ entrepreneurs from Manali or as far away as Delhi. As per local regulation, ‘outsiders’ are not allowed to own property in Tabo, he explains. Instead, they rent property from local families and operate them as guesthouses. The local families do see profits from these rents, which have brought much newfound prosperity to the community. But Sonam worries that this is making his neighbors “lazy” and “dependent” and causing them to “forget their culture.” He decries the homogeneous style of the “outsider” guesthouses and explains that he was inspired to open his own guesthouse (in its first year of operation when I visited) in order to

39 Thumbing through the guestbook I saw numerous museum curators and doctoral students.
infuse local culture, knowledge, and food into Tabo’s tourism milieu. It is difficult, though, he explains, because he lacks the financial capital, or the access to bank loans, that the “outsiders” enjoy, and he cannot afford the same whistles and bells that they can, such as televisions and toilets with plumbing. He hopes, though, that his rustic and locally inspired offerings will appeal to enough visitors that his business model will succeed and other townspeople might emulate it.

Meanwhile, new destinations in Spiti continue to open up every year. The village of Mudh is not yet listed in *Lonely Planet*, but when I was in Spiti, it was the summer’s word-of-mouth hotspot. Previously accessible only by foot, a road was completed to Mudh in 2007, opening the door for tourists to arrive *en masse*. I was not able to visit Mudh myself, but I spoke to others who did, and they told me that the place is “already being overrun by tourists, mostly Israelis,” and that there are more tourists than the four guesthouses can handle. The addition of Mudh to the tourist map foreshadows the shape of developments to come. Mudh is in the Pin Valley, which is a side valley off the main Spiti Valley. Another popular tourist destination, Khibber, is in another side valley. The physical geography of Spiti-Kinnaur is such that there is only one possible route through the district. Side valleys are the only possible place for future tourism development to expand off of the main valley. A number of villages in other side valleys off the main valley have yet to be connected by roads, but the BRO has plans to rectify that, and once they do, tourists will not likely be far behind.

Approached from either Shimla or Manali, Spiti is part of a loop circuit (see Figure 6.7). This means that in any given stop along the circuit, there is likely to be a confluence of travelers coming from and heading in opposite directions. This provides fertile ground for the exchanging of information about the road behind and the road ahead, as parties headed in either direction question each other’s “expert” advice. In the village of Nako, near the southern end of Spiti, I was interrogated by a group of Israelis. They had a list of places, some of which I had just been through, and although they had the same guidebook I did, they wanted to verify what it said and get my personal recommendations: “How many guesthouses were there? How was the food? How “touristy” was it?” And, most importantly, “how was the view?” Tourism development in Spiti is clearly an ongoing process, and one that has by no means reached its peak. A key qualitative indicator I propose as a measure of any given place’s level of tourism development is whether Western-inspired “backpacker food” is available in its restaurants. This indicator is positive for every location I have described so far in this thesis and indeed for every location I
visited during the summer of 2007, with just one exception: Nako. A year or two later, that probably will have changed.

Resilience and mitigation of tourism’s impacts

Having described some of the impacts of tourism in Ladakh and Spiti, and the extent to which they are being magnified by the spatial and quantitative growth of tourism, it is important to stress that Ladakhis and Spitians are by no means passive victims in this process. Although observers both inside and outside these regions have raised alarm at the pace of change, these cultures have demonstrated a remarkable resilience. Despite forces conspiring to integrate them into a more interconnected world, they will always remain somewhat independent thanks to the physical, and psychological, distance ensured by their unique geographical setting. Strong undercurrents of cultural identity and tradition run through Ladakh and Spiti, often alongside
currents of change and modernization. When problems emerge that threaten Ladakhi ways of life, the will to confront those problems is often mustered. In one example, trekkers were found to be using fuel wood, water, food, and other scarce communal resources upon which Ladakhi villagers depended (Goering 1990, 22). But Ladakh has a long tradition of direct democracy, organized at the village level through councils of elders and citizen participation (Page 1993). In response to the trekker problem, villages took it upon themselves issue new rules restricting trekking agencies to designated campsites, and collecting fees from trekkers who used the village’s communal resources (Goering 1990, 26).

There are some voices, even within the tourism industry itself, calling for increased restrictions on tourism access, following the model of Bhutan, which maintains an annual quota of foreign tourists and levies steep user fees (Connecting Horizons 2007). Given the recent history of Ladakh and Spiti, however, the government of India seems to be moving in the opposite direction, increasing accessibility for tourists rather than limiting it. With this in mind, NGOs such as the Helena Norberg-Hodge’s International Society for Ecology and Culture (ISEC) have stepped in to ensure that, if tourism is going to be allowed to expand indefinitely, it at least transpires in a way that is as least disruptive to local societies and as environmentally sustainable as possible. Among its many programs, ISEC runs a multi-purpose resource center in Leh known as the Women’s Alliance of Ladakh (WAoL). The WAoL creates space for Ladakhi women to socialize, learn, and pursue livelihoods. Women (and men) from the community sell local foods, handicrafts, and clothes in the shop. Prices are fixed so that the farmers and craftsmen are assured fair compensation for their labor, without the downward pressure exerted by bargaining and competition in the bazaar.

The WAoL is also a resource center for tourists. Since 1993, it has received generous attention in Lonely Planet (as well as every other guidebook), often the focus of one of the book’s “special features,” guaranteeing that it is on the mental radar of nearly every foreign tourist who arrives in Leh. The WAoL conducts daily film viewings of Norberg-Hodge’s documentary Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh as well as other documentaries that question the dominant neoliberal development paradigm. Moreover, it arms tourists with the information and tools they need to keep their social and environmental impacts positive. It publishes a “Mindful Travel Guide” (see Figure 6.8) that includes a checklist of guesthouses and hotels in Leh that clearly and concisely shows tourists which establishments offer different eco-
friendly services. The WAoL also publishes a companion “Eco Map” of Leh (see Figure 6.9) showing tourists where they can find sustainable goods and services such as water refill stations (eliminating the need to purchase plastic bottles of water), local food restaurants, eco-friendly laundry, and local crafts and foods.

The center holds participatory workshops with Ladakhi guesthouse proprietors to promote eco-friendly knowledge and technologies such as solar greenhouses, solar cookers, solar water heating, and solar space-heaters (see Figures 6.10 and 6.11) (Rizvi 1996, 176). It is important to note, however, that, unlike many developmental NGOs that dispense knowledge and technology in a paternalistic, top-down way, the WAoL operates with a radically different worldview. Rather than imposing techniques dreamt up by Western technocrats and environmentalists, it sees its mission as promoting indigenous knowledge and technology. Over centuries, Ladakhis have fine-tuned practices that are sustainable and in sync with their fragile environment (Page 1993). From the perspective of the WAoL, Ladakhis do not need new technologies. They simply need to keep using their old ones. This is not an easy task, however, when the dominant, state-led development discourse and culture of modernization argue the opposite. The WAoL’s mission is to challenge those discourses.
Figure 6.9 “Eco Map” of Leh (Women’s Alliance of Ladakh)

Figures 6.10 and 6.11 Solar water heater and composting toilet in Leh
To accomplish this challenge, Norberg-Hodge is a strong advocate for tourists’ agency. Tourists do have an impact on the communities where the travel. The important thing, she argues, is to make sure that impact is a good one rather than a bad one. In most tourist-host interactions, foreign tourists’ visible signs of wealth trigger amongst locals feelings of envy, deprivation, and a desire to share in the trappings of a modern consumer lifestyle (Page 1993). The objective, then, is to break down “the mystique of the tourist” in the Ladakhi mind’s eye, by bringing tourist and Ladakhi together in pursuit of common goals. When Ladakhis see that “tourists’ high standards of comfort can be met with local resources” (Goering 1990, 23) it reinvigorates their sense of self-worth and pride and lessens feelings of envy and deprivation. Rizvi (1996, 196) suggests that Norberg-Hodge’s efforts have achieved a remarkable level of success when she writes that “three decades into the tourism boom, Ladakhis have learned to temper their views of the West with more nuanced understanding of the pluses and minuses of Western style development” (ibid). She later concludes that:

Ladakhis are quite shrewd enough to realize that if the package on offer by the modern world is accepted lock, stock and barrel, along with its inevitable downside—the untrammeled consumerism, the commercialism, the aggressive economics that gives importance only to the profit motive, the crime, the pollution, the overcrowding, the urban sprawl, the uncontrolled proliferation of motor vehicles, the despoiling of the natural environment—then Ladakh will no more be Ladakh and the tourists will stop coming (Rizvi 1996, 200).

Ladakh and Spiti offer unique case studies in comparison to the previous three chapters because of the historical circumstances that kept them “closed” for periods of time, thus delaying their entry into the tourism market. They are also unique because of their physical geographic separation from the rest of India. Yet, despite their late start in tourism and their inaccessibility (or perhaps because of it) tourism development seems to be rolling

40 “Visible signs of wealth” need not be fancy clothes or jewelry. Indeed, most foreign tourists in India would not wear such items. For many Ladkhis, the very presence of foreigners in their land is a sign of their wealth.
41 This “tempered” and “nuanced” understanding is illustrated in another ISEC film titled Paradise with Side Effects (Schenk 2004). It follows a group of Ladakhi women who leave Ladakh for the first time and travel to London to see how life in Ladakh compares to life in the West. Instead of being dazzled by Western modernity, the women are confused and saddened by what they see: homeless people abandoned by their society, prostitution, crime, conspicuous consumption, and no visible signs of community. They come away feeling immensely proud to be Ladakhi and to live in a society where such horrors do not (yet?) exist.
along just as it is elsewhere in India. Referring back to Figure 6.1, we see that the years 2003-2007 saw the number of foreign tourists in Ladakh more than double, reaching a peak of 28,178. If this trend continues, the need for effective and proactive mitigation such as the outreach efforts of the Women’s Alliance of Ladakh will be more important than ever.
CHAPTER SEVEN: INTERVIEWS

Introduction to the interviews

The previous four chapters have presented as-seen evidence from four field sites/regions. This place-specific evidence has come from participant observation and interviews, both formal and informal, with backpackers as well as tourism sector hosts. The majority of the information gleaned from the formal interviews I conducted, however, has yet to find its way into this thesis. The goal of this chapter is to present many of the insights learned during the interviews that do not pertain specifically to any of the locations discussed in the last four chapters. The material in the chapter is not organized chronologically or geographically, but rather by broad themes, as seen in the three sub-sections which include spatialities, perceptions of development and change and differences between expectations and experiences, and identity and positionality. Although the interviews produced a wealth of information, not all of it was relevant to this thesis’ primary objectives and research questions. This chapter presents a careful selection of what I felt were the most pertinent, and insightful, quotes, as they relate to the theoretical concepts, empirical evidence, and spatial patterns that I have discussed throughout this thesis.

The goal of these interviews was to open a window into the more personal, ideographic, and internal aspects of the discourses, representations, and perceptions that inform the backpacker geographic imagination in ways that could not be accomplished by observation and textual research alone. Discourses, after all, are what is said and thought. Although my own voice is present in this chapter, I try to restrain it to the role of moderator and narrator, highlighting the connections and contradictions between my informants’ various ideas. For the most part, this chapter is an opportunity to let my informants’ voices speak for themselves. I will not recount here the procedural techniques used in these interviews, which are described in the Methodology section in Chapter One. But I will remind my reader that I conducted sixteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with foreign tourists during the summer of 2007, and that Table 1 in the Appendix lists my informants, their ages, nationalities, and the location of the interviews.
The concept of spatialities encompasses both the geographies, or physical locations and patterns, of tourist movements across space, and the deeper meaning and significance that those geographies entail. All tourists exhibit spatialities. For that matter, all people, everywhere, exhibit spatialities. But spatialities are shaped, and sometimes constrained, by various shades of power, agency, and rights. Tourists are amongst the most geographically mobile people on Earth, and therefore have great flexibility in their spatialities: in the places they go, why they go there, how they interact with those places, and what those places mean to them. The ways in which tourists construe and manage their own spatialities reveal something about their grasp of agency and control over their environments. My informants describe both external influences that shape their spatialities, such as guidebooks, infrastructure, geopolitics, and word of mouth, and internal influences such as their own desires, preconceptions, geographic imaginations, and social relations. These external and internal influences are not rigid and often overlap, producing rich, complex spatialities that manifest themselves in spatial patterns in the tourist landscape.

This section is also particularly attuned to the spatial discourses and language of backpacker geographies, with attention given to spatial enclaves, remoteness and accessibility, discovery, and what it means to be “off the beaten path.”

One of the most common external influences is the guidebook. Most backpackers carry one, and *Lonely Planet* is the most popular. Guidebooks, as has been the case as far back as the Murray guidebooks of the nineteenth century, describe far more places than any one tourist could visit, and thereby steer tourists into a spatial decision-making process wherein they must narrow their prospects. Nicole was so inspired by the quantity and diversity of places listed in her book that she tried to fit in as many as possible. She later admitted that this crammed itinerary meant that any appreciation she gained of the places was superficial at best. There is a sense among backpackers that guidebooks, when relied upon excessively, can be a “crutch” and detract from their valued sense of spontaneity. On his first trip to India, Erik noticed with some displeasure concentrations of copycat businesses clustered around anything listed in his *Lonely Planet*. That is why, on his second trip to India, he used the less popular *Footprint* guidebook instead, and was happy to find less concentrated tourism in the places it listed.
Most of my informants are not ashamed to use *Lonely Planet*, but some are careful to qualify their use with conditionalities. Mary uses hers as a tool to triangulate when she arrives in a new destination. Based on the clustering of icons in her guidebook’s maps, she determines which neighborhoods are popular and contain the amenities she desires. Once there, however, she does not rely on the guidebook for specific hotel recommendations, noting that the ones listed in the book tend to charge inflated rates. Charlotte and John, too, use their guidebook to narrow their focus from the scale of entire cities to the smaller scale of specific neighborhoods. Upon arrival, they put their books aside and explore with their own eyes and feet. Seth explains that he does not specifically avoid hotels listed in his guidebook, but that neither does he seek them out.

Word of mouth is another significant external influence on backpacker spatialities. It is conveyed both through conventional face-to-face contact on the trail, and through new mediums such as internet forums. Word of mouth is particularly important in helping backpackers determine the safety of travel in highly volatile regions where conditions can change rapidly. During the summer of 2007, for instance, Nicole decided that she would not travel to Kashmir, the state neighboring Himachal Pradesh and the site of ongoing violence between Indians, Pakistanis, and Kashmiri separatists. Even though the region seemed less turbulent than in recent years, she could not rationalize putting herself at risk when there were so many other, more reliably safe places to which she could travel. On the other hand, one young man I spoke to nonchalantly cited the dangerous aura of Kashmir as precisely the reason he would travel there. The built-in danger factor appealed to his sense of adventure, and, one might presume, his desire to accumulate cultural capital by boasting of his travel plans to other backpackers.

Tourism sector hosts, who include travel agents, touts, unofficial guides, rickshaw drivers, and merchants, are another external force influencing backpacker spatialities. For many, however, they are an unwelcome influence. Mary complains that “They want to tour you. They want to lead you. They don’t let you just be alone.” For Mary, being solicited by Indians eager to guide sell her their services is constricting and unsettling. Her personal definition of “off the beaten path” has less to do with the presence of other tourists than with the way she is treated by tourist sector hosts: “It could be anywhere. It could even be a touristy place. Just as long as I’m left alone.” Mary’s resentment of tourist sector hosts is mirrored by a similar feeling of resentment that tourism sector hosts reserve specifically for tourists like Mary. Butcher (2003,
49) quotes an Indonesian tour guide who explains why he prefers package tourists to backpackers: “With the tourists everything is organized, so they don’t destroy as much. I prefer tourists. The backpackers are uncontrolled—they don’t want to go to the places already prepared for them, they want to go to other places and then spoil them—and they don’t spend any money.” From his perspective, backpackers who insist on controlling their own spatialities pose a risk to his livelihood and his environment.

Backpackers mostly prefer to retain agency over their own spatialities, relying on internal forces such as personal instincts, whims, and desires. The flexible itinerary is central to backpacker identity. Sometimes this flexibility is taken to an extreme. When trying to decide whether to travel to Bangalore or Mysore, Seth literally flipped a coin. In his case, he had no great personal desire to go to one place over the other, but rather than trust the decision to the advice of other backpackers, or a travel agent, he let the coin decide for him. His desire to go it alone is echoed in Peter’s denunciation of the value of word of mouth. Backpackers kept telling him to “skip” the Taj Mahal but he went anyway and loved it. This led him to realize that every person responds to places differently and that any place recommendations people dispense, whether positive or negative, should be taken with a grain of salt.

The former rules restricting foreign tourists’ access to Ladakh and Spiti, as discussed in depth in Chapter Six, are one of the most blatant examples of external forces that limit tourist spatialities. In my interviews, I tried to ferret out how my informants felt about restrictions such as these (which are still in place in much of India’s northeast frontier states). Does the end justify the means (i.e. do the restrictions accomplish their stated goal, and is it a worthy goal)? Or are they needless and unjust infringements upon freedom of mobility? The responses to this question illuminate backpackers’ perceptions of their “rights” and sense of entitlement vis-à-vis their acknowledgement of Indian sovereignty. The responses ranged widely. On one end of the spectrum, John framed his answer in terms of universal rights, claiming, “everyone should be able to travel everywhere.” Without further contextualization, one might infer from John’s proclamation a hint of chauvinism. Everyone should be able to travel everywhere, he stated, but the political reality is that everyone cannot. Most Indians, for instance, have no political or economic means to travel to John’s country as tourists because his country (the United States) is very selective about who receives visas. John’s universal declaration of mobility rights
disproportionately benefits foreigners over Indians because they are best poised to take advantage of increased mobility, while most people are not.

Contrasting with John’s argument, however, most of my informants see it as a matter of India’s sovereign rights as a nation state to do what it thinks is in its best interest. They argue that the Indian government has every right to designate certain areas off-limits to foreign tourists, or to charge steep entry fees for the right of access. Elana describes a trekking district in Nepal where the prohibitive cost of entry means that “not every backpacker is going there, it’s really closed, and all the culture is preserved. The area stays uncommercial and untouristic. If you go there you stay in people’s houses. There are no hotels or cafés.” Elana thinks this model makes sense for the Nepalis who live in the district because they are able to earn a livelihood from tourism while at the same time minimizing and controlling its impacts. It should be noted, however, that while her rationale is well intentioned, it could be connected to questionable and Orientalist notions of “purity” which construct people and places as “primitive” and in need of “protection.” Elana regrets that while this pricing scheme works well for the largely European clientele, she, a working-class Israeli, is priced out of the market. My question of whether this is “fair” elicits her relativist response that “This is life. I am able to come here because I have more money than the people here…. This is a privilege for me to come to this place. They don’t have to allow me to enter.” Elana’s denouement shows that even when official entrance fees are not levied, one’s mobility is still determined by one’s relative class position.

Practically all of my informants have opinions on the backpacker enclaves that dot the landscape of tourism in India because they all have experienced these enclaves at one point or another, and for many they are a mixed blessing. Few are entirely critical of enclaves. Peter, however, is visibly embarrassed. He admits that he has been “hanging out in the [Manali] backpacker scene for the last three weeks,” and says this is “terrible.” But he also justifies his indulgence as a much-needed change of pace following a grueling travel schedule in South India where backpacker enclaves on the scale of the one in Manali are less common. Mary’s travel narrative can be described as oscillating between the intensity of heterogeneous space and the sheltered nature of enclavic space. She spends most of the time in the former, but admits that every now and then she needs “India-free days” when she can “just sit in a rooftop restaurant in my hotel, read a book, and pretend that I’m not in India.”
My informants responded defensively to the idea that there is anything colonial or exploitative about enclaves, with their high concentrations of white people and spaces carved out of local communities as pleasure zones for backpackers. Erik argues that enclaves are not the creation of backpackers but the product of supply and demand and Indian entrepreneurial initiative. Nicole admits to feeling “a bit uncomfortable with the whole white-people-banding-together thing.” She denies, however, that the tendency of white backpackers to concentrate amongst themselves is evidence of racism or prejudice against Indians as it was with British settler enclaves in colonial India. Her explanation is, “you’re another person who’s far from home and you might both be feeling homesick so there’s that kind of bond between you.” Daniel also speaks of the tendency for backpackers to congregate amongst themselves, suggesting that “You need to find a balance. It’s like you try to get away from tourists, and then you end up away from tourists, and then there’s no tourists…which is kind of all right, but then you realize that with no tourists you don’t have a lot to do because, you know, you can hang out with Indian people but it gets a bit samey, because you don’t have a lot in common.”

The phrase “off the beaten path” is engrained in backpacker discourse, and might as well be the motto of guidebooks like *Lonely Planet*. To my surprise, my informants invoked the concept far less frequently than I had expected, and that when they did, it was not always in a positive light. Furthermore, different informants define it in different ways. Seth recounted a twenty hour bus ride through “all sorts of tiny villages” and how when he “stopped in one for a chai it was amazing to be there [amongst Indians] who had never seen someone with blonde hair before.” He then acknowledges, however, that such stories are the stuff of backpacker myth and proudly proclaims after describing backpackers who compete to see who get furthest off the beaten path “but I’m not into that.” Jen’s initial definition seems to match Seth’s: “Well first thing is, you go to a place and there’s no palefaces around.” Jen then further qualifies her definition: “Then, if you really want to get off the beaten path, there’s no hotel in town.” But she, too, expresses “no burning desire to do that. I don’t need to get off the beaten path.” She then suggests that “there’s a reason why people like to go to places [that are “on the beaten path”]. So I don’t have a problem going to places that other people have seen and enjoyed. Sure, it’s nice to go to places with fewer tourists. But I don’t have to be the only one.” Erik’s lack of desire to get off the beaten path, on the other hand, is more pragmatic. “It’s just much harder,” he explains. “It’s easier to buy a book and read about it.” Josh and Rachel recognize that going off the beaten
path is self-defeating because as more and more tourists do the same thing, places that were once “off” the beaten path join it. Their solution: “You just try to stay one step ahead of the game. You try to get there a little bit earlier.” But they also acknowledge that there are different gradations of what constitutes this beaten path, or main trail. Some places, they explain, may be on a main trail of sorts, but they “aren’t on the main main trail.”

When Frank was a young man in the 1970s, he traveled the world in search of “paradise” which he admits was “a sort of movie paradise, Robinson Crusoe-like tropical islands.” But his youthful exuberance and definition of paradise mellowed with age: “as I got older I realized that paradise is the relationship between you and your environment.” Now, Frank defines “off the beaten path” rather narrowly as places that are only accessible by foot. Now a middle-aged man, he no longer has the desire to seek out such places. Ironically, Frank has taken up semi-permanent residents for four months of the year in the village of Tabo in Spiti, one of the most remote valleys in Himachal Pradesh. Compared to other fifty-seven-year old American men, I would given Frank credit for being quite “off the beaten path,” but the way he sees it, “as long as he has access to a bus and a bed, he’s at home.” As for tourists whose goal is to discover those true off the beaten path places, Frank spares no contempt: “the whole concept of Westerners discovering a place is cultural chauvinism to me.” He explains that discovery needs to be thought of in more personal terms than in terms of conquering space: “You’re discovering your own self when you go to these places more than you’re discovering anything external.”

Collin’s reluctance to buy into the “off the beaten path” discourse stems from his concern over the impact that increasing tourism can have on traditional communities that have not yet been exposed to tourism and the other influences it brings:

I’m not sure how good it is to visit off the beaten path places, and bring this [Western] culture to it, where people are dependent on the travelers. It would be a wonderful experience for the traveler, and also, initially, I think, for the people in the village. Everyone likes to know a little more about the world that they live in. But once one tourist goes there, more inevitably go, and guesthouses open, and I don’t know if it’s such a great thing, at all, for villages to be dependent on tourism. If there’s some scare, and the tourists stop coming, that would be the end of that village.

Collin’s words neatly paraphrase sentiments that pervade many of the articles cited in my literature review. Charlotte’s response falls into a different category. From her viewpoint, some places are best left “off the beaten path” for a good reason: “You get there, and you’re like ‘Why? Why am I here?’ …They’re kind of devoid of anything.” What she means is that they are
devoid of anything of interest to tourists. This is, of course, a highly subjective determination, but she is probably correct in that there are indeed some places in India that would be of little interest to even the most “everyday life”-attuned tourist.

Charlotte then makes the astute observation that one can be in any city in India and “all you have to do is walk fifty meters in the wrong direction and you’re not with the tourists anymore.” In other words, rather than expending their time and energy searching for “off the beaten path” places in inaccessible and remote locations, tourists should stop and take a look around them, because, more than likely, there are “off the beaten path” places right under their noses. David and Chloe corroborate this notion with a glowing review of their stay in New Delhi’s Tibetan quarter, which receives a mere passing mention in the pages of *Lonely Planet*. Whereas most backpackers stay in the busy main bazaar of Paharganj, David and Chloe enjoyed the quiet, close-knit Tibetan quarter, where, despite being in the middle of the largest city in India, they did not see any other foreigners.

*Development and change: Contrasts between preconceptions and actual experiences*

Before tourists ever step foot in India, they are bombarded with imagery, signs, and media that work to collectively and discursively construct representations of place that in turn inform their preconceptions and geographical imaginations. As I talked to my informants I tried to extricate the representations of India that informed their consciousness as they related, in particular, to notions of colonialism, development, and modernity. I then prompted my informants to confront these representations and their preconceptions with the experiences and images they had gained through the actual practice of travel, to see where they overlapped and where they diverged. This section is organized into four subsections. First, I discuss the role (or lack thereof) of colonialism and/or neocolonialism in backpacker experience and discourse. Second, I shed light on contested discourses of change and development and examine the problematic role that tourism plays in these dynamics. Stemming from questions of development, I describe the diverging preferences of tourists for rural versus urban, and pre-modern versus modern, spaces. Finally, this leads into a broader discussion of the nature of “Third World” place representations and expectations and how actual experiences and observations challenge and/or reinforce those expectations.
For the most part, my informants had only vague notions of the history of colonialism in India. Even Nicole and Clara, who planned to matriculate at Oxford after their gap year, admitted that colonialism was “not something that’s taught that often” in Britain. They suggest that Britain may be embarrassed by its colonial history and that this might explain its absence from curricula as well as popular discourse. When pressed, they acknowledge that there might be some “slight similarities” between historical colonialism and present day relationships between the British and India, but they assure me that they, and, in their opinion, most other tourists as well, try hard not to replicate “something like that.” Peter, on the other hand, who is also fresh from high school in Britain, jokes that traveling to India “is like bringing the empire back.” He then propounds that the racialized power differentials of Britain’s historical relationship with India are negligible in this day and age when compared to the persistence of caste hierarchies amongst Indians and the uneven terrain of power that they connote. Emily has difficulty seeing how tourism could possibly be neocolonial, because “nothing is forced on the local people. They can choose.” She readily acknowledges that tourism can be exploitative, but when she pictures this exploitation, she envisions not backpackers but “rich tourists being carted around, living like kings.”

Charlotte does see evidence of lingering colonial attitudes and expectations of Indian servility in the rudeness with which tourist sector hosts are often treated by backpackers: “It’s this attitude of ‘come come,’ this disregard of local people. It’s ‘you don’t need to say thank you,’ ‘you don’t need to tip,’ ‘you don’t need to move your feet when the sweeper comes around on the train.’” John, a post-doctoral anthropologist, warns that even if my younger and less historically-minded informants had some cursory knowledge of colonial history, it would do “nothing to keep it from reoccurring in a ‘neo’ form” because neocolonialism is “constantly going on, at all levels, and it’s not related to national boundaries anymore. It’s about globalization, and there’s nothing you can do to stop it.”

The sense of inevitability that John invokes is echoed in many of my informants’ discussions of the changes they see taking place as India develops and modernizes. Most young backpackers today have some familiarity with the hippies who came to India in the 1960s, and they are generally looked upon with admiration. As Seth ruminates, “I think in the sixties it must have been quite an extreme thing to do, to come to India, ‘cos there weren’t all these facilities and guesthouses everywhere.” That earlier era of tourism is romanticized, especially when it is imagined in contrast to what backpackers like Will decry about tourism in India today: “It’s
standardized and commercialized. There’s nothing unique in any of these places. Every restaurant has the exact same menu.” Frank, however, has been traveling in Asia since the 1970s and can speak of the hippie generation from experience. Attempting to debunk what he sees as the myths of that generation, he argues that today’s backpackers are actually “more mature” and that the hippies were often more interested in “dope-driven spirituality” than anything else.

Charlotte’s greatest disappointment was to find that India is being shaped by the same forces that are shaping every other place on Earth: “I was already frustrated by this whole global economic thing and now I come over here and here it is. I was already flustered by the middle-class, and then I come here and all the middle-class of India’s on vacation. I was hoping India was less destroyed by global modernity.” I asked Charlotte to clarify what she meant when she said that Indian culture is being “destroyed by global modernity” and if this meant she was hoping to see India frozen in time in a less developed state. She responded, “it’s not so much about developed and undeveloped. It’s not like ‘oh, it’s so exotic. I like seeing poor people.’ I just wanted to see Indian culture.” In her response, she carefully extricated herself from the Orientalist tourist gaze, but her logic still suggests that Indian “culture” somehow exists in “pure” form, unadulterated by middle-class vacations and modernity.

Jen lived and volunteered in a small village in India for one year before traveling in India. She feels protective of this village and, like Charlotte, expresses frustration with the forces that are causing it to change: “It bothers me that there are these indigenous cultures all around the world, and eventually they’ll all become modernized. I think it’s unfortunate because their culture is beautiful and amazing the way it is.” She bemoans the fact that students from the village who were sent to university on scholarship returned with their degrees only to lecture their elders that their traditional beliefs were “phony.” But she also recognizes that her feelings stem from her “privileged point of view” and acknowledges that if the village wants to modernize she has no right to stand in its way.

When my informants begin talking about the development and modernization that they witness as tourists in India, I pose to them a question: What is the root of these changes, and who bears the great responsibility for them: tourist or locals? I do not personally believe there is any easy or definitive answer to this question. My objective is merely to force my informants to think deeply. Ricardo’s elegant response is as follows:
We are the cancer: the tourists, not the locals. The locals are just trying to survive. I don’t blame them for that. We bring the money, and we bring the necessities. We want the internet here. If people start coming, they’re going to ask for the internet, the laundry, the ATM, the bank, the café, the lounge, the cinema, and the TV. That is not their fault. They are just giving us what we want because they want us to come here.

Ricardo also recognizes, however, that indigenous development will occur whether tourists are present or not. Tourism, he argues, only serves as a catalyst to speed up the process of development. While Ricardo expresses his preference for places with small scale tourism development and defends his right to “dislike a place” if it is “too touristed,” he also acknowledges that when he decides he dislikes a place, it is his personal problem and not a problem of the place itself: “They have the right to do what they want. I cannot say ‘oh these people, they’re destroying this place.’ That’s not fair.”

Not all of my informants, however, seek an imagined pre-modern India or are convinced that development and change is a bad thing. Elana remarks with exasperation that “everyone complains about how things have changed, how it’s not like it used to be…[but] I decided that there is no point in saying that, because what was in the past is in the past, and now what there is, is what there is… [and] you just need to enjoy what India has to offer now.” Frank is a staunch defender of the right of local communities to develop on their own terms. He argues that “wherever a culture has been protected [by outsiders who think they know what’s best], it has been destroyed. It’s Western pseudo-superiority at its worst.” He maintains that “the exciting cultures are the dynamic ones.” John echoes this view by enthusiastically describing the hybridization he sees in India, where traditional elements exist side-by-side with modern, outside, and tourist influences. “Cow dung building with a satellite dish…why not?” he quips. “It’s embracing the new and keeping the old, and that’s just fine.” Or, as Josh and Rachel put it, India “maintains its culture in the face of cultural imperialism a lot better than other Third World countries do.”

As I asked my informants about the kind of environment and landscape they prefer as they travel in India, I found a wide range of responses. One of the most common was an aversion to Indian urban space. Clara, for instance, did not like Bangalore because she thought it was “too Westernized” and “just an imitation of what we’ve got back home.” Ricardo does not “manage real well in big Indian cities” because they are too “chaotic and unorganized.” Elana prefers small villages in rural settings and admits that she is simply “not comfortable in cities.” Elana’s
disinclination towards cities, however, extends beyond just India and other developing countries to her own country of Israel. Charlotte likes India cities. She just doesn’t like modern cities. “I like an old city that’s still old. No concrete. You can only look at so many concrete buildings.” Like Elana, Charlotte also claims that her preferences are consistent and not biased against India because she always prefers old cities, whether in Italy, India, or the United States. Charlotte also challenges the dominant tourist narrative that elevates passive images of ancient Indian culture over active images of modern Indian culture: “I stopped going to temples. I went to too many temples. I stopped bothering. I don’t find the architecture all that interesting anyway. I find a good market, a good bazaar, more interesting.”

Seth, on the other hand, fully embraces the aesthetics of urban space in India, whether it is old or modern. He describes how, after two weeks in the ancient ruins of Hampi, he found the modern high tech metropolis of Bangalore to be “exhilarating, and even beautiful.” I shared a bus ride with two British artists who are also fans of India’s cities, which they view as “places of vitality and energy, and the real engines driving cultural and artistic development in the country today.” They are far more critical of what they see as the contrived, commercialized landscapes of backpacker enclaves with their standardized Bob Marley soundtracks and generic hippie art.

Before they arrive in India, backpackers are often warned that India is “an assault on the senses.” These are the words John uses to describe his first impression upon arrival in Calcutta. He continues: “The first week was nearly unbearable. I was ready to leave and go somewhere else. It was the stink, the smells, the sights, people pissing everywhere. And the exhaust, you have to cover your face to walk down the street. And the honking of the horns was constant. It’s just too much. I couldn’t even think clearly.” John’s experience neatly summarizes the most rife stereotypes of tourists’ representations of India. But among my informants his negative stance was surprisingly solitary. In describing the unfamiliar landscapes of India, Emily at first used the word “primitive” but then caught herself in mid-sentence, realizing the prejudice implied in such a word, and re-couched her impressions in less offensive terms: “It’s just culture that hasn’t been particularly Westernized.”

The majority of my informants found the dismal images mirrored in John’s impressions above to be overdramatic and exaggerated. Explains Elana, “everyone prepared me for a lot worse. They said I would want to come back home. It’s so terrible, they said, the smell and the dirt and the people. And it was terrible, but it wasn’t that terrible. It was okay.” Likewise, Peter
acknowledges that while India does take some getting used to for people coming from Western countries, “you just learn to sort of adapt.” For Seth, the noise and the smells are just part of what makes India unique, and he thinks they are wonderful. Backpackers like Charlotte are optimists who take pleasure in the diversity and differences they find in India. Charlotte concedes that while many places in India may not fit Western aesthetic standards of beauty, she asserts that “in India, the beautiful is within the people.” Furthermore, she would refrain from calling certain places “more authentic” than others because such a statement implies that other places are inauthentic and she doesn’t think there is any such thing as an “inauthentic place.”

Backpacker framings of identity and positionality

As they travel, backpackers constantly negotiate, question, and frame their identities and positionalities vis-à-vis race, class, gender, nationality, and any number of other social identifiers. For most, the ability to be flexible about one’s identity is essential, because India has a tendency to requires of its visitors significant adjustments in their routines, assumptions, attitudes, and interpersonal relationships. I address this diverse topic in several sub-sections. First, I describe ways in which backpackers interact with tourist sector hosts, and with Indians and India in general. I pay particular attention to how their positionalities as (mostly) middle- and upper-class white people affect these relationships. Next, I discuss backpackers’ diverse relationships with the subculture of which they are a part. I then show how backpackers accumulate, utilize, and think about cultural capital (even if they do not know it by that name). Following that is a discussion of the insider/outsider dynamics that backpackers navigate as foreign tourists who stand out in predominantly Indian landscapes. And finally, I chronicle some of my informants’ ethical dilemmas, deliberations, and recommendations.

Seth recounted the story of an auto-rickshaw he hired to take him twenty-five kilometers from Hampi to the nearest train station. When the driver stopped at his house, a little mud hut, and picked up his daughter on the way, he did not understand its significance. It was only later when he realized that the driver’s daughter was ill and that Seth’s fare was the only way he could afford the petrol to take her to the hospital. Seth explained that the experience “really opened my eyes, made me realize that I’d been living in a bubble in Hampi and not appreciating the problems of the local people which are happening right there beside you as you’re happily
having your holiday. It’s easy to forget that you’re visiting a Third World country.” Many backpackers have “moments of awakening” similar to Seth’s, when the reality of vastly different ways of life that millions of Indians experience finally sets in. No backpacker visits India without seeing poverty firsthand. But their reactions take many forms, from disgust, to compassion, to moral outrage, to self-contemplation.

Most backpackers find themselves the object of attention of Indians with different agendas. Some are merely being polite, looking for a friendly conversation, some hope to sell tourists goods or services, while still others are probably just looking for a handout. For backpackers traveling in India for long periods of time, interaction with Indians can become repetitive. Ricardo admits that he was often annoyed when Indians pestered him to purchase services he did not want. But he later realized that they were only trying to make a living. Rather than beg, they preserved their dignity by offering some small service, like carrying bags, in exchange for a few rupees. “When I saw Indians paying for these things,” he recalled, “I realized they were not just for tourists, to rip us off, but this is actually a way of surviving, a job.” Seth, likewise, admits that “sometimes you just need to give yourself a reality check and ask yourself, ‘What would I do if I were earning five hundred rupees a week?’”

Peter thinks his time in India has made him a more patient person. Though he easily became frustrated at first, he realized over time that things don’t always run smoothly and that delays are just a part of life. Once he was able to accept this and set aside his Western-influenced expectations, he found that he was much more tolerant. Now, when things go wrong, he says, he “just laughs.” And for the most part, he observes of India’s infrastructure, “things seem to run remarkably well.” Will credits his travels in India with providing him with new life perspective: “Seeing that there’s more than one way to live your life is really valuable. If you never leave your home then you only have one frame of reference to see things in.” Emily stresses the value of staying in one place for an extended period of time, “getting to know the place” as much as possible, and making “real human connections” with people who live there. Emily tries to give her contacts something personal, more than just charity. She works with children, plays games, teaches them crochet, and answers their questions about her country. She tries to avoid acting like other Westerners who think they “know what’s best for people” and tries hard to make her interactions with locals more than one-sided impositions, stressing that “I don’t tell people things unless they want to know.” Emily’s approach is in stark contrast to a different backpacker girl
with whom Emily and I fell into discussion. Later, just between the two of us, Emily mocked that
girl’s attitude as one of “There’s so much we can do [as enlightened Westerners] to help them
and teach them.”

Frank enjoys spending time with and talking to the tourism sector hosts who work in the
guesthouses and restaurants that he patronizes. He states proudly that, in Tabo, “a lot of the
locals know my name, I know the two local doctors, I know the mayor of the village, people say
‘hi’ to me on the streets, and I can answer.” Frank is quick to dismiss what some have interpreted
in Indian hospitality as a servile humbleness reminiscent of colonial subservience. He argues that
the level of deference shown by hosts is even more pronounced when the customers are Indians,
and that foreign “travelers are good [for them] because they loosen up the local population a little
bit, [and help them] realize that it’s okay to sit down and talk with the guys they’re serving.” In
other words, Frank sees cheerful and respectful interaction between hosts and guests as an
equalizer, helping to break down hierarchies rather than reinforcing them.

Although I am grouping my informants (not to mention all the tourists I observed in the
field) into the somewhat nebulous category of “backpackers,” they do not all necessarily refer to
themselves in such terms. Semantic differences abound, and no one’s definitions of “tourist,”
“backpacker,” and “traveler” are perfectly in sync. Nevertheless, my informants would probably
agree that they have certain things in common, most notably among them being independent
from organized mass tourism. Rachel identifies a “form of brotherhood” amongst backpackers,
and an ethos of mutual assistance. She explains, “when I first arrive in a new town and need
information on where to go and where to stay, the first people I turn to are backpackers.” She is
more willing to place blind trust in strangers who look like her than in Indians who are probably
more intimately familiar with the territory. Several of my informants remark upon the natural
social cohesion that seems to occur amongst backpackers, even though they come from diverse
backgrounds and their interactions with each other are transitory and fleeting. Frank feels that
there is a kind of shared purpose among backpackers who make it all the way to India, because
“people who come to India are relatively open and unafraid of the unknown; otherwise they
wouldn’t have come to India in the first place.” Frank readily admits that the built-in social life
that comes with backpacking is one of the major attractions to him: “I find it very difficult for
people in America to get into a conversation with a stranger. But here I feel I can listen to a
conversation at the next table, and join in.”
Seth, however, is more skeptical of the backpacker label. “Backpackers…they can be a bit cliquey, can’t they?” He plays down the backpacker/tourist distinction, admitting, unlike other backpackers who argue over semantics, “I suppose I am just a tourist after all. I suppose everyone who’s traveling is.” Peter finds some of the hippie-inspired tropes of backpacker discourse, such as its fascination with Indian spirituality, to be superficial and tiresome: “Some of the people you meet, it’s just too much, talking about their experiences and their *karma* and how they’re so enlightened.” In fact, Peter specifically prefers to be seen by Indians as a “tourist,” and not as a “backpacker,” because he thinks Indians have negative opinions of backpackers. “I don’t want to come to this country and just *use* it for its drugs and sit around and do nothing” [emphasis added]. Emily agrees that many backpackers seem to come to India only to “hang out” and “party” and that they “really don’t give a shit about the culture.”

Charlotte also agrees that backpackers are just another kind of tourist. She goes even further to suggest that she “feels like a cultural voyeur. I feel like I’m starring in at the culture, and not getting everything that’s going on.” This speaks to a consciousness among backpackers that they are instant outsiders in India, easily marked for all to see by their pale skin, and never able to truly blend in as much as they would like. This feeling of outsideness, however, resonates differently amongst my informants backpackers. Charlotte, for instance, thinks that India is so diverse to begin with, with its thousand languages and multiplicity of religions and ethnic groups, that being an outsider in India is not such a strange thing. She wears a *salwar kameez*, the standard dress of South Asian Muslim women, and she believes that because of this Indians male and female alike treat her with great respect. He experience is rather different from than of Nicole and Clara, the 18-year old British women who wear tank tops and complain of sexual harassment by Indian men and scowls from Indian women. Although Charlotte admits to sometimes stepping “out of place,” such as the time she accidentally walked through a villager’s house in Sikkim without realizing it, it hasn’t caused her any problems. The Sikkimese villager in her anecdote simply laughed about her accidental trespass, and proceeded to offer her tea. Charlotte thinks that her ability to negotiate easily between spaces of homogeneity and heterogeneity might stem from her experience growing up in Buffalo, New York where she was a white minority in a predominantly African American neighborhood.

Cultural capital is a highbrow academic concept with which most of my informants would probably not be familiar. Nevertheless, it is a concept that plays into their thinking and
about which they are able to speak readily in layperson’s terms. Jen admits that she accentuates some of the more “risky” and “exciting” elements of her travels when she describes them to others: “The more ridiculous things I can tell people, the better. If I had to pick the leeches off my legs after going for a walk, that’s way more interesting to hear about than if I sat in a café all day and read a book.” Charlotte recalls how her friends in the United States thought her trip to India was “a really wild thing to do.” She says, “they have a very antique view of how things work here. They think it’s more adventurous than it actually is.” Rather than capitalize on her friends’ inflated perceptions, however, Charlotte “corrects them and tells them what it’s really like.” David, too, gets “a weird sort of pleasure out of correcting the misconceptions people have about India.” Charlotte and David’s counteractive steps might seem to demonstrate an eschewing of the potential cultural capital that could be accrued by letting those myths endure. I would argue, however, that it is actually possible that the act of dispelling myths can itself be a kind of cultural capital-building exercise, because it confers upon the dispeller the status of knowing expert.

Not all of my informants believe that their travel experiences yield cultural capital. Although Seth acknowledges that his friends in Britain might envy his travels, he thinks this might have more to do with the fact that he isn’t in school writing essays than it does with any particular status associated with India. Frank admits of his past self, “I wanted to be one of the first ones to go to a place, and then tell everybody that I was there, to say ‘Oh, I was the one, I was there last year, and it was even more fantastic then.’” But he has since given up this tactic, and now “realizes that being the first is not important.” In Charlotte’s experience, she feels that her time India may have even worked against her best interests. Her friends thought she was “crazy.” “People were like ‘why would you want to go there?’” Even though she is one of only a handful of Americans to have ventured to India, Charlotte does not feel that she is in any way “adventurous.” It might have been so “twenty years ago” she concedes. “But not when you can order chocolate cake and a Fanta.” Erik also pegs the degree to which travel in India constitutes “adventure” to a historical timeline. When he first traveled to India in 1990, Europeans like him “who went to India at that time were different than tourists who just went to Costa Brava to go to the disco and drink a lot.” “Nowadays,” Erik hyperbolizes, “everyone goes to Asia.”

I ask my informants if they think their travel experience will play any role in advancing their careers “Yes, it can,” Seth speculates, “but it depends on what you do. I don’t think sitting
on the beach in Goa for six months really counts.” For Charlotte, her time in India has no positive bearing on her job prospects in the United States. In fact, she even believes it might have deleterious effects: “The jobs I’m applying for at home are crap jobs. It’s not like I’m applying to be international sales coordinator. I think in my sector of the economy it becomes more a sign of flakiness than a deep intellectual commitment to expanding my horizon.” Erik believes “it’s hard to point a finger to where you get value back from your travel.” He thinks that, if there is value, it is in less tangible aspects. “People who see the world are more interesting than people who just stay in the Netherlands.” Travel is something that can help a person in their life and career, he says, but it’s only one of many factors.

With his lanky stature, middle age, blond hair, and piercing blue eyes, Frank has an even harder time fitting in India than Charlotte does. This does not seem to matter much to him. To Frank, the sense of belonging to a place is “all about attitude and the human connections you make.” In his adopted home in Tabo, he maintains that local residents were receptive and welcoming when he expressed his desire to live there for four months of the year. One resident even offered to build him a room on top of his house. Jen also cites the added intimacy and familiarity with a place that can only come from long-term residency, such as the year she spent living with a family: “I tended to think of myself as an Indian person really. I was living with an Indian family, and they even gave me a new name…Priya. I wore Indian clothes, I spoke only the local language, I squatted on the floor when I went to the bathroom.” This, she explains, is in sharp contrast to her current lifestyle, which she says is very much that of a tourist: “This time I’m using Western toilets, I’m speaking English, and I’m staying in comfortable rooms.”

Chloe makes an insightful observation about the limits of the tourist gaze and knowledge accumulation. Even long-term familiarity with a place is not enough to say that one “truly knows that place” [emphasis in original]. “There’s always going to be so much you can’t see, that you don’t know about.” This dictum Chloe applies not just to tourists visiting places of stark difference, but to all humans in all places: “Even my home town can still surprise me. I would never be so arrogant to think that I know a place inside out, that I know all its secrets.” Clara agrees that backpackers and tourists will never fit in everywhere, and thus should tread carefully: “As a respectful, conscientious traveler, you should be aware of where you’re welcome and that some places might be off-limits to you and just because you’re a traveler doesn’t mean you can intrude.”
Most of my informants acknowledged, on their own volition, that there are ethical problems and considerations that backpackers must contend with when traveling in India. The most common revolve around what constitutes appropriate behavior for tourists (and backpackers) vis-à-vis Indian values and mores. Charlotte tells me an anecdote about a white tourist with whom she once shared a public bus journey. The woman was literally “flicking people off of her, saying ‘I like a big space—they can all just back up!’ and monopolizing all this space to herself while the poor Indians were piled on top of each other.” Charlotte told the woman, “You’re in India. You don’t get a big space!” To Charlotte, part of traveling is adapting to different situations and ways of doing things. It is the responsibility of the visitor to adjust to Indian definitions of “personal space,” not the other way around. It is also the responsibility of the tourist to spend his or her money in ways that contribute positively to the local economy and local livelihoods. Ricardo learned this lesson the hard way after he paid a considerable sum to go on a camel safari in Rajasthan. It was only later when he later realized that his guide only received ten percent of his fee. He was shocked by this example of “exploitation.” When I asked him to identify the source of the exploitation he realized that he was as much to blame as the company was because it was he who paid the upfront sum without examining the company’s labor practices.

Many of my informants note that traveling in India and seeing how Indians make do with scarce resources inspires them to make changes in their own lifestyles and to consume less back home. This reordering of priorities resonates with Chloe, who contends that “when you travel you see people living on very little, with limited possessions, and you gain a lot of confidence. I feel that I could do more, live with less.” Elana is sometimes frustrated by the more “primitive, Third World” practices she encounters in rural India. But then she concedes that, once the initial unfamiliarity rubs off, she realizes that what she thought was “primitive” is in fact practical, economical, environmentally friendly, and fully sufficient. “Like the bucket shower. I enjoy that,” she says. “And these places that grow all their food themselves. Everything you eat, they grow. It’s beautiful.”

Some of my informants, however, although cognizant of ethical considerations, express a desire to set the self-critical navel-gazing aside and just enjoy their vacations without any pretense of traveling for a “higher purpose.” Jen, for instance, is comfortable admitting, “This, right now, is totally a selfish thing. I’m doing it for me, and it’s fun. No one else is really going
to benefit from my being here.” Will argues that although many Western visitors in India claim that their motives are selfless because they engage in volunteer activities, their motives can never be fully separated from self-interest. If they really wanted to help people in India, Will asks rhetorically, “Would they be willing to give up the cost of their trip and simply donate it to the people who live here instead?” John feels no great desire to get off the beaten path himself, but with those who do, he finds few faults: “Sure, yeah, why not…They’re on a quest, they’re doing their thing. There’s nothing wrong with it itself.” He is careful not to let all tourist behavior off the hook, but stresses that “It’s how you do it [travel]. It’s how you interact with people” [emphasis in original].

My reader may notice that I have rarely invoked the specific language of neocolonialism in the context of these interviews. Although my informants sometimes replicate discourses, stereotypes, and attitudes that I have shown elsewhere in this thesis to be associated with neocolonialism, most also demonstrated a level of self-awareness and reflexivity that largely absconds them from the worst sins of neocolonial discourse and practice. On this note, I will conclude by noting the conspicuous absence of neocolonial “trigger words” such as “discover,” “explore,” “remote,” “authentic,” and “conquer.” While most these words did emerge in the interviews, they did not materialize with the frequency I expected, and when they did, they were contextualized and qualified so as to divest them of neocolonial implications.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Now that we have been there and back, what can we say?

In Chapters One and Two, this thesis asked the question: is there evidence of neocolonialism in tourism in the Indian Himalaya? With references from critical tourism literature, I laid out a framework of theoretical arguments and evidence from case studies around the world to provide contextual evidence of what exactly the intersection of tourism and neocolonialism might look like. Chapters Three through Seven presented evidence from the fieldwork I conducted in four case studies in Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh. The goal of these chapters was to provide evidence to answer the research questions and objectives posed in Chapter One, and to either corroborate, or refute, the underlying claim that tourism is a form of neocolonialism. Of course, as expected from the beginning, the answers to these questions are rarely black and white. That said, this thesis will hopefully have still made a positive contribution to this discussion. This will be true even if, rather than answer these questions conclusively, it has merely opened them up to greater debate, revealing tourism to be a complex, multi-hued landscape upon which a multiplicity of actors imbued with agency interact to produce discourses, patterns, and forces which both perpetuate and counteract neocolonialism. Although my four field sites each have their own particularities, enough similar patterns emerged across multiple sites that, as this thesis reaches its conclusion, I am able to make a number of observations and statements with confidence.

To begin with, there are more tourists in India today than ever before. This goes for domestic tourism, which is expanding in line with the general growth in India’s domestic economy and middle class, as well as foreign tourism, which India is increasingly courting around the world with expensive new advertising campaigns. In the most recently available data, 2,726,214 foreign tourists visited India in 2003, and that number is growing at an annual rate of 13.5% (Ministry of Tourism 2004, 8; UNWTO 2007) (see Table 4, Appendix for the total number of foreign tourist arrivals in India over time). While it is impossible to parse these totals into quantifiably specific categories such as “backpackers” or “mass tourists,” nearly every source I spoke to in the field who works in the tourism sector (i.e. those who have witnessed the evolution and growth of tourism with their own eyes) can confirm that the number of
backpackers is on the rise. In more and more Western eyes, India is becoming a “safe” and “desirable” place to travel. This is reflected in the growing number of study-abroad, gap year, and volunteer programs that send young people from Western countries to India. Given this evidence of growing numbers of tourists, it can be assumed that whatever effects these tourists are having, positive or negative, they are at least somewhat proportional to the number of tourists, and are thus being magnified as the number of tourists grows.

It can also be said without doubt that backpackers and tourists in India are going to more places than ever before. That is, tourism space has expanded to include a greater number of locations, or points on the map, than ever before. One professional travel writer I spoke to explained that the sheer number of potential places to write about today is daunting:

I did a story on...adventure travel into the Himalaya foothills, and to pull it off I had to do a lot more research than I had counted on. It was painfully tedious, mainly because there are excursions, guesthouses, adventure options, guided explorations, an infinity of elephant treks and tiger spotting and peak climbing and even skiing in every little corner and on hundreds of roads of a vast, vast territory. In the seventies, to think of going to the foothills would have meant choosing, most likely, between five or six possible destinations at most!

As my source suggests, much of the growth in geographic choice is due to growth in supply. There are simply more entrepreneurs in India today selling tourism services—and places—than ever before. This growth in supply on the business and retail side would not have been possible without simultaneous improvements in domestic infrastructure—transportation, electrification, etc—that has paralleled growth in tourism over the last several decades. As I have noted elsewhere, much of this infrastructure development has been undertaken by the government of India primarily for purposes of national economic development, and any utility it has added to tourism is merely an added bonus. In other word’s, India’s national development is not tourism-centric, but India’s tourism development is development-centric.

Further evidence of the growth of tourism space in India is found in the added breadth of geographic coverage in travel guidebooks over time. In 1981, Lonely Planet’s first edition described 270 different places in India. By 2003, the eleventh edition listed 543 different places, or twice as many. During this same period of time, the number of places listed in the state of Himachal Pradesh more than doubled, from twenty to fifty-one (see Table 8.1). To make room for all these new places, Lonely Planet’s page count has also expanded significantly over time. Whereas the first edition contained 696 pages, the eleventh contained 1,236 (the page count for
### Table 8.1 Comparison of place and page counts in *Lonely Planet*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pages</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>1236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page-to-Place Ratio</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Himachal Pradesh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pages</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page-to-Place Ratio</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Himachal Pradesh rose from thirty-one to sixty-eight). Over this same period of time, however, the page-to-place ratio actually declined slightly (also see Table 8.1), meaning that although the breadth of geographic coverage expanded, the depth did not. A more detailed examination of page counts by location would reveal that, in fact, the depth of coverage (or page count) in certain locations did increase significantly, but that the places to benefit from expanded depth were mostly those included in the original 270 places. It is the latter 273 places, added after 1981, which are given less depth, thus bringing down the page-to-place ratio.

This leads to my second main conclusion, which is that the spatial distribution of tourism in India is still highly uneven. The overall universe of tourism space may have expanded to include more places than ever, but the magnitude by which those places are actually frequented by tourists is highly variable. For the most part, most backpackers today are spending the greatest amount of their time in the same places in which backpackers were spending time in the 1980s, and in which the hippies before them were spending time in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, the temporal persistence of tourist geographies in India goes back even further. Most of the places where tourists and backpackers go in India today are listed as tourist destinations in Murray’s 1894 *Handbook to India*. This suggests a sort of path dependence in the geography of tourism in India. That is to say that places that are already established as worthy of tourism are likely to remain so indefinitely in the tourist imagination, and to act as a magnet for investment in infrastructure and tourism services.

By 1894, European explorers had already mapped all of British India, and anthropologists, artists, scientists, and geographers had already sketched, described, and classified its animals, forests, cities, caves, ancient ruins, and ethnic groups. In other words, the universe of potential tourist destinations was fairly well laid out. Seeing as the geographic
imagination that informs tourist desires and perceptions today is highly indebted to colonial nostalgia and Orientalist imagery, it is perhaps not surprising that tourists today should be drawn to the same places that drew colonial tourists two centuries ago. As one of my informants proclaimed, “some places are touristy for a good reason!”

During my two months in the field in India I spent the night in sixteen different places, ranging in size from villages of a few hundred citizens to cities of millions. Every one of these places was listed in Lonely Planet, complete with lists of accommodations, restaurants, and sights. Thus, every one of these places had some level of tourism infrastructure, and in none of these places could I claim I was the only tourist present. But in several of these places—Jari, in the Parvati Valley, and Khibber and Nako in Spiti Valley—I was one of a small handful of foreign tourists staying in one of the only two or three guesthouses in the village. This is probably true of hundreds of the places listed in Lonely Planet. They are by no means devoid of foreign tourists. They have guesthouses. They are accessible by train, bus, or motorbike. Thus, they are not fully off the beaten path. But they are further off that path than other places, simply as measured by the magnitude of tourism development and number of tourists they attract.

More importantly, there remain in India thousands of places that are more off the beaten path of foreign tourists than any place in Lonely Planet. The Indian census recognizes 163,000 separate places, most of which are small, rural villages, and 162,500 of which are not listed in Lonely Planet (see the maps in Figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix for an idea of the vast amounts of space that remain “untouristed”). I do not mean to suggest that foreign tourists never visit any of these “unnamed” villages. After all, it is not very difficult to do so. In the densely populated Gangetic Plain, for instance, villages are rarely sited more than a few kilometers apart. Any tourist with a means of transportation could easily add any number of these places to his or her itinerary. But most of the tourists I spoke to would not have much interest in doing so. While beds to sleep in can undoubtedly be found in most of those 162,500 villages, tourists will not as easily find restaurants serving Western food, or residents who speak English. They will certainly not find Western toilets, and they may not be able to find bottled water for sale. While such places might appeal to a rare form of foreign tourist, they would likely fall beyond the tolerance threshold of the vast majority of tourists, including otherwise-“adventurous” backpackers.

As Chapter Six demonstrated, however, new places do get added to the tourist map. Lonely Planet has added 273 new places in the last twenty years, and it will undoubtedly add
more in the next twenty years. But the locations of these “new places” will not be random, or in
the middle of nowhere. Their locations will follow a predictable geographic logic, occurring in
the peripheries and hinterlands of already-existing tourism space. In Chapters Four, Five, and
Six, I showed how the “frontier” of tourism development is occurring in the form of expansion
around the edges, in concentric circles, in a spatial pattern not unlike what Western planners call
suburban sprawl. Tourism development does have the ability to disperse from place to place, but
it does so in a predictable pattern, from established nodes and along established corridors, which
are largely determined by the available transportation infrastructure. In other words, “new”
places that get added to future editions of Lonely Planet are likely to be located either slightly
beyond, or in between, existing tourism destinations.

The spatial pattern of tourism development that I am describing can be inferred from the
editorial structure of Lonely Planet’s textual narrative. Every place in the guidebook fits
somewhere within a highly structured hierarchy, whereby the variable size and importance of the
place is represented in a multi-level formatting schema. Chapters are organized by state, and
each chapter is divided into several first-order headings, which typically include the largest city
in that state, as well as its broader geographical regions. These are then broken down into
second-order, third-order, and even fourth-order sub-headings, each with greater geographic
specificity than the last. The “sprawl,” or “peripheral expansion” that I have described
constitutes much of the places listed in the third and fourth order sub-headings, often signified
with terms such as “Around Manali” or “Kullu to Manali.” These sub-headings are intentionally
geographically broad, allowing the guidebook to describe several small destinations in the
general vicinity of a larger destination, or along a route between two larger destinations, without
devoting too much space to them individually. This system is convenient for the guidebook’s
readers for the same reason it is convenient (and cost-effective) for its researchers, editors, and
typesetters. It gives the appearance of greater geographic breadth, or off the beaten path-ness,
when the marginal difference in reaching these “new” places is minimal because they are located
conveniently within close proximity of other locations.

The spatial concentration of tourism into concentrated clusters, corridors, and circuits is
not unique to backpacker itineraries and Lonely Planet formatting hierarchies. India’s Ministry
of Tourism and its various state-level subsidiaries encourage tourists to follow geographically
defined “circuits.” Government websites and pamphlets advertise a variety of these circuits,
tailored to different cultural and geographic themes. The HPTDC sponsors several circuits in the state of Himachal Pradesh, where they are spatially defined more by the topography than anything else (see Figure 6.6 for an example of a government “tourism circuit map” in Lahaul and Spiti). This policy, however, has its critics. Singh (2004, 59), a researcher with the Centre for Tourism Research and Development\(^{42}\) criticizes the national policy encouraging tourism along circuits, because, he argues, concentration magnifies the environmental and social impacts of tourism disproportionately on a small number of locations, while other places not on the designated corridors miss out on the potential benefits of tourism development. He recommends, instead, policies encouraging the dispersion of tourism away from well-trodden corridors, thus spreading the impacts over a greater area (ibid).

Mountaineer Jimmy Roberts (Foreward, Kapadia 1996, 10) takes the opposite position, however, which he defines in his “theory of tourist drains,” which argues that “a main route or track through a beautiful country is not necessarily a bad thing as it draws off most of the visitors onto a single route, leaving the country left and right of it more or less unspoilt.” I tend to agree with Roberts’ position over Singh’s for the same reason that most urban planners advocate concentrated urban development over low-density suburban sprawl. Concentrated development, when managed properly and when provided with adequate infrastructure, can lead to a more effective allocation of resources and mitigation of impacts which are more difficult to manage with unfettered sprawl. Unfortunately, the peripheral enclaves of Old Manali, Bhagsu, and Leh seem to suggest that, when left to the forces of supply and demand, tourism development seems to conform more to the dispersed pattern advocated by Singh than the concentrated pattern advocated by Roberts.

This discussion of the spatial patterns of tourism development brings me to my next main point, which is about the specifically colonial (or neocolonial) implications of these spatial patterns. I am particularly interested in the colonial spatial vocabulary of “colonization,” “discovery,” and “the frontier.” In the context of historical colonialism, we have seen that colonization literally entailed the acquisition, by force, of territory as the British consolidated their hold over the Indian subcontinent. The geography of colonial colonization was uneven, proceeding at first from toeholds on the coast along trade corridors, bypassing much of the

\(^{42}\) A non-governmental organization with ties to universities and the private sector.
indigenous hinterland that would only come under colonial control through the gradual expansion and consolidation (Ghosh 1970, 96).

Thus, tourism development in India seems to resemble early colonization in its pattern of spatial concentration in corridors between key points. Tourism (or, at least, foreign tourism of a certain magnitude), however, is unlikely to ever achieve the same level of spatial consolidation that colonial territorial colonization did. At its height, the British colonial apparatus exercised legal, political, economic, and military control, surveillance, and power over the entire territory of India. Although tourism, as a force, also exerts control, surveillance, and power over territory, it will never do so with the completeness of formal colonialism. The power of tourism is dispersed amongst a multitude of agents who do not possess the sort of power amassed by the British empire and its military. As I have demonstrated, there remain 162,500 villages in India not yet subjected to the “discursive colonization” that being listed in a guidebook like *Lonely Planet* could be said to represent. If being written about, talked about, and mapped by tourists and tourist sector providers constitutes “colonization by tourism,” then there will always remain places in India not colonized by tourism.

Surprisingly, the concept of the “frontier” is also of questionable applicability to tourism in India today. As I have demonstrated through observations from the field, the frontier is indeed part of tourism discourse, but it is apparently more likely to surface in the promotional literature of (Indian) travel and trekking agencies than it is in everyday backpacker discourse. Chapter Six, set in the more recently opened areas of Ladakh and Spiti, provided perhaps the strongest allusion to the frontier discourse, but this is more a result of these regions’ unique historical-political circumstances. Surprisingly few of the tourists I interviewed or spoke to expressed any desire to “push the frontier.” They were more likely to speak of “discovering” places, but the discovery they spoke of was not the same as the colonial sense of discovery wherein the discoverer must be the “first” to “conquer” a place. My informants contextualized discovery as something personal, ideographic, and attuned to the subtle aspects of a place rather than the entirety of the place itself. They expressed little desire to be the “first” to discover a place, in many cases acknowledging that any such desire would be foolish and probably impossible in this day and age. They also demonstrated far less desire for cultural capital than I had anticipated. They framed their journeys in terms of personal growth and reflection, rather than in terms of gaining or accumulating something upon which they could later capitalize.
As I have demonstrated in the sections of this thesis that recount the historical geography, any real “frontiers” of tourism in India were likely broken long ago by white colonial travelers (not to mention the generations of Indians who called those “frontiers” home). They were later inscribed in guidebooks like Murray’s, and have remained part of the well-trodden geography of tourism to this day. If the thousands of villages yet to be named by *Lonely Planet* remain all that is left of the tourist frontier, they are not beckoning tourists very strongly. Most of the places of historical, anthropological, and cultural interest to tourists have long since been marked and developed, and the space that remains off the tourist map remains there for a reason: most tourists would find it banal.

As I have demonstrated, backpackers tend to display a preference for the rural over the urban in India. This might seem a direct contradiction of the colonial preference for the “orderly, hygienic, scientific, superior, and civilized” spaces of colonial urban development over the erratic, haphazard, “unclean” space of indigenous settlement (Kumar 2002, 86). It is true that backpackers do not fashion enclaves modeled after European space as the British did in, for instance, Shimla or the British sections of Calcutta or New Delhi. But neither do backpackers and foreign tourists feel comfortable in the truest of indigenous space. The “rural” they prefer is not the rural of the 162,500 villages in India, but a very particular type of *shanti* environment containing guesthouses, cafés, outdoor seating, and attractive scenery.

Backpackers may have significantly higher tolerance thresholds than British colonials, but their practices suggest that colonial tropes of hygiene, servitude, and segregation are still present (albeit in more subtle ways and with less rigid forms of power and policing behind them). For instance, while backpackers invade the heterogeneous space of Indian bazaars and villages, they complain about their cleanliness, and refuse to eat certain foods or drink the same water that Indians drink. While backpackers are not accompanied by anything resembling the “traveling servants” of Murray’s colonial-era guidebooks, they nonetheless depend heavily on cheap Indian labor for a number of services, from transportation to room service. Backpacker enclaves, with their relatively homogeneous concentration of white tourists, seem to resemble colonial enclaves wherein white colonists intentionally set themselves apart from Indians because they believed themselves to be racially superior. But while this parallel may make sense based on outward appearances, it does not hold up under closer scrutiny. The major difference is that backpacker enclaves, in most cases, are not controlled by white people. The guesthouses and
cafés are owned by Indians, and there is no formal “boundary maintenance mechanism” keeping white tourists and Indians apart. Indian tourists may keep largely to their own separate tourism spaces for the same reasons white tourists keep to theirs—different preferences and different tolerance thresholds—but there is nothing keeping them from intermingling if they so choose.

Tourists may not formally “control” the spaces that they inhabit temporarily, but they do exert agency over them, and, through their preferences and consumer demand, they do help to shape the appearance of these spaces. For instance, their consumption habits undoubtedly shape the orientation of the consumer landscape, and therefore the public space of communities. The level of impact that tourist demand and agency exerts over the built landscape, and economy, of a place is inversely correlated to the size of that place. For instance, although large cities like Delhi and Calcutta host more backpackers annually than any of the enclaves I studied in Himachal Pradesh, backpackers have a minimal impact upon those cities’ built landscapes because their numbers are, proportionally, so much smaller than the resident population (refer again to the tourist-to-population ratios in Table 2, Appendix). Those cities have their backpacker enclaves too, but the vast majority of their urban space is devoid of backpackers, and could in fact be said to constitute some of the most “off the beaten path” spaces in India, despite the most modern and networked places in the country. Smaller communities, on the other hand, are more likely to see a larger percent of their space, and economy, devoted towards tourism.

Although backpackers take pride in their independence, and enthusiastically exert agency over their own spatialities, their spatialities are, in fact, highly determined by the fixed geography of infrastructure, development, and discursively constituted tourism space. The location of backpacker enclaves and other backpacker-frequented places is as much, or more, determined by Indian entrepreneurs who sense growth opportunities and invest the capital necessary to attract backpackers with backpacker-friendly infrastructure, than it is by backpackers themselves and their purely demand-side spatial preferences. In fact, I believe that Indians who produce tourism space for backpackers are masters of producing the illusion of backpacker choice, and hence, control over their own spatialities, when in reality those spatialities are highly predictable and predetermined.

Finally, it is of the utmost important to acknowledge the agency of those who do “produce” the spaces of tourism, and to acknowledge the implications of that agency. As I have shown in the case studies, ownership and control of tourism space in backpacker enclaves is
almost entirely concentrated in the hands of Indians rather than foreign capital. This automatically rules out the most common global form of neocolonial tourism. But the patterns of that ownership are not as simple as “Indian.” India’s move towards neoliberal capitalism over the last two decades has produced extremely uneven geographies of capital concentration and political and economic power. As I have shown, many of the Indians who own hotels and other services in backpacker enclaves are “outsiders” in those communities, who come from older tourist enclaves like Goa to capitalize on new and expanding markets. These outsiders may bear the same national label as the local residents of these villages—“Indian”—but they benefit from vastly different positionalities vis-à-vis ethnicity, class, gender, and race. These are the terrains on which power is contested within modern India, and through which the most prescient form of neocolonialism may in fact be internal colonialism.

\textit{And what lies ahead?}

The fact that power relations between various factions within India are unequal and may embody internal forms of neocolonialism does not excuse foreign tourists from culpability. They still have a great deal of agency in this whirlwind of political, social, and economic relations called tourism. I believe one of the most powerful, and positive, things tourists can do is to actually exert their agency as consumers of tourism commodities but to do so in as socially and environmentally conscientious of a way as possible. I could issue all sorts of dire warnings about the negative effects of tourism, and the carbon footprint of flying halfway around the world, and the commodification of cultures that tourism brings. But at this point in the game, my warnings would do no good. Global tourism is an industry that here is to stay. Furthermore, the new consumers of global tourism will increasingly be people from countries like India, China, and Brazil. In other words, they will be the new middle classes of countries that were formerly colonized by Europeans. And they will travel to Europe, where they will turn their tourist gaze upon white people whose ancestors once colonized them. And they will travel to India. And to Bali. And to New Guinea, where they will turn their gaze upon fourth world indigenous peoples, and labels of neocolonialism will probably be highly appropriate.

The point here is that tourism will be, as it has always been, about the privilege of people in positions of class power. Tourists are a privileged subset of the world’s population with
enough wealth, free time, and political capital (e.g. access to visas) that they can leave their responsibilities at home for a week or a month or more and travel to wherever in the world happens to be the pleasure periphery of the moment. Wherever they travel, these tourists, be they white, brown, black, or yellow, will come into contact with people who are less fortunate and less privileged than they are. They will consume goods and services sold by people who are dependent upon tourists for their livelihood. And every time they travel, these tourists’ relations with their hosts will be colored by imbalances of power that can take on neocolonial aspects. Unfortunately, as long as there is inequality of power, wealth, and mobility in this world, tourist-host relations will always be subject to the political-economic aspects of neocolonialism. But, I argue, there is space for tourists and hosts alike to contest some of the worst socio-cultural ramifications of neocolonial relations.

This may not be a groundbreaking observation, but it can make a world of difference when tourists simply treat their hosts with respect, dignity, and compassion. I wholeheartedly believe that some of the worst aspects of tourism can be mitigated if tourists simply behaved more compassionately to their fellow human beings. An American backpacker will always be positioned differently vis-à-vis class than the majority of Indians she meets in India, and there is not a whole lot she can do to change that. She knows this, and the Indians she meets know this, too. No one is asking her to give away all her money or put herself on an “equal playing field.” But she can afford to be generous than perhaps the average backpacker. She can tip, something many backpackers do not do. She can bargain politely without feeling “cheated” if she ends up paying slightly higher prices than locals pay. Many backpackers insist that they should pay the same prices as locals, but I think this is an unreasonable expectation. Indians are not stupid. An Indian knows that if the white guy attempting to bargain with him has enough money to travel halfway around the world to his village, then he can probably afford slightly more than the local price for his products. Tourists should not be offended to pay more. They should see this as a form of “fair trade,” buying international products directly from the source, cutting out the profiteering intermediaries who sell the same products for far higher prices in the curio shops of Europe and America. Furthermore they should see such trades as an opportunity for face-to-face convivial interaction, not as competition.

Furthermore, tourists can use their consumer demand to drive the supply side of tourism in directions that are more environmentally and socially sustainable. The checklists, maps, and
information provided by Women’s Alliance of Ladakh in Chapter Six are an excellent example of the positive effect tourists can have when they direct their patronage to tourism providers who are good stewards of their communities. Of course, such discriminating consumption depends on information, and someone to organize it. And as I have argued, the discourse of “eco-tourism” is far too vulnerable to discursive abuse such as greenwashing. But I have confidence that more institutions like the WAoL will emerge in the future, aided by the internet, which makes information more readily available.

Fortunately, I am not the first person to suggest a code of ethics for tourists. Such codes are proliferating in the industry, right down to the pages of *Lonely Planet*, whose admonitions are considerably more conscientious today than they were two decades ago. Tourists may not always follow the “dos and don’ts” laid out for them, but at least they are becoming part of the mainstream of tourism discourse. There are voices of hope out there. Wearing and Wearing (2006, 160) maintain that tourism can be a force for good, fostering space where tourists interact with, and learn from, locals. Hollinshead (2004, 35) claims that tourism can lead to a positive form of cultural hybridity, which encompasses and celebrates “difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.” As I have demonstrated, tourist interactions with locals too often merely reinforce stereotypes rather than challenging them. Challenging heavily engrained cultural discourses like Orientalism is hard work, and takes a great deal of effort and reflexivity. But it is possible. Not all, but some, backpackers do return home from their travels in India more aware.

In the end, I believe that much of the burden comes down to the individual tourist. I began this research project in the literature, where it seemed apparent that tourism was surely the most prescient form of neocolonialism alive today. And I did find much in the field to corroborate this. But I also found evidence to the contrary, not the least of which came from the interviews I conducted. Some of the things my informants said during interviews can surely be deconstructed, processed through the machinery of critical tourism studies, translated into academic jargon, and revealed as “evidence” of neocolonial discourse. And that is what I have spent much of the last 215 pages doing. But I would be very uncomfortable, as both a researcher and human being, labeling any of my informants a “neocolonialist.” It might be easier to apply such a label to some of the “other” tourists whom I observed but did not interview and with whom I did not develop personal relationships, but I do not want to do that either. The objective of this thesis was not to assign blame on any one group of people, but to raise awareness of the
potentially problematic aspects of an activity that many good people engage in (myself included).

Neocolonialism is very much alive and well today. Compared to examples of neocolonialism such as the United States occupation of Iraq or the violence wrecked by multinational oil corporations in the Niger River Delta, the “spatialities of backpackers in India” might seem trifling. I do not think they are trifling. I mention Iraq and Nigeria only to put my thesis in a broader perspective and acknowledge that neocolonialism is a serious problem that comes in many forms. But, for all my wavering and reluctance to come out and apply the “neocolonial” label to tourism directly, I believe it is a useful point of departure, and analytical tool for studying an industry and a discourse that too often are assumed to be harmless. There is much in tourism today, in India, and around the world, to be wary of, and the more we can stop and think about its problems, the better its future will be, because tourism is not going away.
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# APPENDIX

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Table 1 Summary statistics and demographics of interview informants
Figure 1 Popular destinations of backpackers in India (Hottola 2005, 8)
Figure 2 Destination frequency of interview informants
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<th>State</th>
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Table 2 Tourism-to-population ratios

a) These tourism statistics are from the year 2003 (Ministry of Tourism 2004)
b) These population statistics from the most recent census in 2001
c) Ladakh is not a state, but a district in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. These data are from the Jammu & Kashmir State Ministry of Tourism
d) These states are anomalies in that they are largely off-limits to foreign tourists, except with special permits.
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Table 3 Change in Lonely Planet page counts over time

Figure 3a Change in Lonely Planet page counts over time (localities)
Figure 3b Change in *Lonely Planet* page counts over time (region)

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<td>2003</td>
<td>2,726,214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Foreign tourist arrivals in India, 1951-2003 (Ministry of Tourism 2004, 8)