



# A MODEL OF 'CREATIVE EXPERIENCE' IN CREATIVE TOURISM

**Siow-Kian Tan**

National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan, ROC

**Shiann-Far Kung**

National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan, ROC

**Ding-Bang Luh**

National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan, ROC

**Abstract:** This study explores the essence of 'creativity' in 'creative tourism' from a tourist perspective. Creative tourism is receiving an increasing amount of attention, although the concept remains rather vague, and more research is needed. Data was collected using in-depth interviews with tourists and observations at four 'Creative Life Industry' sites in Taiwan. Grounded theory approach was employed, and the findings show that 'outer interactions' and 'inner reflections' construct the model of tourists' creative experience. The former refer to tourists' interactions with 'environment', 'people', and 'product/service/experience', while the latter refer to 'consciousness/awareness', 'needs' and 'creativity', and these dimensions 'interact' in tourists' inner-self throughout the experience. Moreover, 'consciousness/awareness' is a prerequisite for 'creative experience', differentiating it from other types of experiences. **Keywords:** creative experience, creative tourism, creativity, tourist's perspectives. © 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of creative tourism has been developed for a number of years in many countries, including New Zealand, Austria, Spain, Canada, the United States and Taiwan. Although different places have their own definitions of creative tourism, there are commonalities among them, such as 'active participation', 'authentic experiences', 'creative potential development', and 'skills development' (Richards, 2011). These experiences are mostly related to everyday life, and the 'creativity-base' of creative tourism includes traditional crafts/

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**Siow-Kian Tan** is Ph.D. candidate in Institute of Creative Industries Design, National Cheng Kung University (NCKU) (PO Box 70101, 1 University Road, Tainan, Taiwan. Email <siowkiantan@gmail.com>). Her main research interests: tourism management, service design. **Shiann-Far Kung** is Associate Professor in Department of Urban Planning, NCKU. His main research interests: urban study, industrial analysis/planning. **Ding-Bang Luh** is Professor in Department of Industrial Design, NCKU. His main research interests: industrial design, creative industries.

handicrafts-making, gastronomy, perfume-making, porcelain painting and dancing (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Even though creativity is seen as the base of creative tourism, the creative factors of creative tourism systems remain unexplored. Furthermore the current definitions of creative tourism are all supply-led, such as by tourism boards, service providers, and various industry practitioners, without considering the tourists' viewpoint although tourists are seen as co-creators of the experiences.

While it is undeniable that a supply-led perspective is important in this context, as most of these creative tourism businesses are operated by creative people such as artists, 'lifestyle entrepreneurs' or 'cultural creatives' (Anderson, 2009; Binkhorst, 2007; Maisel, 2009; Peters, Frehse, & Buhalis, 2009; Prentice & Andersen, 2007; Ray & Anderson, 2000; Raymond, 2007), the views of consumers should not be ignored (Maisel, 2009; Maitland, 2007; Raymond, 2009). As Kaufman and Baer (2012) ask, who decides what is creative? In fields such as psychology or design, creativity is always seen from the artist's perspective. For example, how artists develop their artworks (Mace & Ward, 2002), the development of measurements of artistic creativity (Nelson & Rawlings, 2009), or the creative process of designing new products or new activities. However, these assessments of creativity are expert-based, and may not be applicable for ordinary people, especially as these studies often examine artistic creative dimensions that are unreachable by lay people, such as tourists, who just want to enjoy something that is original or authentic in common life settings and related interactions.

Although tourists are seen as playing active roles in co-creating their experiences while on vacation, industry practitioners still take the lead when it comes to designing and providing such activities (Raymond, 2009), with few studies considering what tourists actually want in this context. For example Maitland (2007) studies the roles of tourists and residents in creative cities, while Maisel (2009) acknowledges that many tourists desire experiences that are small, intimate and on a human-scale. Therefore, there is a need for more sophisticated analysis of creative tourism that draws on the tourist's perspective, especially with regard to what exactly makes creative tourism creative, how is it different from other types of tourism, what are the basic building blocks of creative experiences, and how do these elements interact in creative tourism systems? This study thus aims to construct a model of 'creative experience' in creative tourism from the tourists' perspective. By knowing how the creative process has been constructed, tourists can maximize their creative experience by searching for what they want from the range of creative tourism experiences on offer. Besides, industry practitioners also need to know more about the key elements that can increase the level of creativity in the creative experience process. Since there are relatively few studies examining these issues, the current research aims to address these gaps in the current literature.

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