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Othering, Power Relations, and Indigenous Tourism: Experiences in Australia's Northern Territory

Katie Bresner

Abstract

Indigenous tourism is characterized by the involvement of Indigenous peoples in tourism activities, either through ownership or the centrality of their cultures in a tourist attraction or destination. While Indigenous-themed and Indigenous-operated destinations exist around the world and vary wildly in their construction, none are immune to the ideologies and discourses that govern the tourism industry. The tourists that visit these destinations, too, are influenced by the narratives and texts that mediate their experiences as consumers. In this essay I use the influence of institutional ethnography to discuss personal experiences travelling in Australia's Northern Territory, placing this discussion within the broader context of indigenous tourism. Beginning with a brief summary of the anthropological theories of tourism, I move on to describe actual experiences in Kakadu National Park, Alice Springs, and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. I demonstrate how texts and institutionalized discourse organize the tourist experience through the application of Edward Said's concept of "Othering" developed in his work, *Orientalism* (1979).

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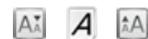
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Australia's Northern Territory, a 520,902 square mile area spanning the tropical shores of the north to the arid desert of the country's Red Center, packs beauty and adventure into every turn. Waterfalls tumble into crystal plunge pools, wallabies dart through monsoon forests and star trails glimmer over Aboriginal

rock art sites dating back up to 50,000 years. On the coast, open-air markets take over Darwin's beaches and indigenous guides teach visitors Aboriginal art on the Tiwi Islands. With so much to see, you need a few places to start. Here are ten experiences you can't miss: S