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Traveling to Troubled Countries: Ethical Perspectives on Tourism in Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

For many years, the actions of Myanmar's military government have provoked domestic discontent and strong condemnation overseas. The government is encouraging tourism in an attempt to legitimize its actions whilst generating valuable foreign currency. However, a number of organizations are urging people to avoid travel to Myanmar and thus prevent the military junta from obtaining the hard currency and global legitimacy it needs to survive. In this article, the ethical arguments for and against tourism in Myanmar are discussed, and for the first time the ethical perceptions of tourists themselves are explored. The study applied the Multidimensional Ethics Scale to a group of 376 Myanmar visitors, finding that respondents were generally in favor of tourism in Myanmar, but were uncomfortable with the ethical implications of their visit.

INTRODUCTION

Tourists contemplating a visit to any country with a history of human rights abuses are faced with a similar ethical dilemma: keep yourself and your money away, or go and bear witness, facilitate the exchange of ideas and support local businesses. Visitors to Myanmar are faced with such a dilemma along with some profound political and ideological decision-making. Promotional literature on Myanmar portrays a picturesque and idyllic landscape, inhabited by peaceful people whose traditional culture has been preserved. However, this image of a country at peace denies the harsh realities that underlie such representations (Philip and Mercer 1999), and Myanmar has been referred to as the 'land of fear' (Marshall 2002). Under allegations of human rights abuse, the generals running the country spend about 40% of the country's budget on the military, while most of the people live in poverty and disease (Garton Ash 2006). The Burmese health system is ranked 190th out of 190 countries by the World Health Organization.

As a consequence, there have been attempts by some groups to persuade visitors to boycott tourism in Myanmar on ethical grounds. The government on the other hand is encouraging tourism in the hope of maintaining international credibility whilst generating valuable foreign currency. The arguments for and against tourism have been alluded to in previous literature, but little empirical work on the subject exists, and the tourists themselves have yet to be surveyed. This study sets out to understand the ethical decision-making and perceptions of tourists as they leave Myanmar, a study that has important implications for potential tourists, tour operators, government and policy makers.

BACKGROUND

Myanmar – previously known as Burma - is the largest state in mainland South-East Asia and is relatively rich in natural resources, including petroleum, timber, marine fisheries, and natural gas. It also has a unique cultural and natural heritage (Philip and Mercer 1999). Burma's history dates back over 5000 years, but modern Myanmar has its origins in the 19th century. This was a period of immense change, and paved the way for colonial occupation as Burma was annexed by Britain in 1886 following three Anglo-Burmese wars. After independence from Britain in 1948, an elected government held power until 1962 when there was a military coup, and armed forces have exercised control ever since. The regime followed a policy of deliberate isolationism and sought to create a centralized economy entitled "The Burmese Way to Socialism". Like regimes in Singapore, Malaysia and China, the rulers of Myanmar argued that their people were served best by economic development.

However, the 1962 coup transformed a fledgling democracy rich in natural resources into a land of poverty and fear, and the philosophy of exclusion and isolation led to an economic crisis and increasing unpopularity culminating in an uprising in 1988 which was quelled with great severity and left thousands dead. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) - now the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) - was installed as the next military government and it attempted to introduce a more market-oriented system, organizing elections in 1990 when the National League for Democracy (NLD) won over 80% of the vote. However, the party, headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, has not been permitted to take office ever since and this has provoked domestic discontent and strong condemnation overseas. As well as the denial of freedom of political association and expression, many unacceptable practices have been documented in Myanmar over a number of years such as forced labor and relocation (Henderson 2003; Holliday 2005). The leadership is also linked to trafficking in opiates and amphetamines. Over 1,800 political prisoners still languish in jail, among them students, doctors, teachers, lawyers, writers, farmers and housewives (Marshall 2002).

Tourism in Myanmar

For over 25 years, tourism has been acknowledged by the Myanmar government as an industry of potential importance and a major foreign exchange generator. In 1990 a Tourism Law recognized tourism as a significant economic activity and ended the state monopoly, allowing local and foreign private operators to run hotels, transport businesses, and tour guiding services. A Hotel and Tourism Law in 1993 affirmed official support, setting out objectives related to the growth of the hotel and tourism sector. Myanmar's cultural heritage and scenic beauty were to be exploited, maximizing employment opportunities, while fostering international friendship and understanding. In short, the SPDC saw tourism as an opportunity to disseminate a favorable picture of Myanmar to the rest of the world.

But the high-speed growth in tourism infrastructure did not come without a price. It caused mass upheaval, with millions of laborers required to erect the suitable tourism infrastructure, and to restore cultural sites as tourist attractions. Tourism development was directly linked to human rights violations, and there were reports in the 1990s of the

government conscripting labor to complete infrastructure and tourism projects. People were also displaced from their homes to make way for tourism. For example, people in Palaung were reportedly uprooted and moved into 'ethnic villages,' built for tourism purposes. Cultural heritage is often crudely exploited according to international archeologists and conservators, who decry the construction of the replica buildings and the poor reconstruction of historic buildings (Reardon 2004). The natural environment has also suffered from the development of hotels and golf courses (Philip and Mercer 1999).

Ethical arguments against tourism

In reaction, many groups both inside and outside Myanmar have opposed tourism. Inside Myanmar, Suu Kyi and her party have urged travelers to refrain from visiting Myanmar until there is a political transition to democracy. Suu Kyi's anti-tourism campaign has proved to be reasonably successful, with many travelers from the West staying away. Whilst tourism has expanded rapidly in neighboring Asian countries, Myanmar still receives relatively few tourists. In 2005, 660,000 visited Myanmar, compared to neighboring Thailand, which attracted more than 10 million (Directorate of Hotels and Tourism 2006). More tellingly, the number of visitors from the West - 96,000 - represents less than a sixth of the total number of visitors, and the number of charter flights into Myanmar fell from 4,810 in 2004 to 942 in 2005. The number of cruise arrivals has also been falling steadily in the last few years, from 2,535 cruise passengers in 2003 to 1,536 in 2005.

In addition to Suu Kyi, non-government organizations that support Myanmar's pro-democracy movement are also raising the call to world travelers, urging them to avoid travel to Myanmar and thus prevent the SPDC from obtaining the hard currency and global legitimacy it needs to survive. These NGOs, like Tourism Concern in the UK, All Burma Students Democratic Front in Thailand, and Canadian Friends of Burma in Canada, stress that tourism fosters an illusion of peace and regularity while providing foreign exchange to pay for arms which strengthen the military. It thus fortifies the regime whose members may benefit personally and politically from any increase in arrivals (Henderson 2003). These groups have persuaded tourists, tour operators and the travel media to think twice before promoting tourism to Myanmar.

Ethical arguments for tourism

However, there are some outside analysts that believe tourism should be encouraged in Myanmar, despite the political situation. The opportunities to engage in cross-cultural communication form the basis of the ethical arguments put forward by some of those in favor of tourism in Myanmar (Philip and Mercer 1999). These protagonists argue that tourism can break down barriers and accelerate economic progress which improves the lives of local people (Buhasz 2002); that tourism provides a rare channel of communication for the Burmese, it provides jobs and it allows foreigners to learn about the culture (Hendrix 2003); and that travel enhances friendships between peoples and facilitates cultural and political exchange. In the case of repressive countries such as Myanmar, it may also allow visitors to bear witness to local conditions.

Such arguments fall under the umbrella of ‘citizen diplomacy’ – the cross-national interactions between people of different cultures that can have a positive impact on society. Louise D’Amore founder of the International Institute of Peace Through Tourism argues that travel can be one to one citizen diplomacy in its finest form, serving as a means of dialogue at a personal level (Ecoclub 2006). D’Amore suggests that young people in particular are becoming “Global Citizens” as they travel to meet their counterparts from other lands with open hearts and minds. These young tourists, he believes, can be individual ambassadors for peace. There are a few examples where tourism has had a positive impact on conflict avoidance or for bringing peace to a nation. D’Amore for instance, suggests that ‘Ping Pong’ diplomacy (sports tourism) paved the way to opening the doors to China during the Nixon Administration in the 1960s. Specific situations where tourists have witnessed repression directed towards local people have proven that international tourism can have some influence. The massacre of Timorese people by the Indonesian military in 1991 was witnessed, videotaped and made public by tourists, creating a wide international outcry (Philip and Mercer 1999).

Others who don’t oppose tourism in Myanmar (like Amnesty International) say that tourists have the right to visit and make up their own minds. The General Manager of the largest travel agency in Myanmar has explained that curiosity about the region is so great, that political issues are secondary. *“We believe that travelers from abroad should go there to see, and judge for themselves. Only then would they be qualified to comment”* (Henderson 2003, pp. 112). Travelers returning from Myanmar report that most local people are against the travel boycott as they benefit from tourism spending (Buhasz 2002). In fact, there are many who believe that boycotts are rarely effective in changing politics (Donkin 2006). The Free Burma Coalition activist, Zarni, recently argued that the sanctions on Myanmar have been ineffective (Garton Ash 2006). Holliday (2006) suggests that as sanctions in Myanmar have failed to trigger political reform, it is necessary to review the policy options. He believes that prominent multinational corporations should form a coalition and seek to do business on principled terms with Myanmar’s rights violating regime.

Making ethical decisions

Clearly, the decision to visit Myanmar or not is very much an ethical one, but how do tourists make such an ethical judgment? The two approaches to ethical decision-making which have received most attention in the literature are those reliant on the theories of deontology and teleology (MacDonald and Beck-Dudley 1994). A simplistic definition of the two approaches would be that deontology places the **means** as more important than the end, while for teleology it is the **end** that justifies the means. As far as tourists are concerned, if they strongly believe in the merits of citizen diplomacy, then it could be argued that they are taking a more teleological, long-term approach to the ethical dilemma of visiting the country or not. However, if they place more emphasis on the fact that going to Myanmar breaks an unwritten law or an unspoken promise, then they are taking a more deontological stance. It is important to recognize that whichever approach to ethical decision-making is taken – deontological or teleological – the outcome could be the same.

Previous literature suggests that ethical decision making is also likely to be influenced by the type of ethical dilemma faced. Jones (1991) showed ethical issues can be classified according to their intensity, with respondents more likely to respond according to ethical principles if the issue is deemed as important. In Western societies over the last few decades, an increased recognition that the world's resources are limited, has led to the strengthening of an environmental ethic, whereby the natural environment is recognized to have an intrinsic value which outweighs its value as a leisure asset (Holden 2003). Yet, despite understanding the concept of the "triple bottom line", attention to the negative economic and socio-cultural impacts of tourism is less evident (Hudson and Miller 2005; Jamal 2004).

Studies of ethics and gender have found females to be less tolerant than males of situations involving ethical dilemmas. For example, Whipple and Wolf (1991) and Lopez et al. (2005) found that female students are more critical than their male classmates of questionable business practices. Others (Gilligan 1982; Freedman and Bartholomew, 1990; Hudson and Miller 2005) have found female students to have higher moral values than males. Finally, some researchers have compared the ethical perceptions of students and adults, finding that students are much more accepting of questionable ethical practices than adults (Fritzsche and Becker 1992; Cole and Smith 1996; Stevens 2001; Vitell and Muncy 2005).

Objectives of study

Henderson (2003) argues that the omission of two key groups from this discussion on Myanmar should be acknowledged. The first is the local population who do not have the right of free speech, and the second is the tourists themselves who have yet to be surveyed. This study therefore sets out to understand the ethical perceptions of tourists as they leave Myanmar. These tourists were visiting Myanmar as part of a ten-country world voyage with the Semester-at-Sea (SAS) University program. During the run-up to arrival at Yangon, passengers hotly debated the ethics of ignoring government sanctions and human rights advice in order to visit the poverty-stricken 'regime of fear.' Discovering whether or not these informed tourists felt morally vindicated **after** visiting Myanmar would have significant implications for other potential tourists, tour groups, and tourism operators, all faced with similar ethical dilemmas in going to Myanmar and other similarly troubled countries. Furthermore, this research brings to the forefront the concept of citizen diplomacy which has hitherto been barely studied. This could have repercussions not only for other travelers and tour operators, but also for the beleaguered citizens of Myanmar and for policy makers debating the merits of tourism boycotts versus gradual diplomatic change.

METHOD

As mentioned above, the sample was taken from participants in the Semester-at-Sea (SAS) Spring voyage of 2006. On this 'floating university campus' students, staff and faculty travel and study together during a 105-day semester. The majority of passengers on this voyage were American students (677), generally in their second year of University study. They were joined by 80 adult passengers (staff, faculty and senior passengers). The focus of SAS voyages is on non-Western cultures with developing

economies and diverse political and cultural systems. A multi-disciplinary overview of the areas and issues encountered during the voyage is provided by a mandatory upper-level Geography course. Called Global Studies, this draws upon the experience and expertise of the whole faculty as well as specialized inter-port lecturers who provide a more personal insight into their nations' histories, cultures and customs. Thus before reaching Myanmar, the shipboard community was introduced to the politics in Myanmar and the whole ethical debate outlined above. All participants disembarked in Myanmar for five days, and were surveyed on the day after departure at the beginning of a Global Studies lecture.

The Multidimensional Ethics Scale (MES) (Reidenbach and Robin 1988, 1990; Flory et al. 1992) was used to measure the ethical orientation of the SAS passengers. The MES has been developed to be used in business contexts and permits insights into the cognitive ethical reasoning process. It is a semantic differential scale consisting of 8 items representing the four dimensions of ethical behavior: justice (the idea of fairness to all), deontology (the extent to which an action is consistent with an individual's duties or unwritten obligations), utilitarianism (the extent to which an action leads to the greatest good for the greatest number of people), and relativism (the extent to which an action is considered acceptable in a culture). Respondents were asked to reflect on their visit to Myanmar, and to respond in terms of the eight item scale. One final item on the scale measured the overall level of ethical orientation (the action is ethical/unethical) capturing the weight respondents placed on the overall morality of the action. Respondents were also asked further questions reflecting the arguments for and against tourism as depicted in the literature on Myanmar, as well as an overall judgment as to whether or not SAS should have visited Myanmar and whether or not they would recommend that others travel to the country. The polarity of scales was randomized to minimize response effect bias.

RESULTS

The survey was completed at the end of Global Studies by 376 people, a response rate of 50%. Of the respondents, 276 were female and 100 were male. This female/male ratio was similar to that of the overall shipboard community which was 2.4:1. The majority (337) were students, but 39 questionnaires were completed by adult passengers and analyzed for comparison purposes. A test of the reliability of the questions in each ethical scenario confirmed the dimension structure referred to above. Cronbach alpha scores for each of the four dimensions met or exceeded the score of 0.70 recommended by Nunnally (1967) and Robinson et al. (1991).

Ethical Dimensions

With '1' representing the positive form of the scale item (i.e. fair) and '5' the negative form of the item (i.e. unfair), mean scores were calculated for each ethical dimension (see Table 1). The mean scores show that the only ethical dimension respondents were unsure about in terms of visiting Myanmar, was the Utilitarianism dimension ($m=3.11$). For them, the end did not necessarily justify the means, and going to Myanmar may not maximize benefits and produce the greatest benefit to all in the long-term. Certainly, the decision to go to Myanmar would be acceptable within the

culture of respondents (m=2.19). The final item on the MES scale measured the overall level of ethical orientation and respondents were unsure that going to Myanmar was ‘the ethical thing to do’ (m=2.86). Descriptive analysis revealed that only 35% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this question, with 42% undecided, and 23% believing that it was unethical to go.

Table 1. Mean scores by ethical dimension and gender (eg. for Justice where 1=strongly agree and 5=strongly disagree to the question that going to Myanmar was fair)

| Dimension | Mean Level of Agreement | | | t | d.f. | p-value |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------|------|---------|
| | Total sample (n=376) | Males (n=100) | Females (n=276) | | | |
| Justice | 2.46 | 2.28 | 2.52 | -2.27 | 374 | .034* |
| Deontology | 2.61 | 2.34 | 2.70 | -3.50 | 374 | .001* |
| Utilitarianism | 3.11 | 2.86 | 3.19 | -3.10 | 374 | .021* |
| Relativism | 2.19 | 2.00 | 2.25 | -3.10 | 374 | .004* |
| Ethical Orientation | 2.86 | 2.58 | 2.97 | -3.24 | 374 | .002* |

* significant at 0.05 level

Multivariate analysis of variance showed a significant gender difference in the responses to the MES scale questions (Wilks’ Lambda = 0.947, $F(9,366) = 2.095$, $p=0.029$). Mean scores on each of the four dimensions were then compared between males and females using independent sample t-tests (see Table 1). There were significant differences between the groups for all dimensions ($p<.05$), with females in general being less comfortable with the ethical decision to go to Myanmar. Dimensions were categorized into three categories (agree, disagree and undecided) and chi-square assessments of statistical similarities and differences in response to each dimension were made. It was found that there was a significant difference between males and females in their level of agreement with both the deontology and the utilitarianism dimensions ($\chi^2= 11.837$, $df=2$, $p<.005$; $\chi^2= 8.17$, $df=2$, $p<.05$). Females were significantly less likely to agree that going to Myanmar was consistent with an individual’s duties or unwritten obligations (50% of females versus 65% of males), and less likely to believe that the end justifies the means (29% versus 43%). As for the overall level of ethical orientation, there was a significant gender difference ($\chi^2= 10.86$, $df=2$, $p<.005$), with only 30% of females saying that going was the ethical thing to do, as opposed to 45% of males. Mean scores on each dimension were compared between students and adults passengers, but there were no significant differences between the two groups.

Arguments for and against traveling to Myanmar

Mean scores for the arguments for and against tourism in Myanmar, and chi-square assessments of statistical similarities and differences in response to each statement were made (see Table 2). There was more agreement on the merits of citizen diplomacy (m=2.23) than for the arguments supporting a travel boycott (m=2.83). Nearly all (94%) the respondents said that the locals seemed genuinely pleased by their visit, and 72%

Table 2. Mean scores on arguments for and against tourism in Myanmar (1=strongly agree; 5=strongly disagree)

| Arguments for citizen diplomacy | | Total Sample | Males (n=100) | Female (n=276) | t | d.f. | p-value | Student (n=339) | Adults (n=39) | t | d.f. | p-value |
|--|--|--------------|---------------|----------------|--------|------|---------|-----------------|---------------|-------|------|---------|
| The locals seemed genuinely pleased that I was there | | 1.49 | 1.38 | 1.54 | -1.12 | 374 | .253 | 1.36 | 1.44 | -.679 | 374 | .470 |
| Human-rights-conscious travel can help form opinions that could be far more useful to those who struggle against repressive regimes than boycotts would be | | 2.00 | 1.95 | 2.03 | -.711 | 374 | .483 | 2.00 | 2.18 | -1.10 | 374 | .369 |
| Contact with the free world does more good for a country than isolation | | 2.34 | 2.15 | 2.43 | -2.27 | 374 | .022 | 2.37 | 2.26 | .630 | 374 | .558 |
| Tourism can benefit international relations between Myanmar and the rest of the world | | 2.35 | 2.08 | 2.46 | -23.23 | 374 | .001 | 2.34 | 2.45 | -.558 | 374 | .587 |
| Travel facilitates cultural and political exchange | | 2.47 | 2.32 | 2.53 | -1.73 | 374 | .086 | 2.47 | 2.47 | -.002 | 374 | .999 |
| Sanctions generally don't achieve desired objectives so a travel boycott would be just as unsuccessful in changing the political system in Myanmar | | 2.75 | 2.58 | 2.82 | -1.99 | 374 | .054 | 2.75 | 2.90 | -.866 | 374 | .454 |
| Average mean score for arguments supporting citizen diplomacy | | 2.23 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Arguments supporting a tourism boycott | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| The locals do not have freedom of speech | | 1.10 | 1.27 | 1.04 | -1.89 | 374 | .074 | 1.13 | .89 | -1.29 | 374 | .146 |
| I saw evidence of human rights abuses in Myanmar | | 2.84 | 3.08 | 2.76 | 2.22 | 374 | .030 | 2.83 | 3.00 | -.791 | 374 | .509 |
| The locals support a travel boycott | | 2.91 | 2.94 | 2.90 | -1.12 | 374 | .253 | 2.92 | 2.80 | .858 | 374 | .380 |
| Exchanges with locals were contrived or 'staged' | | 2.99 | 3.16 | 2.97 | -1.58 | 374 | .125 | 3.04 | 2.77 | -1.55 | 374 | .214 |
| Money goes to the government and does not end up in the pockets of locals | | 3.50 | 3.62 | 3.46 | -1.86 | 374 | .053 | 3.50 | 3.62 | .934 | 374 | .262 |
| For the long-term good of the people of Myanmar, tourism should be boycotted | | 3.68 | 3.85 | 3.63 | 1.67 | 374 | .086 | 3.69 | 3.62 | .332 | 374 | .768 |
| Average mean score for arguments supporting a tourism boycott | | 2.83 | | | | | | | | | | |

were in favor of human-rights-conscious travel as a means of fighting against repressive regimes. However, adult passengers were significantly less likely than students to agree on this point ($\chi^2= 7.77$, $df=2$, $p<.05$). Respondents also tended to agree that tourism can benefit international relations between Myanmar and the rest of the world ($m=2.35$), and that contact with the free world does more good for a country than isolation ($m=2.34$). However, females were significantly more likely to disagree on these points than males ($\chi^2= 7.28$, $df=2$, $p<.05$; $\chi^2= 8.22$, $df=2$, $p<.05$). Less than half of all respondents (41%) believed that sanctions generally do not achieve desired objectives so a travel boycott would be just as unsuccessful in changing the political system in Myanmar. However, about the same percentage was undecided on this issue.

As for arguments supporting a boycott, the majority (64%) of respondents strongly agreed that locals did not have freedom of speech ($m=1.10$), but most (73%) felt that their exchanges with locals were not contrived or 'staged' ($m=2.99$), and the majority (92%) believed that the money they spent went to the local people and not the government ($m=3.50$). Most disagreed that for the long-term good of the people of Myanmar tourism should be boycotted ($m=3.68$). Mean scores on these questions were compared between genders and between students and adult passengers, but there were no significant differences.

Overall perception of efficacy of visit

Overall, 68% believed that SAS should have visited Myanmar as part of its itinerary, with 18% opposed to the visit and 14% undecided. However, once again, females were significantly more likely to be opposed to the visit than males ($\chi^2= 7.88$, $df=2$, $p<.05$). Females were also significantly less likely to recommend to others that they travel to Myanmar ($\chi^2= 8.66$, $df=2$, $p<.05$). Comparing the students to adult passengers, the latter were significantly more likely than students to think SAS should not have visited Myanmar ($\chi^2= 7.83$, $df=2$, $p<.05$).

DISCUSSION

Results indicate that respondents as a whole were slightly more deontological in their decision-making, indicating that the decision to go to Myanmar was perceived as a just one, and would be acceptable within their culture. However, for many, the end did not necessarily justify the means, and going to Myanmar may not maximize benefits and produce the greatest benefit to all in the long-term. This supports the conclusions of Reith and Nauright (2005) who argue that tourism has not brought an end to Myanmar's debt, reduced poverty, and invoked social justice to all. However, although respondents were unsure about the long-term benefits of tourists visiting Myanmar, the majority seemed in favor of citizen diplomacy as a means of fighting against the repressive regime versus a tourism boycott. Respondents tended to agree that tourism can benefit international relations between Myanmar and the rest of the world and that contact with the free world does more good for a country than isolation. Less than half believed that a travel boycott would change the political system in Myanmar. It should be acknowledged though that the Myanmar government makes a concerted effort to hide any human rights abuses from

tourists (Marshall 2002) and the country at peace seen by respondents will undoubtedly have affected their judgments.

It could be argued that the respondents were not opposed to visiting Myanmar because they are unconcerned or ill-informed about the socio-cultural impacts of tourism. Previous research has shown that students are potentially more likely to be sensitive to environmental issues than socio-cultural issues (Hudson and Miller 2005). A recent review of tourism journals shows a heavy bias in favor of papers that focus on the environmental issues arising from the industry (Hughes 2005), reflecting the acknowledged predisposition NGOs have previously held towards the environment (Scheyvens 2002). Perhaps, there is a need for curriculums to integrate more social and economic ethical dilemmas.

Similar to many prior studies, the results indicated that female students are more sensitive to ethical issues than males. These findings suggest that as more and more women complete their education and enter the business world, ethical decision making within organizations may change (Whipple and Swords 1992). Also, educators who are developing and teaching business ethics and social responsibility courses should pay attention to gender differentiated development needs. This finding may have practical implications for tourism marketers wishing to attract tourists to Myanmar in that their marketing messages could be tailored for different genders.

Adult responses were significantly different to those of students in two ways. Adults were more likely to indicate that SAS should not have visited Myanmar, and they were less convinced that human-rights-conscious travel is a means of fighting against repressive regimes, such as the regime in place in Myanmar. These findings suggest that the adults – perhaps through previous experience and knowledge - are less idealistic than students and less trusting of the merits of citizen diplomacy. This is consistent with previous ethical studies that found adults to have more ethical caution than students when confronted with ethical dilemmas (Stevens 2001; Vitell and Muncy 2005).

From a practical point of view, the results of this research should be of interest to both policy makers and tourism businesses. One can be skeptical about the practicality and the desirability of citizen diplomats influencing policy, but Governments, both in and outside Myanmar, should be aware that the actions of tourists may have an impact on the nature and conduct of international relations in that country. The results will also be of interest to tour operators doing business in Myanmar, or to those considering sending tourists to the country. In the last few decades, responsible or ethical tourism has emerged as a significant trend in the western world, as wider consumer market trends towards lifestyle marketing and ethical consumption have spread to tourism (Goodwin and Francis 2003). If operators can convince tourists about the merits of citizen diplomacy then they may be able to encourage potential travelers to go to Myanmar.

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