

Book Review**Mountain Tourism, Altitude and Host-Guest Relationships**

Apollo, M. (2026). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032623375>, ISBN 9781032623351, 190 Pages, 13 B/W Illustrations, €67.99

This authoritative monograph by Michal Apollo examines how elevation influences interactions between mountain tourism and local communities, proposing sustainable destination development paths for ecologically sensitive high-altitude regions. Building on his earlier work that uncovered a relationship between altitude and the host-guest relationship, this volume extends the theory into the world's foremost high-altitude destination for mountaineering, hiking, trekking, and technical climbing. Drawing on empirical fieldwork conducted in Nepal's Mount Everest region, against the backdrop of Sagarmatha National Park, it analyses contemporary mountain tourism dynamics and trends including activity diversification, commodification, and commercialization while examining potential benefits for economically marginalized highland populations.

As trekkers wind their way up the Khumbu Valley to reach the base camp of the world's tallest mountain, the volume progresses systematically through seven chapters to examine the influence of altitude on host-guest dynamics in Himalayan Mountain tourism. Chapter 1 establishes foundational concepts linking mountain tourism to altitude-based horizontal zoning affecting interactions between locals and visitors to Sherpa communities. The Direct Zone (0–10 m removed from the main trail to Everest Base Camp) is compared and contrasted with the Intermediate (10–50 m) and Remote Zones (50 m or more off the main trail).

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework and research methodology underpinning the investigation of host-guest relations in mountainous regions. A mix of *quantitative* (a diagnostic study to measure the phenomenon) and *qualitative* methods (in-depth interviews to triangulate ground-level understanding) were conducted to collect data in extant Sherpa villages ranging in height from Phakding (2,610 m) to Dingboche (4,410 m). The empirical core comprises Chapters 3–5. Chapter 3 employs quantitative analysis to examine spatial and altitudinal factors shaping host-guest relationships, while Chapter 4 utilizes grounded interviews to explore lived realities of altitude's impact on interactions between local Sherpa and trekking tourists. Chapter 5 synthesizes findings, identifying causal mechanisms linking altitude, zoning, and relationship dynamics.

Chapter 6 translates research findings into practical management recommendations for sustainable development of mountain tourism. The concluding Chapter 7 applies Doxey's (1975) Irritation Index framework to analyse Sherpa sentiment trajectories—from initial euphoria to potential antagonism—across various highland contexts, providing critical insights for destination managers and policymakers. The findings are interestingly ambivalent, with host-guest relations invariably revealed as not uniform across all communities but differing depending on the settlement's elevation and the respondent's distance off the “beaten track” to Everest Base Camp. In all three zones (A, B, C), local residents tend to judge tourists more harshly in terms of cultural knowledge as the altitude of residence increases while nonetheless showing increasing appreciation of trekkers' respect for local culture. Yet insights from the horizontal zoning model can also preclude simple solutions to certain antagonistic sentiments. For example, Sherpa communities at higher altitudes seem more concerned by annoying tourist behaviours in the direct trekking zone “A” closest to the trail. A similarly significant relationship holds tourists more responsible for environmental pollution in zone “A” at higher altitudes, but for the introduction of foreign norms by tourists and their subsequent uptake, results were indistinguishable between direct zone “A” and intermediate zone “B”. Conversely, at higher altitudes local residents recognize the positive impact of tourism in terms of

improving quality of life yet simultaneously these most sensitive sites are said to be the priority for “overtourism” counter-strategies.

There are a couple of features of the book’s focus that could be deemed limitations or taken as the impetus for future research. First, the commendable efforts to put the Sherpa people at the heart of this story should not preclude further investigation of the touristic dimension. Follow-up studies could triangulate trekkers’ and tour operators’ perceptions on some of the same said “overtourism” issues. Ultimately, it is the demand-side dynamics that seem set to drive the development trajectories of high-altitude trekking meccas such as this one that are increasingly reliant on tourism. Second, the cross-sectional nature of this monograph leaves the door open for future longitudinal studies, not least because many of the host-guest feelings must surely fluctuate across time as well as space. A follow-up study, for example, could compare the oscillations from euphoria to hostility (and back?) before, during and after the coronavirus pandemic when the drastic swings in demand ensured that factors other than altitude or distance from the main trail must have also affected the market for mountain tourism.

Overall, the book serves as essential reading for researchers, students, tourism professionals, and policy practitioners engaged with mountain tourism and host-guest relations in remote regions. The Himalayas have long since played a prominent role in adventure and exploration narratives, yet the prevailing discourse celebrates mountaineers’ achievements while marginalizing perspectives of resident populations. *Mountain Tourism, Altitude and Host-Guest Relationships* address this critical gap by examining broader consequences for Sherpa communities. If mountain tourism is to be made more sustainable, we must prioritize benefits for indigenous populations whose livelihoods depend on these environments. Apollo’s sustained ethnographic engagement with Himalayan highland communities demonstrates exceptional cultural sensitivity and analytical sophistication, achieving a level of scholarly commitment that matches the geographical elevation of its subject matter.

Reviewed by Prof. T.E. Jones

Department of Ritsumeikan, Asia Pacific University College of Sustainability and Tourism,
Japan

