

# Interpretation in Maori cultural tourism in New Zealand: Exploring the perspectives of indigenous and non-indigenous guides

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*Abstract: Control over representation to ensure cultural integrity is a key issue in indigenous tourism. This article highlights the importance of the role of the guide and the influence of the guides' characteristics in managing Maori cultural tourism experiences. Drawing on findings from qualitative research at Te Puia (New Zealand Maori Arts and Crafts Institute) in Rotorua and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, key factors identified in managing interpretation include the source of information, the relevance of tribal diversity and whose perspective is being shared, and the personal experiences and meanings communicated by the guides. The way information is presented is found to be dependent not only on the guide's knowledge of Maori cultural heritage, but also on the guide's understanding and perception of visitors. The characteristics of guides, the diversity of tribal and ethnic identities of Maori and non-Maori guides, and their upbringing and socio-cultural contexts clearly influence how Maori culture is shared with international visitors.*

**Key Words:** New Zealand; Maori tourism; cultural tourism; interpretation; guiding

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Cultural tourism experiences provide opportunities for cultural exchange between the host culture and visitors. With growing interest in indigenous tourism, the extent of indigenous control over cultural content and representation becomes increasingly important. In managing interpretation processes, guides have an influential role in facilitating understanding and appreciation in visitors, thereby fostering respect for indigenous cultural heritage. In a guided tour this exchange is facilitated by the tour guide who needs to consider the diversity of the visitors' characteristics. By taking a visitor-centred approach to guiding and interpretation, guides adjust the way the experience is managed so that it is interesting, meaningful and relevant.



Source: Trisha Dwyer

An interpreted visit to the carving school at Te Puia is part of the guided visit of the attraction

Drawing on primary research, this article explores the significance of the role of the guide and the influence of the guide's characteristics on managing interpretation in Māori cultural tourism experiences for international visitors to New Zealand. First, there is an overview of tourism to New Zealand, of the key themes in the literature on indigenous tourism and Māori cultural tourism, as well as literatures on guiding and interpretation of indigenous cultural heritage. This is followed by a description of the research method and key findings from the study, in particular the influence of the guide in managing interpretation. Finally, the implications for management and training in Māori tourism are discussed.

### **Maori tourism in NZ**

The indigenous Māori people of New Zealand have long had involvement in tourism as entrepreneurs, guides, and performers. In the 1870s, Māori guides from the Te Arawa tribe were already involved in tourism, initially hosting international visitors at the Pink and White Terraces prior to their destruction in 1886 and also in the Whakarewarewa geothermal valley where guiding continues today (McClure, 2004; Tourism New Zealand, 2001). Today, 6% of international visitors participate in Māori cultural activities, making up the majority (76%) of Māori cultural tourists (Ministry of Tourism, 2009a). In addition, museums provide opportunities for Māori cultural tourism and are visited by 27% of international visitors (Ministry of Tourism, 2009b). Visitor markets are becoming increasingly diverse and although Māori cultural tourism is not the main reason for visiting New Zealand, it is an important part of the visitor experience (Colmar Brunton, 2004).

### **Indigenous tourism, guiding and interpretation**

Issues of ownership, control, and representation are highly relevant in indigenous cultural tourism. The level of indigenous control influences the extent to which culture is controlled or dispossessed (Hinch & Butler, 1996). Cultural heritage is cultural property, and tourism can conflict with traditional protocols (Bunten, 2010). According to Ryan and Huyton (2002), cultural integrity in indigenous tourism relates to control over content in terms of what is being shared,

whose cultural perspective it is and on whose authority. Empowerment may be achieved through ownership of the political and social aspects of heritage (McArthur & Hall, 1996) and in indigenous tourism experiences there is an opportunity to challenge stereotypes and change attitudes (Bunten, 2008, 2010; Howard et al., 2001).

In Māori tourism, ownership and control are key issues. Tourism for Māori may be considered as a way to empower and to achieve legitimacy (Ryan & Crofts, 1997). The involvement of Māori in the control and management of tourism is important not only in terms of generating employment and economic benefits but also for ensuring cultural integrity and control over representation. Key management strategies identified in a study of successful Māori tourism attractions (Hinch, McIntosh & Ingram, 1999) included management guided by Māori traditions, promoting cultural pride among employees and empowering them to speak with authority. Bunten (2010) found that Māori employees enjoyed sharing their culture and that their personal experiences added value to the Māori cultural tourism products. With importance placed on Māori values, cultural integrity, and honesty (Hinch et al., 1999; McIntosh, Zygadlo, & Matunga, 2004), consultation with Māori elders over which aspects of culture can be shared may be required to ensure control over cultural content (Amoamo, 2007). Representation and recognition of tribal identity and diversity is still a current issue in Māori tourism (Amoamo, 2007; Amoamo & Thompson, 2010).

In cultural tourism experiences the tour guide is a cross-cultural mediator, responsible for connecting the visitors to the resource and facilitating understanding. In face-to-face interpretation guides have the opportunity to adapt to the characteristics and needs of the visitors. In indigenous tourism, the guide's background and ethnic identity is considered important in terms of representation and sharing indigenous perspectives (Bunten, 2008, 2010; Howard et al., 2001). In order to maintain cultural integrity, challenging stereotypes and changing attitudes is the guide's resource management role (Howard et al., 2001). Guides may engage in a sophisticated style of manipulation as part of a strategy of resistance (Bunten, 2008). Interpreta-

tion, therefore, may be employed to achieve organisational goals in indigenous tourism (McArthur & Hall, 1996; McKercher & du Cros, 2002) and maintain cultural integrity. Although there is extensive literature on Māori tourism, the lack of research on tour guides highlighted a gap in understanding their role as cultural mediators managing Māori tourism experiences.

### **Method**

Qualitative case study research was carried out in order to gain insights into the guide's role in managing Māori cultural tour experiences for international visitors. Furthermore, the study compared and contrasted the perspectives on and approaches to guiding and interpretation of Māori and non-Māori guides. Case studies were selected from attractions offering guided Māori cultural tour experiences for international visitors and organisations with internal training programmes for guides. In addition, Māori cultural heritage is central to the purpose and function of two organisations selected. Te Puia (New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute) is a Māori organisation located in the Whakarewarewa geothermal valley in Rotorua where there is a long history of Māori tourism (Images 1 and 2). All of the guides at Te Puia are Māori, the majority being from the local tribe and part of a guiding legacy dating back over five generations. Te Papa (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa) is a bicultural organisation with Māori and non-Māori guides (Image 3).

A total of 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted, with 14 Māori participants (identified by an asterisk \*), including a manager from each organisation, and 7 non-Māori guides. Although a pseudonym could be chosen for confidentiality, many participants chose to use their own names. A social constructivist approach to the research allowed multiple voices and multiple perspectives to be reflected. The subjectivity of the non-Māori researcher is also recognised, being an insider to guiding and the cross-cultural dimensions of interpretation yet an outsider to Māori culture.

### **Narrative and voice**

In managing information, it is acknowledged that there are multiple sources and a diversity of narratives



which may reflect different perspectives. The importance of consultation with knowledgeable people, mentoring, and building knowledge and understanding through on-going learning, whether formally or informally, was identified by managers and guides from both organisations.

“If you don’t really know and you’re going to find out, make sure the source is reliable. (...) And there’s nothing better than going back to the source you came from, you know from within your own family.” (Hapeta\*-TePuia)

Information may be verified by knowledgeable people both within and outside the organisation, including consultation with Māori elders (Amoamo, 2007).

“This is why we have people like kaumātua, other kaumātua [Māori elders], which we can discuss things with and talk about things, and look at differences. But we’re there, I’m also there as a safety net if you like for some of our non-Māori guides.” (Rangimoana\*-TePapa)

Tribal diversity adds to the complexity of interpretation. In some cases, the source of information and whose perspective is being shared may be of personal relevance and meaning for the guides, in particular when sharing their own tribal perspectives. Even though there may be a tendency to provide general information about Māori culture during tours for international visitors, both Māori and non-Māori guides also need to develop an awareness and understanding of tribal differences.

At Te Puia, narratives of the local tribe are linked to the landscapes which are a key aspect of the visitor experience. At Te Papa, as the national museum, information about Māori culture and tribal narratives may be viewed through a bicultural framework and the historical context of New Zealand. The influence of Māori culture on New Zealand as a nation is presented, as well as the impacts of social and political processes on Māori.

### Guide background

Little attention has been paid to how guides contribute and share an understanding of contemporary Māori culture and the way in which their diverse

combinations of ancestry, heritage, and upbringings may influence cultural tourism experiences. The information about Māori culture provided by guides may be general, or shared at a level of personal meaning.

“I look at the generalness of being Māori. (...) I believe that what I say is very common. It might change with different iwi [tribal group] that we have because of slightly different influences. I believe I represent my people first and foremost, my iwi [tribal group], and then my entire people second.” (Shane\*-TePuia)

In addition to tribal narratives and family stories, guides may include their own perspectives. Managers at both Te Puia and Te Papa emphasised the importance of the personal qualities and individualised interpretation of guides, as well as the contribution of the guide’s own stories.

“I know that hosts have to draw on their own experience in order to be sincere and genuine. The visitor does not want carbon-copied interpretation on the floor.” (Jay\*-TePapaManager)

For many of the guides at Te Puia the narratives of the local tribe about the geothermal area were learnt as children growing up in the area.

“On the marae [Māori village] – that’s where I started learning (...) I’m not a fluent speaker (...) I was brought up here so I only know one side, one tribal side. (...) my father is from another area so I’d like to know about that side. (...) So with the myths and legends, I only know of the ones here.” (Ryl\*-TePuia)

For guides of mixed tribal ancestry, their understanding and awareness of tribal differences may depend on their own upbringing and learning experiences. Guides from different regions and tribes may bring their own stories and understanding, sharing a range of tribal perspectives with visitors. In addition to diversity in tribal ancestry, many of the Māori guides mentioned combined heritage, such as European ancestry, and may choose to share an understanding of this with visitors.

“It should always be positive, you know. (...) But I’m not biased, I’m also positive within the Pākehā-Māori

[New Zealand European] within me as well – which they are interested in. So I’m not biased to one part, I bring the whole package in.” (Kiri\*-TePuia)

Personal accounts shared by Māori and non-Māori guides of different characteristics may reflect some of the diversity of experiences and perspectives found within contemporary society.

“Because we cover a little bit about urban Māori and the effect of European colonisation, and I talk a bit about my own experience growing up without Te Reo and having to learn it as an adult and how that’s impacted my life and things. They can have more of a, I suppose a personal perspective from me.” (Maraea\*-TePapa)

Although non-Māori guides may endeavour to share an understanding of Māori culture, most pointed out that it is not possible to speak from a Māori perspective. However, a personal perspective from a non-Māori guide may still contribute to an understanding of a shared history with Māori in New Zealand.

“I can’t speak as a Māori, I’m a Pākehā (...) I’m talking to them as a person who has this place as their heritage and their home. And, as I say, the Treaty is my story as well.” (Joe, non-Māori -TePapa)

Similarities identified within the guide’s own upbringing and cultural background may, in some cases, facilitate understanding and appreciation and be a source of personal meaning.

“Well I think through my upbringing, the values are similar to Māori culture. The Chinese people they believe in hospitality, welcoming people (...) but also having respect for our elders – Māori culture does so.” (Basil, non-Māori -TePapa)

These insights into the resource management role (Howard et al., 2001) of non-indigenous guides and the similarities and differences in their approaches to enhancing understanding and appreciation of indigenous cultures provide a key contribution, yet to be discussed in the literature on indigenous tourism. Whilst there is a belief that communication by guides should be individualised and



Source: Julia N. Albrecht

During a small group guided tour at Whakarewarewa: The guide explains the long guiding heritage of her extended family.

that guides should share personal perspectives (Beck & Cable, 2002), there is also a concern that tour guides may have their own agendas based on their socio-cultural, historical, political and economic contexts (McArthur & Hall, 1996; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). In some cases, exclusion of a sincere personal viewpoint may be required, particularly when discussing potentially sensitive issues.

“Also a perspective that’s not coloured by my own views too (...) especially when you get into speaking about politics. But I try and give an unbiased view as much as I can.” (Maraea\*-TePapa)

Interpretation is subjective and guides make decisions about which information and whose perspectives to include or exclude and how to frame the presentation for visitors. Although guides are encouraged to include their own stories and experiences, there may be boundaries regarding sharing personal viewpoints.

### Visitor-centred interpretation

In order to select appropriate tour content, guides may try to find out about visitors and their requirements. Interpretation, as a communication process, is a way of connecting visitors to the resource and should be a visitor-centred process (Beck & Cable, 2002).

“You can find out what they’re specifically wanting, you can even get an idea of what their viewpoints may be, where their prejudices may lie (...) so you can store that up and think right, I’m going to do this interpretation in this way so I’m going to bring out these things.” (James, non-Māori -TePapa)

For relevant and meaningful connections, guides take into account the characteristics of visitors, such as their prior knowledge and experience. Face-to-face interpretation can be powerful as it is possible to adjust to the visitors’ characteristics and needs (McArthur & Hall, 1996). Guides may reframe the interpretation and presentation of information depending on who is standing in front of them.

“But we find that other nationalities, quite often there are commonalities in our histories, in our societies and in our structures, our social structures. Once we find those, we connect and we’re away.” (Taparoto\*-TePuiaManager)

“When we come to the Treaty [of Waitangi] area it causes lots of questions, particularly for people from Australia, United States, and Canada where they’ve had experience of indigenous culture’s development in various ways, not normally as positive as our history. So they bring up questions about that.” (James, non-Māori -TePapa)

Visitor experiences are subjective and influenced by personal backgrounds and agendas, and McIntosh (2004) points out that prior knowledge and personal meaning can influence how cultural experiences are understood. Cultural understanding may be hindered by differences in the ways visitors understand experiences (McIntosh & Johnson, 2004). Whilst there may be similarities which draw people closer, differences between cultures and cultural contexts may lead to a diversity of attitudes and perspectives.

“So when people arrive here with different views or opinions, I have to listen to it and try to see where it’s coming from.” (Shane\*-TePuia)

“We try never ever to say ‘that is wrong’. Because that’s the way they’ve been brought up.” (Rangimoana\*-TePapa)

Guides choose how to share and frame information in order to mediate visitors’ attitudes and facilitate understanding. The awareness guides have of potential differences in viewpoints, and the understanding of visitors’ beliefs may influence how the interpretation is managed. Importantly, in their approaches to challenging stereotypes and misconceptions, guides need to maintain a good relationship with visitors in order to facilitate a positive visitor experience.



## Conclusion

For face-to-face interpretation without a fixed script, no two tour guides can ever be the same. How guides share Māori cultural heritage is influenced by the guide's own background, understanding, and personal meaning. Furthermore, the way guides present information and manage the tour experience also depends on their understanding and perception of the visitors.

First, the interpretation of Māori cultural heritage stems from the choice of the source of information, and whose story and perspective is being shared. For Māori guides, their understanding of Māori cultural heritage may be influenced by their upbringings, tribal heritage, and life experiences. The diverse background characteristics of Māori and non-Māori guides may lead to different types of knowledge, understanding and personal meaning. Management may need to consider to what extent guides have the capacity to facilitate an awareness and understanding of information from different sources and diverse perspectives. In addition to consultation with elders (Amoamo, 2007), a collaborative approach to interpretation training acknowledging the diversity of the characteristics of the guides and the contribution of the guide's own knowledge may be valuable.

Second, in face-to-face interpretation the guide and the guide's connection to Māori cultural heritage and the contribution of their own stories and experiences may make the interpretation more meaningful and sincere. However, in some cases viewpoints on potentially sensitive or topical issues may need to be suppressed. Guides may be faced with the challenge of maintaining cultural integrity and personal integrity, whilst endeavouring to facilitate a positive visitor experience. Management need to consider the balance between the value of sincere and honest interpretation resulting in positive visitor experiences, and the potential negative implications of guides sharing their viewpoints openly and pushing their own agendas (McArthur & Hall, 1996; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006).

Third, the guide's cross-cultural understanding of the visitors also influences the way the experience is managed. A key consideration for management is that the guide's decisions on how to frame the interpretation, identify relevant and meaningful links, and manage attitudes may be influenced by the guide's understanding and perception of the visitors and their cultural contexts. Effective interpretation depends on the guide's knowledge of the visitors and determining in what ways Māori culture may be significant and meaningful to the visitors (Gross & Zimmerman, 2002). Furthermore, having a more in-depth understanding of visitors' beliefs and viewpoints may enable guides to effectively perform their resource management role, by challenging misconceptions and facilitating a positive change in attitude about Māori culture.

For recruitment and training, organisations should consider the value of prior knowledge and experience, and the importance of on-going learning for guides in order to share and build knowledge and understanding both inside and outside the organisation. Tour guides can play a valuable role in enhancing the understanding and appreciation of Māori culture by drawing on their own knowledge and experience to facilitate meaningful visitor experiences. The influence of the guide's characteristics in Māori cultural tourism experiences is clearly a key consideration for management.

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