This book is an edited collection of 16 studies of tourism in Southeast Asia selected from papers presented at a conference organized by the National University of Singapore and the Singapore Tourism Board to explore the concept of “interconnectedness” through tourism among the countries of Southeast Asia.

An introductory chapter outlines this theme, noting that the effects of tourism are not simply a combination of economic, environmental, and sociocultural factors, but need to be understood “as outcomes of global processes in which the nature, intensity, and extent of interaction involving people, commodities, capital, and information are intertwined” (p. 2).

In exploring the concept of interconnectedness, the chapters range from theoretical and empirical case studies of interconnections between the countries of Southeast Asia, to subregional cooperation (for example, the Mekong countries), corporate alliances across borders, analyses of global-local discourse as they relate to individual countries, and tourism flows throughout the region. Problems and challenges as well as successes of regionalization are examined. The editors state that this broad range of topics, held together by the common theme of interconnectedness, “adds value to current research and debates in economic geography, geopolitics, cultural politics, globalization and the financial and environmental crises in Southeast Asia” (p. viii).

There are five sections to the book. Part One sets the scene geographically. Two chapters, by Michael Hall and Douglas Pearce, respectively, provide base data on the countries of Southeast Asia, and the size and state of their tourism industries. Of necessity these chapters are more descriptive than theoretical but Pearce, in recording the main tourism developments in the region and the prevailing marketplace, ventures into relational aspects of tourism between the countries, the potential for growth, and the current systems of distribution.

Part Two has three chapters. Of particular interest for its analysis of the economic and financial underpinnings of tourism within the region is the paper by Tou Chuanq Chang and K. Raguraman. The continuously deepening tourism relationship and accompanying cooperation between Singapore and Indonesia are the focus of attention for the second chapter in this section by Grundy-Warr and Martin Perry. While it is
light on theoretical analysis, it nevertheless offers some perceptive commentary on the evolving relationship between these two countries, which is geopolitical in nature but has a burgeoning tourism element. This is an interesting study because the two countries are so different, one the third most populous nation in the world, the other a city-state of less than 4 million people. The final chapter by Stephen Page takes a new slant on core (metropolitan)-periphery theory with his concept of tourism in “extended metropolitan regions,” an approach in which he covers both praxis and theory.

The theoretical heart of this book lies in Part Three. If the first two parts “are largely descriptive, unimaginative, and lightly theorized” (Wearing and Macdonald 2003, p. 752), the six chapters in this section are much more strongly grounded in theory. The roles of “universalization” and “localization” of culture in the development and presentation of tourism resources of countries in Southeast Asia form the theme of the first chapter. A companion theme is pursued in the second chapter by Geoffrey Wall and Heather Black, which examines cultural heritage sites within the region and how global organizations and their relationships with local authorities set the parameters for planning and management of these sites. The third chapter by Singaporean geographers, Peggy Teo and Brenda Yeo, analyses the lack of local agency and localism in theme parks, suggesting that these factors have the potential to make distinctive contributions to the production of tourism landscapes. The eminent sociologist Eric Cohen has a fascinating analysis of how new contrived tourism spaces in Thailand are in many cases proving more attractive than natural spaces; tourists are aware that they are not being ushered into authentic back-stage environments, but they are satisfied with these new, emergent artificially constructed places and spaces, and the earnest search for authenticity that MacCannell (1976) claims for all tourists is not supported by this case study.

The conceptualization of history, space, and time constitute the framework for an exploration by Can-Seng Ooi of the interpretations and stories proffered by the National Museum of Singapore (which actually consists of three different museums covering Asian civilizations, the art of Singapore, and the history of Singapore). The final contribution to Part Three is an analysis by Carolyn Cartier of the significant role that ports around the world have played in national development, economic power, political leadership, and cultural transformation and the exertion of local, regional, and global influence. Cartier uses the port city of Melaka (Malacca) in Malaysia as an example, outlining its key role and growing transformation as a prominent tourism destination and its function in regional interconnectedness that is helping to shape contemporary tourism activity.

The natural environment and issues confronting Southeast Asian tourism form the theme for Part Four. There are three chapters that examine different aspects of environmental issues and natural resources that are used and exploited for and by
tourism. The first is Poh Poh Wong’s critique of traditional connections to the land and new perspectives about the natural environment that help to determine how modern developers and planners use natural resources for tourism. Shortcomings in the approaches adopted by the countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (Cambodia, People’s Republic of China, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam) to manage and sustain the area’s natural resources for tourism form the basis of a thoughtful chapter by Michael Parnwell that probes the gap between rhetoric of government policy and actual practice. The final chapter, a forceful and persuasive appraisal by Kevin Markwell of how tourism marketing has often produced unproductive commoditization of the natural environment, concludes this section.

Part Five has three chapters that examine quite diverse elements of interconnectedness: Kathleen Adams’ study of the expanding trend toward “danger-zone tourism” in Indonesia and parts of mainland Southeast Asia; Peter Burns’ observations on the various interconnections that frame the relationship among the local, the national, and the global when planning for tourism at the local level in Viet Nam; and Wiendu Nuryanti’s study of Bali as a gateway into other tourism regions in Indonesia.

A concluding chapter by Geoffrey Wall discusses the challenges and opportunities facing tourism in Southeast Asia.

The outstanding feature of this book is the wealth of insights about tourism development in the countries of Southeast Asia, provided by a group of internationally renowned tourism researchers. While most of the book is descriptive (Section Three excepted), its conceptualization around the theme of interconnectedness in a global world ties the many disparate offerings together in a thematically consistent way. The variety of topics and ideas presented by the authors ensures that this book provides the reader with a comprehensive and highly readable account of tourism development and the many connections and interrelationships it fosters between the countries of Southeast Asia.

Trevor H.B. Sofield, Professor of Tourism, University of Queensland, Australia; and Team Leader, ADB Mekong Tourism Development Project, Cambodia and Viet Nam

References
