

GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL

When you hear the word tourism, you might picture autumn foliage, a corn maze, or perhaps a hot beach and a cold drink. Dr. Chantell LaPan, Assistant Professor in the Bryan School's Department of Marketing, Entrepreneurship, Hospitality and Tourism, doesn't quite see it that way. Or, at least, she has dedicated her career to painting a fuller picture of a complex industry.

"It's not really whether tourism is inherently positive or negative on a region or place," she says. "But you begin to see the pressure it puts on residents if too high a percentage of the economic activity relies on tourism."

LaPan earned her PhD from NC State in 2014. For close to a decade, she has covered a variety of topics, from the sociocultural sustainability of gender and tourism to the economic sustainability of rural and agricultural tourism. LaPan's latest work examines the realities of tourism and human trafficking in a book chapter she is cowriting with MEHT Department Head Dr. Merlyn Griffiths and Dr. Channelle James, lecturer and Dean's Fellow for School Climate.

"It's a little bit more critical of structures that keep women in oppressive areas such as human trafficking," she said. Regarding her more feminist research, she explains: "It's bad for women in other places, but rural communities tend to have more traditional values and what we've learned is traditional values don't empower women in ways that make their lives better."

When it comes to things that seem picturesque or traditional – there is such a thing as selling the ideal in tourism, LaPan says. For example, every moment the farmer spends setting up a corn maze is fewer hours spent farming. The notion of getting away from it all is also tied to the reality that vacationing is inherently a pleasure-seeking

activity. In some cases, like at the Super Bowl or World Cup, there is a darker, hedonistic bent going on behind the scenes.

LaPan is excited about the directions her tourism research could take her, but with it comes disheartening topics to tackle, such as assaults and unsanctioned digital surveillance through platforms like Uber and Airbnb. A theme she continues to return to is sustainability – not in the environmental sense but economic and sociocultural. "When things are good for people, when people have sustainable development goals there is more access to equitable work and people can work with dignity," LaPan said.

LaPan encourages people to do their research before booking their next getaway. Who owns what you are doing? Travel agents, LaPan jokes, still exist and can even help with this. "Put your money where your heart is," she says.

Dr. Chantell LaPan
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