

“To succeed, tourism in the community must be planned and managed to improve the quality of life of the residents and to protect the local, natural and cultural environment”

World Tourism Organisation

The travel and tourism industry is “essentially the renting out, for short term lets, of other people’s environments, whether that is a coastline, a city, a mountain range or a rainforest. These products must be kept fresh and unsullied not just for the next day, but for every tomorrow.”

Sir Colin Marshall

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.theinternationalcentreforresponsibletourism.org

Climate Care and Future Forests both run carbon sequestration schemes

Climate Care www.co2.org
Future Forests www.futureforests.com

Tourism Concern is the UK’s only NGO dedicated to campaigning on tourism issues
www.tourismconcern.org.uk

The Centre for Environmentally Responsible Tourism run an award scheme for tour operators
www.c-e-r-t.org

The European Community Network for Environmental Travel and Tourism
www.greenglobe.org/econett

World Tourism Organisation serves as a global forum for tourism policy and issues
www.world-tourism.org

Center Parcs is a leisure operator, with four villages in Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire; Longleat Forest, Wiltshire; Elveden Forest, Suffolk and Oasis Whinfall Forest, Cumbria.
www.centerparcs.co.uk

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*Publication of this paper
has been supported by a
donation from*



HOW CAN YOU TRAVEL RESPONSIBLY?

There are many codes for tourists and tour operators; here are some issues that you might reflect on.

BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

- To get more out of your holiday learn about the destination and its people, consider whether the trip you are planning will really offer you the opportunities you seek to meet with local people and to explore their environment.
- Patronise companies, operators and hoteliers who minimise their negative environmental and other impacts and maximise their positive impacts by, for example, booking locally owned hotels, employing local staff at all levels in the organisation and contributing to conservation.
- Seek out tourism products and services that demonstrate social, environmental and cultural sensitivity and which make a demonstrable economic contribution to conservation and sustainable local livelihoods.
- Consider whether there is anything you can do to reduce the environmental impact of your trip.

WHILE ON HOLIDAY

- Consider how you like to be treated by tourists in your community and reflect on what constitutes appropriate behaviour in a place that may have very different cultural values.
- Consider what local products you are purchasing – is the economic benefit going to the local community, are you encouraging the unsustainable or illegal use of cultural artefacts or plants and animals?
- Can you make a contribution through supporting a local conservation programme or charity?
- Consider whether you can reduce the environmental impact of your visit by being frugal in consuming water and energy.

When you get home share your experiences with others, and tell your operator or agent if you feel that there are ways in which your holiday could have been more sustainable.

CASE STUDY 1: EARTHWATCH

As an environmental charity, Earthwatch is active in supporting research around the world, promoting conservation and running environmental education programmes. Earthwatch’s Volunteer Programme allows people from all walks of life to join scientific research projects as field assistants, giving them a hands-on role and a unique insight into conservation.

Every Earthwatch project needs volunteers in order to be successful. Projects vary enormously, from botanical inventories in African rainforests and research into frogs in Australia, to studies of migratory birds in Kenya. Over 130 projects, in 45 countries, are supported each year, and none could go ahead without the involvement of volunteers.

Internationally, 4,000 people join Earthwatch project teams every year, and over the last 30 years Earthwatch volunteers have contributed over 3,000 man years to environmental research. In addition, because each volunteer makes a financial contribution to join an Earthwatch project, the charity is able to provide the funding the projects need – over its history Earthwatch has provided some £20 million to projects around the world. Earthwatch projects buy their supplies locally, and recruit staff from the country hosting the project. This means that the contribution made by volunteers not only funds research, but also benefits the local economy.

By working on an international project, Earthwatch volunteers have decided to do something very different with their free time and their money. Indeed, because most volunteers use money and time usually set aside for their holidays, their contribution represents ‘new’ money for conservation – money that would not normally be contributed to environmental research.

CASE STUDY 2: CENTER PARCS

Center Parcs has 19 holiday villages around Europe in forest settings. The essence of the Center Parcs concept is to escape from everyday life into a forest environment to enjoy a range of leisure activities integrated into and enhanced by nature.

Center Parcs is widely acknowledged as an exemplar of sustainable tourism. The company has integrated the built environment into the natural forest and has a philosophy of ecologically enhancing the existing environment. It is committed to taking forested sites of low ecological value and to enhance them by introducing a variety of habitats that substantially increase the biodiversity value of its sites.



Making Travel Sustainable

an introduction

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THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The advent of mass tourism has raised a range of concerns about the sustainability of tourism. Initially triggered by the growth in international holidaymaking with the introduction of charter flights in the 1950s, there is now also mounting anxiety about the impacts of domestic tourism. The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) defines a tourist as anyone who spends 24 hours away from home, whether on a business trip or on holiday. However, tour operators and travellers shy away from the word – we prefer to be called travellers or visitors rather than tourists.

The growth of international travel has been staggering:

- there were 25 million international tourist arrivals in 1950
- this had grown to 532 million in 1994
- and is expected to triple to 1.6 billion by 2020.

MISLEADING LABELS

Tour operators market their tours using a range of language designed to present their products as different from, and superior to, mass tourism. These alternatives to mass tourism include responsible tourism, science tourism, ethical tourism, soft-tourism, environmentally friendly travel, adventure travel, low-impact tourism, sustainable tourism, green tourism and ecotourism.

Ecotourism has been the term most widely used and abused as a form of green-wash. As there is no agreed definition, and no means of validating the claims made by companies, the word has been used to describe a bewildering range of products. Ecotourism is used to describe tourism products which do make a significant contribution to conservation, and the communities that bear the costs of living with biodiversity, but also those which are no different from traditional forms of tourism featuring nature.

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INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 discussed sustainability in the context of the triple bottom line of environmental, economic and social sustainability. Echoing the Rio declaration, the WTO and the World Travel and Tourism Council have defined sustainable tourism as meeting the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. The WTO takes the view that all forms of tourism should strive for sustainability – although sectors of the industry and individual companies will aspire to, and achieve, very different levels of sustainability.

The enlightened self-interest argument has considerable support within the industry; there is widespread recognition that companies are dependent on the maintenance of the environment in the destinations for the continued viability of their businesses. There is pressure for all sections of the travel and tourism industry - business travel, cultural tourism, city breaks, sun, sand and sea and nature tourism – to become more sustainable as the industry matures.

Tourism is a private sector business activity, and economic viability is defined primarily in terms of profitability. Destination, activity, price, dates of availability and the unique characteristics of trips all drive consumer decisions. It is also highly fragmented, with each tourist making purchases from a wide variety of businesses, from travel agents to restaurants. This further complicates the potential for coordinated action.

Involvement from charities is rare, though some have designed programmes to capitalise on the varied motives people have for travel: for Earthwatch volunteers, for example, making a contribution, or 'putting something back', is a key part of the motivation to travel, and they are attracted by travel opportunities designed to enable them to work on a wide range of conservation projects. Although not unique to Earthwatch, this form of direct contribution is relatively rare.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Since the Rio Summit the main emphasis has been on environmental sustainability – there has been a whole raft of initiatives in the industry to reduce the environmental impact. Many of these initiatives have been driven by cost cutting imperatives as well as concern for the environment, the most ubiquitous example being the widespread suggestion to guests that they opt not to have clean sheets and towels every day. This has saved the hotels considerable expenditure, and has also reduced water consumption and the volume of detergents discharged into the environment, demonstrating that this is good for the environment and good for business.

TRANSPORT

Transport presents considerable challenges. Infrastructure such as roads, railways, ports and airports all have significant environmental impacts, both in the construction and the operational phases. Cars and aircraft and other environmentally expensive forms of transport use non-renewable resources and cause pollution through increased traffic, congestion, noise and waste emissions. Carbon sequestration schemes are beginning to be developed which offer the industry and the traveller the opportunity to mitigate their environmental impact by planting trees which will remove and fix carbon dioxide. However, other emissions are not reduced by this approach, and fuel energy consumption and pollution are likely to be of increasing concern.

SOCIAL IMPACTS

The impacts on the natural and cultural heritage of the communities which bear the brunt of tourism are of major concern. Tourism can bring economic development and foreign currency earnings, but often there are few benefits for the local communities whose lives are most affected by tourists. For example, traditional arts and crafts may lose their local cultural significance, for as they are mass-produced they may become trivialised. Tourism can instil new community pride but local artists, dancers and singers can be exploited, providing amusement for tourists who have no cultural understanding of what they are seeing. Tourism development can also bring new conflicts between old and young, and land price inflation can dispossess local people.

The scale of the industry is also a major contributory factor: for example, the Peak District in the UK has 22 million visitors a year, and 60,000 trekkers use the trail to the Peruvian mountain citadel of Machu Picchu every year, with a further 240,000 people arriving by bus. In some destinations visitor management programmes are being put in place to limit the damage caused by tourists, and visitors to Machu Picchu, for example, are to be restricted to 500 people per day.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Tourism, if properly managed, can support conservation either financially, through an in-kind contribution, or even more directly through the visitors' activities: Earthwatch volunteers contribute through working as scientists' field assistants in research teams; BTCV volunteers do so by, for example, repairing walls or paths. In fact, visitors contribute whenever the amount they pay in admission or use fees (for hides, accommodation or other services) exceeds the costs of their visit.

PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

The reality, though, is that in most protected landscapes this is not the case, and that visitors are effectively subsidised. In order that visits by relatively affluent visitors are not subsidised by generally less affluent hosts, admission charges and other fees are going to have to be raised significantly. The pay-back schemes being introduced in the Lake District in northern England and elsewhere are one way of tackling the issue. The essential test is re-investment, as the contribution made by the tourists or the tour company needs to be sufficiently large to provide a re-investment in the maintenance of cultural or natural heritage.

THEIR HOMES, OUR HOLIDAYS

The phrase, 'take only photographs, leave only footprints', is often used to describe the ideal tourism scenario. Yet leaving only footprints is not enough. Local communities need to benefit from tourism and to be compensated for the costs of living with the natural and cultural heritage that we want to visit - our use of their heritage generally denies them access to it and imposes costs on them. International and domestic tourists have a range of social, cultural and economic impacts in the destinations, aspects of sustainability which have been less attended to. Tourism Concern's campaign slogan *Their Homes, Our Holidays* captures the essence of the problem.

However, if the industry is well managed locally, if tour operators and tourists take responsibility for their actions, tourism can provide good opportunities for local sustainable development and meet the triple bottom line aspirations of the Rio Summit.