

## **Making Tourism Sustainable – an Introduction**

Tourism is an activity that most of us will enjoy and indulge in at some time in our lives. But how many of us actually think about the impact that holiday/business travel, days out even, often to sensitive destinations, may be having on the environment? Both negative and positive impacts. Below I will introduce some of the key principles of sustainable tourism development which I hope to be relevant, realistic and thought provoking.

Tourism actually accounts for around 10 per cent of the world's economic activity and brings much needed employment to all the destinations that we travel to and visit. 760 million international travellers were recorded in 2004 which resulted in US\$622 billion receipts. Tourism is a huge global and local activity which has grown by 25 per cent in the last 10 years<sup>1</sup> Tourism is predicted to continue to grow for the foreseeable future in all parts of the Globe and in many countries domestic tourism will also continue to grow also.

Big issues are at stake here with climate change now being high on the political agenda. It must not however be forgotten that travel can bring huge economic benefits to people living in some of the poorest countries. It can also, for example, be argued that the wonderful elephants of Africa have only been saved as they bring in high numbers of tourists each year. Higher taxation on air travel might very well have a detrimental impact on these regions.

However, tourism is undoubtedly a contributor to climate change and climate change will impact upon tourism destinations. Some of these impacts are already being felt with less snow fall on mountain resorts, an increase in storms causing beach erosion, coral bleaching and a shortage of water just to name a few.

It is estimated that tourism may be responsible for 5.3 per cent of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, with transport accounting for 90 per cent of this (Gossling, S, 2002). Aviation uses 2-3 per cent of world's fossil fuels and this is increasing yearly<sup>2</sup>

At the same time surveys have shown that with most forms of tourism that tourists are increasingly showing an interest in visiting natural and cultural sites during their holidays and will pay more to support the local environments and communities.

Environmental protection is now a key element for many governments throughout the world as a means to keep on attracting tourists. There are some good examples to be found in the UK, South Africa and parts of South America. By implementing local ecological laws, conservation of natural resources and education of local people tourism in these often remote regions biodiversity has actually benefited from tourism development, when implemented on sustainable principles.

It is important that we insist on governmental and corporate environment and social responsibility when considering a holiday destination. Many companies are now including their social and environmental commitments on their advertising and mission statements. Carbon off setting is now offered on some airlines web sites, controversial as carbon off-setting may be it does demonstrate the heightened awareness of the climate change by the traveller.

Sustainable tourism more commonly known as eco-tourism, or green tourism part of a niche market, should not be a special form of tourism anymore. All forms of tourism should become more sustainable and be based on the principles of sustainable development. Policy makers and local government should be working to promote sustainable tourism when taking into account the opportunities that tourism often brings to local economies and the inhabitants.

The three key pillars to look out for, as advised by UNEP/WTO:

- ✓ Environmental sustainability. Conservation and managing resources, especially those that are not renewable.
- ✓ Social sustainability. Respecting human rights and equal opportunities, a focus on alleviating poverty, an emphasis on local communities and respect of local cultures and avoiding any form of exploitation.
- ✓ Economic sustainability. To generate prosperity at all levels of society and for enterprises to be maintained in the long term.

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[www.sustainabletourism.org.uk](http://www.sustainabletourism.org.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> WTO World Tourism Barometer, June 2005

<sup>2</sup> International Panel on Climate Change, Special Report on Aviation and the Global Atmosphere, 1999