

NATURAL AREA TOURISM: ECOLOGY, IMPACTS AND MANAGEMENT

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By David Newsome, Susan Moore and Ross Dowling. Channel View Publications (Frankfurt Lodge, Clevedon Hall, Victoria Road, Clevedon BS21 7HH, UK. <info@channelviewpublications.com, www.channelviewpublications.com>) 2002, xii+340 pp (figures, tables, bibliography, index) £19.95 Pbk. ISBN 1 853150-24-5

“The world we live in is an exciting place” (p. 1). That is how these three West Australian authors start their book, and their enthusiasm shows throughout the volume. Their central theme is “how to manage tourism in natural areas in a sustainable way while at the time providing tourists with a high quality experience”, and they argue that “natural area tourism is an appropriate vehicle for achieving deeper understanding of the environment in a way that other forms of tourism are not” (backcover).

These themes are addressed in six steps. After a scene-setting introduction, Chapter 2 provides a basic introduction to ecological patterns and processes, with examples relevant to tourism. There are Australian case studies, such as the spread of dieback fungus through Stirling Range in Western Australia (Box 2.3, p. 48), but these are balanced by examples from elsewhere. Figure 2.1, for example, shows ostrich and giraffe rather than emu and kangaroo. The impact of tourists on wildlife receives special mention (pp. 72–77), with examples from Antarctica, Gibraltar, and Peru.

Chapter 3 reviews sources, and types and significance of environmental impacts from tourism and recreation, summarizing worldwide studies up to 2000. Chapter 4 addresses planning for natural areas, examining issues such as stakeholder inclusiveness, concepts such as carrying capacity and acceptable change, and planning models such as ROS/LAC. As the authors note, there have been few case studies of implementation, and “the carrying capacity concept has failed to generate practical visitor use limits” (pp. 154–155).

Chapter 5 examines management strategies and actions, including establishment and design of protected areas, and the significance of international conventions. Classifications of management approaches are summarized in Table 5.2 (p. 200), which illustrates the strong influence of US researchers such as Anderson, Cole, Manning, and Marion in this field. The authors draw a broad distinction between site management and management of tourists. Zoning, however, is treated as overriding both these categories. Site management focuses on infrastructure and hardening, but also “relies on locating use in the more durable parts of the landscape” (p. 197), which might arguably be considered as management of people rather than the natural environment.

Management strategies are divided into regulation of tourist numbers, group size or length of stay, and communication and education. Regulations on equipment and activities are not considered separately, but included under visitor numbers. The same applies to admission fees. A range of relevant and up-to-date examples is given, including a table of management measures and technologies for human waste

disposal (p. 209). Campfires in natural areas, aptly described as “a contested practice” (p. 208), are also considered. Enforcement is mentioned, citing a US study that found that “most people knew what they were supposed to do, but chose to do otherwise” with the only effective deterrent being “the presence of a uniformed employee” (p. 218). The US Leave-No-Trace program also receives a mention. The chapter differentiates between management of tourists and managing the tourism industry. Codes of practice, certification and accreditation, guidelines on best-practice, permitting systems for commercial tour operators, and environmental management systems each receive a brief mention.

Approaches to environmental interpretation are expanded in Chapter 6, which illustrates the elements of good interpretive practice with case studies from Brazil, Indonesia, Uganda, the Congo, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. For example, both orangutan in Indonesia and gorillas in the Congo have suffered significant impacts from tourism, despite interpretive programs.

As a final element, the book turns to monitoring, which as they note “has long been a neglected element of natural area management” (p. 259). Interestingly, the authors note (p. 260) that in contrast to other countries, the numbers and environmental impacts of tourists in national parks have been particularly neglected in Australia. Monitoring is needed to plan and evaluate management measures, to allocate funds, and to provide accountability. The basic components and options in a typical monitoring program are illustrated with examples of campsite monitoring protocols (Table 7.2), lists of impact indicators (Tables 7.4, 7.5), and case studies from Uganda and the United States (Box 7.1, 7.2). Similar information is provided for trails

(pp. 276-281). The chapter also reviews techniques for monitoring tourist numbers, characteristics, activities, and satisfaction. Case studies are presented from Borneo, Australia, the United States, though with a particular emphasis on Western Australia.

In conclusion, the authors argue that tourism can play an important role in sustainable development, but that this “will never be fully realized until tourism developers, planners, and managers embrace an understanding of ecology and its importance to humanity” (p. 301). As the authors say quite explicitly,

[t]his is the principal message of this text ... an understanding of ecology predetermines the success of tourism in natural areas ... impacts occur wherever tourism takes place in natural areas ... the sources of impacts are numerous and include infrastructure development and tourism activities in relation to transport, accommodations and attractions ... some environments are inherently more fragile than others ... it is often rare and endangered species or particularly fragile habitats which are attractive for tourists ... impacts can be imperceptively cumulative ... an understanding of the cause and types of environmental impacts caused by tourism is essential in the planning, development and management of natural area tourism” (p. 302).

One hopes that tourism organizations and research funding agencies pay heed to these words of wisdom. The authors also note, “the adoption of the principles of sustainable development to tourism has become widely accepted as embracing environmental, cultural and

economic elements. However, more often than not, it has been the economic component only that has been championed, leaving the other two elements languishing under a lip service mentality” (p. 303), an accurate position.

As is no doubt clear from the above, this reviewer is in strong agreement with the main messages of this book. In addition, the structure is logical, the treatment balanced, the content solid, the prose readable, and the references up to date. There are two shortcomings. The first is that the overview of the tourism industry included in the Introduction might have been better presented as a separate chapter, complementary to the overview of ecology in chapter 2. The second is that some topics, such as the section on environmental management systems, are treated in a rather brief and cursory manner. This is a minor quibble, however, given the breadth and range of topics covered in a little over 300 pages. Overall, this will be an excellent textbook for undergraduate students in tourism, geography, environmental science and management, and park and recreation planning.

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