

TOURISM, RECREATION AND SUSTAINABILITY:

Linking Culture and the Environment

Edited by Stephen McCool and R. Neil Moisey. CAB International
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The School of Forestry at the University of Montana–Missoula has long been an exemplary model of “multiple use”, with a tourism group as active as its timber researchers. Stephen McCool and Neil Moisey are among that group’s most prolific authors; they have compiled, in this volume, 16 case studies from 23 colleagues from the United States, Canada, Australia, Denmark, and the United Kingdom. The book’s basic premise is that “tourism, particularly that which is based upon a region’s natural and cultural heritage, contains both the promises of a better quality of life and protection of the region’s heritage, as well as numerous pitfalls” (p. xi). There are six chapters on integrating environmental and social concerns in tourism; six on society, recreation, and sustainable tourism; and five on sustainable tourism development. The case studies are taken from around the world, including Africa, Latin America, the Arctic, Asia, Europe, and North America.

The editors open the volume with a 15-page introduction to sustainable tourism, examining meanings, context, indicators, planning, and knowledge. They argue that sustainable tourism is a “guiding fiction”, and that “tourism is no longer the benign economic development tool that the boosterism of the past purported it to be” (pp. 2–3). They note that “tourism agencies are generally involved solely in promotion activities”, and that this often becomes “unbridled boosterism, with few acknowledgements of tourism’s negative social and environmental consequences”. As it is, “one agency may

promote protected areas as a tourism destination, while another is responsible for managing the tourists and their impacts when they arrive” (p. 6). These observations do indeed apply worldwide, and form a major barrier to the potential for tourism as a tool in sustainable development. McCool and Moisey also argue, as others have before, that sustainable tourism is a rather meaningless term unless quantitative indicators can be defined to assess progress. They note that planning and development commonly involve so-called “messy situations, where goals conflict or compete” (p. 9). They also draw attention to the weakness of “carrying capacity” approaches (p. 9).

Few of the case study chapters address these issues specifically, and different chapters appeal to different readers, but each of them contains solid and interesting contributions to the sustainable tourism literature. The central significance of environmental impacts and management in any consideration of sustainability is established at the outset, in a review chapter on recreation ecology by Yu-Fai Leung, Jeff Marion and David Fennell. Chad Dawson examines the place of ecotourism in a tourism opportunity spectrum. Dimitri Ioannides looks at tourism lifecycles in the Mediterranean, noting the routine hypocrisy of government ministers who talk green while approving, and indeed promoting, large-scale coastal tourism developments. Simon Evans notes the extreme crowding of national parks in the United Kingdom and argues that, to alleviate this pressure, public forests should be used for public recreation, and that new community forests should be created around urban fringes. This would allow the national parks to fulfill their primary role of environmental protection. This is indeed a logical suggestion, and one that is applicable in many other countries.

Judith Meyer reviews contentious issues past and present in Yellowstone National Park, such as the management of bears, bison, fires, snowmobiles, and hot springs. Once a wild place where tourists could watch wildlife and wade in warm water, Yellowstone has become a seething mass of self-drive tourists. Even a decade ago, it was still peaceful in winter, but as Meyer notes, “now those who come to the park expecting solitude and silence find crowds of people and the roar of snowmobiles” (p. 97). Attempts by the

National Parks Service to control these impacts are constantly thwarted by tourism interests that want to expand winter tourism to extend their income throughout the year.

The second part of this book emphasizes community involvement in tourism, and opens with case studies from Peru, Honduras, and rural USA. The details are different, but each makes very interesting reading, and there are a surprising number of similarities. The fourth chapter focuses on destination marketing, and the fifth on casinos. The final chapter in this section examines the role of organizations that promote “volunteering for serious leisure” (p. 241). The third section of the volume focuses on applications, with case studies from the Arctic, Indonesia, and Canada. The Indonesian study, at Tangkoko Duasudara Nature Reserve, is a well-known one. The Danish study is based on a recent PhD dissertation; and the Canadian study, from Lake Superior, reports results from six community forums held in late 1997.

The concluding chapter revisits the questions outlined in the introduction, asking again whether sustainable tourism is a guiding fiction or a realistic endstate (p. 345) and re-emphasizes the need for indicators and the importance of public participation. Wisely, in view of the diversity of views and cases presented, the editors do not attempt to reach any single overriding conclusion, so there is no take-home message. As the editors remark, “the book is not meant to be read from beginning to end” (p. vii). The contributions they have compiled, both old and new, however, are a valuable addition to the panoply of recent literature on sustainable tourism, and well worth digging into for ideas as well as references.

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