

Geotourism: The Tourism of Geology and Landscape

18

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 Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ
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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

18 The future of geotourism: where to from here?

Ross Dowling and David Newsome

Introduction

Geotourism is on the rise the world over. Governments, tourism businesses, geological organizations, community groups, conservationists, NGOs, and individuals are seeking a future for the protection of our geological heritage and community advancement through sustainable tourism development. Countries as far apart as New Zealand and Iceland, USA and China, are getting involved and lifting our knowledge on geology and landscape, through interpretation and education. The future is exciting for geotourism as evidenced by the increased interest in geological awareness, the phenomenal rise of the Geopark Movement, and the rising interest in geotourism as a tool for conservation of our geoheritage.

But whilst in its infancy, geotourism has a number of issues to address as part of its evolving future. They include:

1. The need for a uniformly accepted definition of geotourism
2. The importance of geoheritage conservation
3. Understanding geotourism's stakeholders
4. The growth of geotourism's attractions and products
5. The importance of risk management at geotourism sites
6. Learning more about geotourists
7. The need for geotourism education
8. The importance of 'connection' in interpretation
9. The emerging role of technology in geotourism
10. Capitalizing on the power of the Global Geoparks brand

1. The need for a uniformly accepted definition of geotourism

As stated in our introduction to this book, geotourism is a distinct subsector of natural area tourism firmly entrenched in 'geological' tourism. We do not support the view of *National Geographic* that geotourism is 'geographic' tourism. From our extensive travels around the world attending geotourism and/or geopark conferences and observations in the field, it is clearly evident to us that geotourism is universally understood as 'geological' in nature and not 'geographically' oriented. It is clear that the earliest definition of geotourism was made by the English geological historian Dr Thomas Hose in a 1995 article in the journal *Environmental Interpretation*. Under the heading 'Selling the

story of Britain's stone' he discussed the need for this new niche form of tourism offering both a new packaged tourism product and the potential to foster geoheritage. Under a section of his paper entitled 'Geotourism' he stated that it is:

The provision of interpretive and service facilities to enable tourists to acquire knowledge and understanding of the geology and geomorphology of a site (including its contribution to the development of the Earth sciences) beyond the level of mere aesthetic appreciation.

(Hose, 1995: 17)

It was a development of a working definition for research (Hose, 1994: 2) informally undertaken for English Nature on 'site-specific geological interpretation' at Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and subsequently developed (Hose, 1996) and refined (Hose, 2000). Thus we wish to clearly draw a line in the sand to stop the 'geologic' versus 'geographic' confusion and reemphasize that is only the *geologic* character of geotourism that is referred to:

1. In the first recorded definition of geotourism (Hose, 1995) as later further developed by Hose (1996) and Hose (2000).
2. In the first comprehensive book on the subject *Geotourism* (Dowling and Newsome, 2006).
3. By UNESCO in the 'Global Geoparks Network' (UNESCO, 2006)
4. During the 'Inaugural Global Geotourism Conference' held in Western Australia in August 2008 when over 220 delegates from 36 countries discussed geotourism as 'geologic tourism' (Dowling and Newsome, 2008).

Now taking all of the definitions into account, we have suggested that the generally accepted definition of geotourism at the start of 2010 is:

Geotourism is a form of natural area tourism that specifically focuses on geology and landscape. It promotes tourism to geosites and the conservation of geo-diversity and an understanding of earth sciences through appreciation and learning. This is achieved through independent visits to geological features, use of geo-trails and view points, guided tours, geo-activities and patronage of geosite visitor centres.

Thus the character of geotourism is such that it:

1. Is geologically based and can occur in either natural, rural or urban environments
2. Fosters geoheritage conservation through appropriate sustainability measures
3. Advances sound geological understanding through interpretation and education
4. Generates tourist or visitor satisfaction.

This definition involves all of the wider aspects of tourism activity as geotourism requires transport, access, accommodation and services, trained staff, planning and management and reiterates that stakeholders in geotourism can include investors, government planners, environmental groups and universities (Dowling, 2009).

Taking the above themes further is central to the advancement of geotourism over the next five to ten years.

Chapter extract

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