

# Tourism Research: A 20-20 Vision



**Edited by**

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## Tourism research in Latin America: past and future challenges

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

# 11 Tourism research in Latin America: past and future challenges

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## Introduction

During the last 20 years, great changes have taken place in the field of tourism research in Latin America, as evidenced in the scientific journal of tourism research for which we are responsible, *Estudios y Perspectivas en Turismo*. For example, 20 years ago, tourism research was not considered to be relevant, and no support from the national agencies linked to science and technological development like CONICET (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas), Argentina, or CNPq (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico), Brazil, was granted to research projects related to tourism. However, as the activity has evolved over the years, and with tourism figuring on the agenda of a number of leading researchers from multiple different areas of studies, the situation has changed. Many experts have attempted to explain this change in circumstances, arguing that, hitherto, negative prejudices abounded in scientific circles with respect to the ‘frivolity’ of tourism, an activity ‘indulged in’ by the favoured few, with high incomes and low-weighted work schedules. This was the philosophy embodied in Veblen’s (1992) *Theory of the Leisure Class*, a theory which demoted the area from the echelons of higher studies, rendering tourism unworthy of national sponsorship, on account of its elitist nature. In Argentina, Juan José Sebreli (1984: 148), considered tourism to be a new means of ‘subtle’ oppression where the ‘whip’ was replaced by the ‘sugar’ of luxury leisure time, a useful tool with which dictatorial governments could rule over a specific society. Practical experiences have also been significant in consolidating the importance of subjects linked to open-air activities, such as tourism, which previously had been viewed as a phenomenon unworthy of the attention of social scientists (see Hiernaux Nicolás, 2000).

This chapter aims to address this situation, making reference to *Estudios y Perspectivas en Turismo*, a Latin American academic journal on tourism, published uninterruptedly for the last 20 years. We work on the assumption that the articles published in the journal over the last two decades are representative of the evolution of the Latin American tourism literature. The only other tourism journal in the

region with a comparable history is *Turismo em Análise*, a Brazilian rather than Latin American review, published in Portuguese. Articles in *Estudios y Perspectivas en Turismo* reflect both the positive interests of tourism, as well as the negative aspects acknowledged as affecting tourism (considered in the broadest possible sense, that is, not only an economic activity, but a wide-ranging social practice) such as: management, planning, working conditions and the availability of human resources, amongst others.

## Tourism caught in a positive and negative net

It is common knowledge that after the Second World War, tourism began to be viewed as an activity that could contribute towards development at an international level, where the various independent concerns and issues of countries could find common solutions.

Working on the basis of the model imported from Spain, the less-developed countries, especially in Latin America, foresaw that tourism in general, and international tourism in particular, could be the way to gain the foreign investment with which to finance their industrial development (which, at the end of the day, was what they considered to be the only true driver of economic development). Tourism was also considered, on a complementary level, to be a possible strategy for regional development, a way to eliminate the marked differences which existed in the Latin American countries, since it was largely the poorer regions, unblemished by development, which offered the largest amount of tourist resources, thereby creating employment in these areas, together with economic growth (Schlüter and Winter, 1993).

Tourism, thus, was seen in Latin America as a development tool (Schlüter, 1992). Various different tourism development plans and projects were proposed in all countries, some of which were carried out with clear economic objectives, and evaluated from a purely economic perspective. Most of these projects focused on the need to justify investment by measuring the hypothetical profits to be made, rather than centring on whether the overall results of the plan had been achieved. The first such strongly promoted developments involved 'integrated tourism centres', whose favoured resource was the 'sun, sand, sea' triad. 'Integrated' meant that even the unexpected was foreseen, taking into account the region's environmental, economic, social and cultural factors. The tourism centres of Cancun (Mexico) and Puerto Plata (Dominican Republic) are the clearest examples of such resorts in Latin America (Schlüter, 1998: 218). Countries not favoured with beaches to attract international tourism developed their cultural resources, a good example being the UNESCO-Peru Cultural and Tourism Plan, known as the COPESCO project. Its aim was to expand agriculture, the base economy of the Cuzco-Puno region, and protect the Inca archaeological sites. International agencies also invested in developing ecotourism in those countries with outstanding natural resources. Although attempts were made in many countries, particularly Brazil, which has the Amazon basin and the

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