6 Coastal Tourism and the Ocean Fringe

This focus of this book is on the marine environment, but one cannot understand the impact of tourism on the marine environment without looking at the ocean fringe, the interface between the land and the ocean. In this chapter we will concentrate on how things that happen on land in relation to tourism impact on the marine environment. However, it is also important to note that this relationship is two-way and that tourism on land is affected by the ocean in terms of coastal erosion, for example, as well as being impacted by changes in the temperature of sea water and rising sea levels.

When we discuss the ocean fringe in this chapter we are going to be focused upon the area of land and sea which encompasses the following;

■ The intertidal zone which is *the seashore which is covered during high tide and exposed during low tide, revealing a unique biome* (www.biologydictionary.net, 2019). This is where beach-based activities such as swimming, surfing, shore fishing and parasailing are to be found.

■ Inshore waters, the area of sea close to shore, perhaps extending a few kilometres beyond the shoreline. This is the zone in which marine activities such as sailing and boat fishing take place.

■ Coastal settlements along the shoreline including resorts, hotels, restaurants and transport infrastructure which is located on or close to the shoreline.

In other words, we are focusing on that zone which represents the interface between the natural marine environment and human activity. Since the earliest days of modern tourism this interface between land and sea has been at the heart of the tourist experience. An interesting overview of the historic evolution of coastal tourism and its impacts was offered by Gormsen in 1997.

It all began, in Europe at least, with the early sea bathers, cautiously immersing themselves in the sea but staying only a few metres from the beach. It included people sun-bathing on the beach when the tide went out and looking in the rock pools left by the receding tide to spot minute examples of marine wildlife. And, it involved walking along the beach or walking to the cliff tops to admire the views of the wild ocean.

Over time infrastructure grew up to accommodate those who loved vacationing by the sea, and this included hotels, restaurants, amusement parks and attractive promenades.

Until the twentieth century this form of tourism was primarily limited to Europe and parts of the USA. From the mid twentieth century, coastal resort tourism was at the forefront of the rise of mass tourism which started in Europe, but such tourism is now to be found across the world, from Mozambique to Rio de Janeiro, Bondi Beach in Sydney to the Spanish Costas. At first, most such mass tourism was based in resorts which evolved from existing fishing villages such as Benidorm in Spain. Infrastructure such as hotels grew to meet growing demand over time, until tourism came to be the dominant or even the only real industry in the place. At the same time, new and more sophisticated leisure activities were developed to exploit beaches and the sea, including parasailing, jet-skiing, sailing, and sea angling from boats. These sometimes required specialist infrastructure which had an impact on the marine environment, most notably marinas. In recent decades we have seen an increase in marine-based adventure sports and more active forms of marine leisure such as scuba-diving, wild swimming and coasteering.

As governments saw the potential economic benefits of tourism, more and more of them have sought to gain a share of this lucrative business as a matter of urgency. Instead of waiting for organic change and individual entrepreneurs to transform sleepy fishing villages into lively tourist destinations, they have taken it upon themselves to create purpose-built destinations, such as those developed on the coast of Languedoc in France in the 1970s. It is therefore interesting to note that 20 years ago the French government commissioned a major report looking at the impacts of tourism, leisure and sport on marine flora and fauna (Bellan and Bellan-Santini, 2001)

Elsewhere existing settlements best known as commercial ports were transformed very quickly into major tourist destinations through huge investment. Dubai is perhaps the best example of this, but there are examples in many parts of the world including Tunisia and Egypt. Fifteen years ago, Shaalan stated that '*many beach resorts are now in operation and there are still hundreds to be constructed. However, previous tourism development in Egypt has resulted in a series of negative environmental impacts.*' (Shaalan, 2005) In existing coastal small-scale tourist destinations we have seen the construction of major new resort complexes, which are much larger than traditional coastal destination hotels. They also tend to offer marine leisure activities that have potentially negative impacts on the marine environment. Some purpose-developed destinations and resort complexes were better designed than others and it is clear that some of them were developed in ways that took little or no account of their potential impact on the marine environment.

And as if that was not enough we have also seen, in the past 25 years, the development of a number of new airports, to meet the demands of growing tourist numbers, that have had impacts on marine environments, usually due to land being 'reclaimed' from the ocean to create the site of the airport. Examples of this include the new international airport built for Hong Kong on Chep Lak Kok island and Kansai International Airport in Japan. Tourism destinations and resort complexes have also at times have also expanded by 'reclaiming' land from the sea. The most dramatic example of this to date is undoubtedly The Palm Jumeirah development in Dubai, on which there are large hotels, apartments, restaurants and marina berths. Other versions of the same phenomenon are now to be found in both Qatar and Bahrain. Perhaps the most amazing example of an artificial island developed for the purposes of tourism is Thilafushi in the Maldives. This island was created for one single purpose, namely as a dump for garbage, most of which is due to tourism!

So, we have seen that our use of the ocean fringe by tourism increasingly involves larger-scale and more radical projects and that this is being seen in more and more countries as destinations and resort operators seek to compete with those destinations and operators that are seen as success stories.

In the rest of this chapter we will look at how tourism on the ocean fringe impacts on the marine environment.

The main interactions between coastal tourism, the ocean fringe, and the marine environment

There are four main ways in which tourism in and around the ocean fringe impacts the marine environment and these are illustrated in Figure 6.1
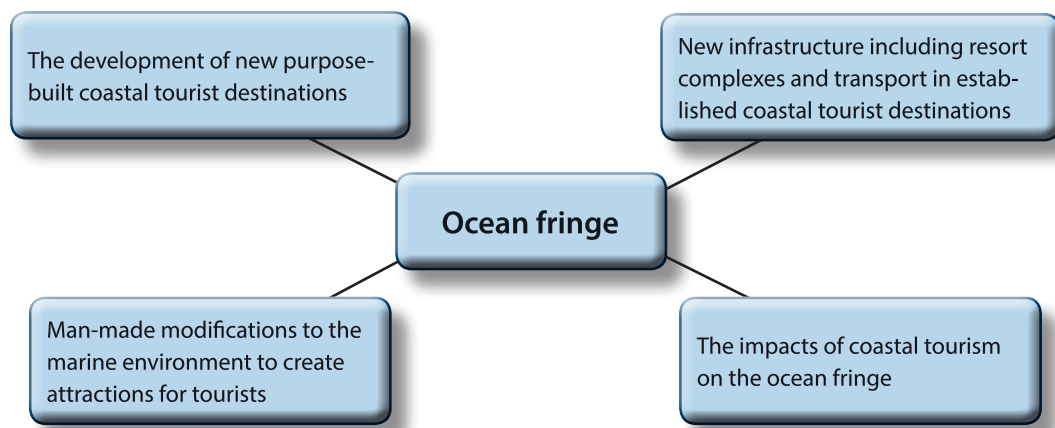

Figure 6.1: The key interactions between coastal tourism, the ocean fringe, and the marine environment