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Concluding Remarks

I hope that by now you can see that ‘sustainability’, a deceptively simple word, is a journey itself. The guiding principles of sustainability are to strategically plan using a holistic and adaptive approach; preserve essential ecological processes as well as protect human heritage and biodiversity; develop in a way that sustains productivity over the long-term for all generations; and achieve a better balance of fairness and opportunity between nations. No small task and one that defies our current business-as-usual approach.

According to the UNWTO, the end goal for sustainable tourism as a sector is to “take full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”. It’s a constant process of measuring your impacts, adjusting your practices, working with stakeholders and supply chains, keeping abreast of sustainability-oriented innovations, and scanning your social, technological, environmental, economic and political environments to be able to manage the changes that are inevitably coming your way. In this way, we move from linear thinking to a more systems-based approach that sees tourism as part of a wider, complex whole.

Sustainable tourism is also a structural issue. Our focus on economic growth through consumption has led to what Pope Francis has called our ‘throwaway culture’. It affects production mechanisms as much as it does the service sector and experiences themselves. When was the last time you stopped to really savour a travel experience once you returned home? Or did you immediately start looking for the next experience? Do you revisit those photos posted on social media or have they drowned in a tidal wave of the newest best thing?

Many tourism academics will argue that sustainable tourism is not achievable, that the rhetoric never matches reality (e.g. Buckley, 2012), and that the challenges are too big. And to some extent this is true; Chapter 2 presented seven challenges that impede the execution of sustainable tourism. Several of these require the support of government and other stakeholders to shift tourism to a more sustainable state, e.g. the private/public sector nature of tourism, integrating sustainable practices across the various scales at which tourism operates, as well as the need for local, context-based, yet multi-disciplinary knowledge.

Solving these requires the type of planning, governance partnerships and knowledge networks covered in Chapters 4 and 5. It is essential for each destination, attraction and business to have its own sustainability plan. The WTO/UNEP (2005) published a guide to making tourism more sustainable based on three guiding principles:

- 1 Understanding tourism as part of a wider system and engaging with the relevant stakeholders in that system,
- 2 Adopting a lifecycle approach for all tourism products and services and wherever possible start to engage with circular economies, and
- 3 Continuing to monitor your efforts within a broader STEEP context.

These are all ideas that have echoed throughout the book.

Fortunately a number of umbrella organisations exist that offer resources for us to build our networks and our knowledge of sustainable tourism. We are definitely not being asked to reinvent the wheel on our own.

- The UNWTO One Planet Program (<http://sdt.unwto.org/members-one-planet-stp>) provides a number of good resources for better understanding best practice in sustainable tourism.
- The World Travel and Tourism Council (<https://www.wttc.org/priorities/sustainable-growth/>) also has a page dedicated to sustainable growth.
- UNEP has also offered a report and other useful material on making tourism part of the Green Economy (http://www.greengrowthknowledge.org/sites/default/files/downloads/resource/Tourism_in_the_GE_%20UNWTO-UNEP.pdf).
- UNESCO also offers a set of resources targeted at tourism attractions which hold World Heritage Listed status for their outstanding universal cultural and natural heritage values. (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/>)

It is true, however, that a strong regulatory framework for sustainable tourism development is still lacking. While Chapter 4 presented the many declarations exist, e.g. *Manila Declaration on the Social Impact of Tourism* (1997), *Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism* (2002), the 2007 *Davos Declaration on tourism and climate change*, the *Buenos Aires Declaration on tourism and the illegal Wildlife Trade* (2018), as well as other broader declarations that protect communities and ecosystems and wildlife (e.g. the Human Rights declaration, CITES, RAMSAR).

On balance, it would seem that these declarations rarely hold much sway in the face of the 'Big End of Town', as the on-going legal fight with Australia's state and federal governments over Adani's proposed coal mine in 2018 and ensuing impacts on one of the seven natural wonders of the world, the Great Barrier Reef, would attest to. This is where legal frameworks, such as the ones put forward by the Rights of Nature movement, might soon have the biggest impact on sustainability in sectors such as tourism.