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## The Tourism Industry and the Marine Environment

Throughout this book we have been looking, primarily, at the negative impacts of tourism on the marine environment. It would appear reasonable to lay the blame for this at the door of the tourism industry, which facilitates the vacations that cause this harm and makes money from exploiting the marine environment and the other natural resources of tourist destinations around the world. However, things are not always that simple, as we will see in this chapter. For in tourism, and certainly land-based tourism, it has often been the tourism industry itself, and particularly the tour operation sector, which has often been leading the way on responsible tourism, often with little encouragement from the tourists themselves and usually no government regulation forcing them to act. Their motives may not have been altruistic but, nevertheless, they have taken action on a number of fronts, while events like the Responsible Tourism Days at World Travel Market in London have sought to share good practice around the tourism industry.

Despite the examples of good practice, though, it is far to say that the industry has paid far less attention to the oceans than it has to the impacts of tourism on land. In relation to the oceans, there are three main areas of concern, as follows:

- The tourism industry is a significant contributor to global warming due to the emissions from air travel and the leisure use of private cars. This is having a direct impact on the health of our oceans through increases in sea temperatures and rising sea levels.
- The cruise sector is having a negative impact on the oceans and the sector has grown steadily and has launched ever larger ships. Unlike the tour operation and hospitality sectors, the cruise operators, in general, have been slow to acknowledge their impact on the marine environment, and action to tackle the effects of cruising on the oceans has been disappointingly limited to date.
- In coastal tourist destinations, tourism continues to harm the marine environment, largely as a result of poorly managed marine leisure activities, beach

nourishment, de-salination and damaging construction projects, including the development of artificial islands as sites for hotels and airports.

It is vital that the whole tourism industry becomes more responsible in the way it manages its impacts on the marine environment, but it cannot do this alone. Tourists need to acknowledge the need to change their behaviour too, so they stop flying so often and so far, although this will adversely affect airlines and destinations that rely on tourists arriving by air. We also need tourists to start recognising, and abstaining from, those leisure activities which have a harmful impact on the marine environment, or at least practicing them more responsibly. And we need local and central government to be more willing to regulate tourism and more importantly perhaps, be more committed to enforcing the regulations.

I hope the reader will forgive me if I continues this chapter with two short sections that are based on an old British saying and an old movie title respectively! I believe that they are an idea way to raise two important issues.

## ■ **Protecting the goose and the golden egg**

There is an old British saying, which has an equivalent in many other cultures, that you should not 'kill the goose that lays the golden egg'. The meaning is clear and in the case of tourism, the goose is the environment and the places that motivate tourists to make trips, and the golden egg is the business and income that tourism brings. In the context of this book, the saying is most apt because much of the international tourism industry is dependent on the oceans of the world. Without the sea there is no cruise industry, and without healthy oceans there will be far fewer seaside vacations and less spending on marine leisure activities. The tourism industry has a vested interest in protecting the oceans and minimising their negative impacts on the marine environment. This should motivate it to be at the forefront of action to protect the well-being of the world's oceans.

## ■ **The good, the bad and the ugly**

I believe that this 1960s movie title sums up, nicely, the range of approaches and attitudes towards the health of our oceans taken by different tourism businesses around the world. Some are the 'good guys', aware of the issues and trying to take effective action in their desire 'to do the right thing'. Others make bad choices and do things which harm the marine environment, but this may often be due to a lack of awareness of the issues and alternative ways of working, rather than an uncaring attitude or ruthless pursuit of profit. But then there is the 'ugly', those companies that do not care what impacts their activities have on the marine environment, providing they are making money. And, there are also the corrupt politicians who turn a blind eye to bad practices and support irresponsible development projects in return for payments and favours.

## The contribution of the global tourism industry towards global warming

While there are differences of opinion over the impact of travel and tourism on global warming, and thus on sea water temperatures and rising sea levels, no one suggests that it is not significant. The UN World Tourism Organisation, an organisation that exists to support tourism, claims that tourism as a whole contributes around 5% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of which the majority come from transport (www.sdt.unwto.org, 2019). Meanwhile, an article in the *Independent* newspaper in the UK in 2018, quoting recent research, suggested that tourism was responsible for around 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions (www.independent.co.uk, 2018). Everyone seems agreed that air travel is the main culprit, but other forms of transport and the hospitality sector also make a significant contribution. Furthermore, currently, tourism is continuing to grow worldwide and there seems little prospect in the short term of major technological advances substantially reducing the carbon footprint of air travel.

Umair Irfan wrote an article on the Vox website in January 2019 that made some interesting observations about air travel, particularly in the USA. Using data reported by Atmosfair he suggested that air travel alone might be contributing up to 4.7% of global warming on its own. The article also reminded readers that air travel generates pollutants in addition to CO<sub>2</sub> that contribute to global warming including nitrous gases, soot, water vapour, sulphate and particles. It also provided a league table of the carbon emissions of different airlines, based on Atmosfair data. (www.vox.com, 2019). The Vox article drew attention to the fact that the emissions of newer aircraft are less than those of older aircraft, due to developments in engine and fuel technology, so they are preferable, but they still generate substantial quantities of harmful emissions.

In Europe in particular at the time of writing we are seeing 'flight-shaming', an anti-flying movement that originated in Sweden to encourage people to take fewer flights and take the train instead. While this is a perfectly viable approach in most of Europe, it is not possible for many of the world's most popular destinations, in Asia, Africa, and Caribbean and Indian Ocean islands, for example, which are reliant on tourists taking lengthy flights from their main source markets. Many of these places are in poorer countries and they are heavily dependent on tourism, so any reduction will have severe consequences for their local economies.

Some people try to find a compromise solution through carbon offsetting whereby the carbon emissions of an individual air passenger can be calculated and monetised as a donation the tourist makes on top of their ticket price that allows trees to be planted, or other relevant activities to be undertaken to 'offset' the carbon emissions from the flight. A number of airlines now offer this option,