

Why Travel?

Tourism



Introduction

Tourism, or the commercial development of short-term personal travel to places of interest, has a long pedigree. The Romans were one of the first to create leisure resorts for tourists at such places as Baiae in Italy and Baile Herculane on the Danube. Today, the commercial importance of tourism and travel is such that it is estimated to contribute 10% of global GDP: a percentage that is growing. The impacts of tourist travel can be both beneficial and negative, and changing trends in tourism are now emerging.



*For my part, I travel not to go anywhere,
but to go. I travel for travel's sake.
The great affair is to move.*

Robert Louis Stephenson, Travels with a Donkey (1879)

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*We travel not for trafficking alone:
By hotter winds our fiery hearts are fanned.
For lust of knowing what should not be known
We take the golden road to Samarkand.*

James Elroy Flecker, Hassan (1922)

*The major occupation of Western civilisation seems to be to go some place else...
Travel should be adding to people's life experience but I wonder if they aren't simply
fleeing from experience. Some of them are literally in flight from consideration of anything
that means anything. Especially for wealthy people, every moment has to be occupied
with not being where they are.*

Arthur Miller, in The Times, 4th July 2000

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Key Aspects

Tourism as self-discovery

Why do we travel on holiday? One of the most powerful explanations is that the motive is to escape our everyday lives: by removing ourselves from our daily routines we seek invigoration, relaxation or therapy. The distance required to achieve this has changed according to individual taste and over time. While Bath and Harrogate were considered long treks from London in the eighteenth century, today one can reach Australia in similar journey times. Sometimes escape is found by lying on a beach surrounded by people; others seek escape by travelling into the wilderness. The ability to escape is becoming increasingly harder as technology, including mobile phones and tablets, keeps us connected to our everyday lives even when far away.

Tourism as leisure and recreation

The rise of mass tourism has been associated with the growing leisure time of people in advanced economies. After the second world war, package tours developed in response for the desire of families to use their leave to travel to places in the sun. Today, longer-distance and ever more exotic options are available for those with time and money to spend.

The way we spend our leisure time has also become linked with status and identity. Where we travel says something about us and our view of the world; hence the desirability of destinations changes according to fashions, tastes, and social attitudes. What was exotic in the 1960s is no longer so today, and some go to great effort to escape 'tourist hotspots'.

Sustainable tourism:

The boom in long-distance tourist travel has contributed significantly to the rise in global carbon emissions and to local environmental damage. As a result there has been an increasing emphasis on the ethical complications of tourism. Lower-carbon travel choices are now increasingly promoted, as well as local and short-distance destinations for holidays.

Tourism can provide a much needed boost to local economies, especially in remote and rural areas where commerce and industry are absent. On the other hand, it can put at risk the local culture and heritage: as far back as the early 19th century Wordsworth complained about the effect of the masses arriving on 'cheap trains' at Windemere on the heritage of the Lake District. In some places caps have been placed on the numbers of tourists and sustainable tourism is promoted instead as an ethical travel choice.

Practical Implications

- The importance of foreign travel in wealthy societies has for some time been enshrined in the middle-class pursuit of the Gap Year as rite of passage and backpacking culture. There are signs that the popularity of this is changing as employment becomes increasingly scarce for young people in the developed world.
- Policy makers should be aware of the rise of 'dark tourism', where there is an interest in murder and death, such as visits to concentration camps, or sites of genocide: a trend that has been identified by Richard Sharpley. 'Sin tourism', for the purposes of gambling, sex or violence, is often discreet, but each has developed significant tourist industries.
- The question of the sustainability of tourism is attracting more attention. Eco-tourism, volunteering or slow-tourism, each cater for a desire to cause less damage when travelling. There is also demand for 'authenticity' in travel, leading in some cases to the rise of 'slum tourism' to places such as the favelas of Brazil. Policy makers must consider how to cope with the projected explosion in tourism as the middle classes grow in Asia.

Further Reading/Resources

- John Urry & Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (2012)
Updated version of the classic text on the phenomenon of modern tourism.
- Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976)
Scholarly examination of the social and class dimensions of tourism
- Alex Garland, *The Beach* (1996)
Fictional exploration of the dysfunctional side of tourism
- Tony Perrottet, *Route 66 A.D.: On the Trail of Ancient Roman Tourists* (2002)
Entertaining insight into the first society to embrace tourism

Key Questions

- Can Tourism ever be truly sustainable?
- Will technology increase or diminish the demand for tourism?



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