

# Assess the socio-economic impacts of tourism in east africa

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Kenya attracts about 780, 000 tourists per annum because of its prolific wildlife, white sandy beaches and hot climate. Tourism in Kenya is worth an estimated \$500 million a year, Kenya's principal tourist resources are the wildlife rich savannah grasslands and its beautiful beaches and coral reefs. Tourism really started to grow in the 1980s with the development of mass transit such as the Boeing 707. Tourists also flock to sample a culture which is perceived as completely different from Western culture, however the socio-economic gains of tourism are not without their cost.

By the late 1980s tourism was Kenya's main earner, worth 43% of its income in 1990. There are two sides to the coin regarding tourism, its detractors describe it as a form of economic colonialism, while its promoters claim that it raises the standard of living for people and puts money back into the communities. In Kenya its main primary resources are its huge number of national parks (there are more than 50) which are intended both to promote tourism and to manage and maintain the existing environment.

The parks help to protect the animals and fragile ecosystems from being totally over run by tourists and poachers, today no one is allowed to kill any of the animals in the park, however the welfare of the animals is still be affected indirectly by tourism. The creation of the parks caused the native people, such as the Maasai, to be forced from the parks as no one was allowed to live in them. Tourists stay either in tents in the park or in hotels or villages on the outskirts of the park.

Minibus safari trips take tourists round the park and let them view the animals. The creation of these parks has had a large impact on the people

living in them, both socially and economically. The Maasai and other such tribes now have to live on the outskirts of the parks away from their traditional grazing lands and find it harder to live a nomadic lifestyle. The Kenyan government has a policy stating that one quarter of the income from tourism sites should go back into the local communities.

This policy is not being enforced sufficiently though and the actual amount that the indigenous tribes receive is estimated to be as low as 2%. The Maasai find themselves having to sell trinkets and knick-knacks to tourists in order to generate an income. An estimated 70% of the people employed in the safari parks are not Maasai. Increased tourism to traditional Maasai villages has led to traditional dances and rituals being turned into cabaret for tourists eager to sample another culture.

This can have the effect of making the Maasai feel like they are people living in a museum that is designed to entertain western tourists, however the upside is that traditional dances and rites that may have been lost through time have been preserved instead. Tourism in rural Kenya has had many positive effects. Some of the Maasai can now afford to send their children to boarding schools in the cities to improve their education and future, using money they have generated from tourists, both in the formal and informal sectors.

There have also been improvements in the infrastructure of the villages the Maasai now live in, with the government using some of the revenue of tourism to build wells, improve housing and establish small local schools. The benefits of tourism however are mainly in the cities as this is where the

government will spend most of its GDP, choosing to further develop the core areas rather than the periphery, in which the Maasai lands lie. A large percentage of the income generated by tourism will also be taken out of the country as international companies make most of the money on tours, e. . . tour operators, travel agents, air companies etc.

This means that often the people at the bottom of society do not see any benefits for a long time, it is only relatively recently in Kenya that the government has started to put money back into the very communities that generated it in the first place. Tourism needs to be carefully managed by governments otherwise they risk destroying their valuable resources that cannot be replaced. Tourism in Kenya is also popular in the beach resorts of Mombassa and other smaller towns or cities along the Indian Ocean coast.

Large numbers of western tourists have resulted in a huge growth in the numbers of hotels and resorts, benefiting the local economy more immediately and obviously than in rural areas. The local people find work in the new industries associated with tourism and the wealth of an area will increase. These jobs though are often only seasonal and often badly paid and exploitative. Local traditional shops may close or be affected by some tourists demands for western foods and goods, such as traditional restaurants starting to serve pizza instead of local food.

Many tourists do not want to see or experience the real Kenya, but instead merely want a hot climate, nice beach and things to be like they are at home. This is a mental attitude that is causing severe negative social effects on Kenya, both in rural park areas, and the more urbanised coastal resorts.

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By shifting the Maasai out of the National Parks, the Kenyan government has displaced a whole people from its natural home. They have no access to their traditional grounds where they could work as pastoral farmers in complete self sufficiency.

The Maasai argue that they parks are only rich in wildlife and resources due to their careful maintenance of them, and the large numbers of tourists will destroy them, despite the best efforts of the government. By designating some areas as parks the government has increased the intensity of tourists in these areas, thus helping in some places to drive the animals away, ruining the resources which they depend upon. There is also an increasing amount of rural-urban migration as the young economically active members of the communities move to the cities in search of work and jobs, seeing there is no future staying in the villages.

It can be argued that they will suffer from cultural dilution as their traditional way of life becomes infused with the western way of life. The locals will wear traditional outfits and garments in front of the tourists as they know it is what they want to see and will make them more likely to purchase trinkets and jewellery etc, though when they are at home they will often wear western style clothes. The situation is similar in the coastal resorts, where traditional cultures are being swamped by the western life style, imported by huge numbers of tourists.

A large amount of the local population are Muslim, and to them women walking round through the beaches and towns in western swimwear is offensive as it clashes with their beliefs and culture. The real problems arise

though when the local girls start to copy the tourists, which threatens to destroy local traditions. There has also been an increase in crime, drug usage and prostitution, both male and female, though males are often more obvious due to the male dominated society that exists.

This is yet another example of tourist and government helping to destroy the areas natural resources. Fear of crime and a sleazy image will help to dissuade tourists from visiting Kenya and as such a large amount of economy is dependent upon tourism, will cause widespread economic problems, and probably social ones as well as unemployment rises. The large number of tourists at coastal resorts is also causing permanent damage to the coral reefs that surround the shores, with large numbers of tourists walking upon, and destroying the coral.

At one place there may be up to 20 boats a day, all dropping their anchors on the choral and all the tourists showing scant regard for the delicate ecosystems below their feet. If this carries on then eventually there will be no coral left. Tourism is a double edged sword to developing countries, it can provide enormous economic benefits to the government, however these are rarely distributed to the people at the bottom which the tourist industry is usually based on exploiting in some shape or form, eg the Maasai in Kenya.

Careful management is needed of natural resources and more care must be taken to preserve local traditions and cultures, without reducing them to the status of purely tourist exhibits. It is easy to say the " traditional" societies are being destroyed, however the local people may often prefer to have the material gains associated with the western lifestyle.

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