

# Vacation resorts effects on culture and views tourism essay



An ideal vacation for many people is a trip to an exotic location where they stay at a luxurious resort. All throughout the year, people from developed countries flock to those that are less developed to take advantage of the beautiful surroundings, warm weather and all inclusive resorts. I have been on a few vacations like these and I have always found the experience to be highly unrealistic and superficial as the resorts are completely separate from the local community and culture. I have been to resorts in Mexico and Cuba, however I never got to experience true Mexican or Cuban culture, for the most part my family never strayed far from the resort. My experiences and taking DEVS have caused me to wonder what effect these resorts have on the local people and how does it affect my view of them. Not only that but how does this relate to the bigger issues we have studied so far in DEVS; the relationship between the developing and Third World countries and Edward Said's notion of Orientalism. This paper will argue that vacation resorts in Third World countries have a negative effect of the culture of the locals and that they contribute to the Western view that Third World countries are inferior.

Resorts are kept separate from the local communities. There is usually some sort of boundary marking the edges of the resort that creates a

2sense of keeping the tourists in, but also keeping the locals out. There is also limited transportation for tourists to travel around the area surrounding their resort. Not only is there a physical barrier but a psychological one.

Tourists are encouraged to stay within the confinements of the resort, this isolation brought on by the resort is to keep the money spending within the hotel so it gains maximum profit (United 1976: 83). The resorts provide

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everything a tourist might want from many types of food and drinks, and a wide range of activities. However, there are many adverse affects to this. The resorts are made to seem safe and the surrounding areas to seem unfamiliar and dangerous. Tourists are told of high crime rates and encouraged to take hotel transportation instead of local taxis as well as to always keep a close eye on their belongings in fear of them being stolen. This causes resort vacationers to seldom leave the resort and they never actually see or experience the local culture. Tourists arrive with a feeling of uncertainty of experiencing a new way of life, which is further emphasized through the segregation of the resort. If a tourist does want to leave the resort, usually they go on some sort of guided tour provided to them, which causes the encounters to be contrived and superficial (McRae 2003: 241). This clear and deliberate separation, between the luxurious and pristine resorts and the surrounding areas, which are usually impoverished, creates a distinction between the tourists and the locals, which translates to the developed countries and the Third World (Ibid: 239). It causes a sense of superiority on the part of the tourists and creates views that the local people are dangerous and inferior (United 1976: 79).

When tourists do leave the resort and meet the local people, it usually is not a true representation and can contribute to misguided conclusions. These encounters are usually short and brief, as tourists must see everything in a condensed manor, which is not enough time for anyone to draw proper conclusions (Ibid: 80). There is also a distinct lacking of spontaneity. The contact that tourists have with locals is forced and insincere, in terms of organized shows put on for the tourists or through the gifts and souvenirs

that they buy from the locals (Ibid: 80). This exchange between the locals and tourists causes feelings of material superiority of the tourists over the locals (Brohman 1996: 50). The tourists seem to have endless amounts of money in comparison with the locals. Tourist encounters with locals does not only happen outside the resort but also within it, through their interactions with the workers. This can also cause feelings of superiority, as the workers are there to serve the tourists, they cook for them, clean for them and perform for them. This contact causes a clear distinction between the tourists and the locals and makes the locals seem inferior, which is a problem when this is the main encounter with local people a tourists has.

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These superficial and misguided encounters that tourists have with locals contributes to how people from developed countries see Third World countries as a whole. The segregation and limited genuine contact with the locals does not benefit the cultures of Third World countries; on the contrary it emphasizes inequalities (McRae 2003: 248). Even if tourists do try and venture out of the resorts and experience some true culture different from their own, they never view the Third World for what it truly is as everything they see and experience will be viewed through westernized notions of what is the norm (Ibid: 250). It is impossible to view new cultures completely objectively. This limitation ties into Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, which is viewing different cultures through a Eurocentric mindset and combining many different cultures and peoples into one category (Ibid: 251).

By this definition, resorts are causing a modern day Orientalism. Through separation and a lack of encounters, tourists view Third World countries  
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through a Eurocentric mindset and lump many different cultures of people together. They see the people outside the resort as the “ other,” and therefore inferior. Other factors of resorts that suggest Orientalism is the idea of the “ white man’s burden,” one of the main arguments for tourism is that it brings new developments such as transportation systems and infrastructures to the area surrounding the resort, which is similar to the defense of colonialism (Ibid: 250). Contributing to the Orientalism created by resorts and the distinction between the superior developed countries and the inferior Third World countries is the fact that most of the companies involved in the resorts are from the developed countries and the majority of the revenue goes to them, not the Third World country (Brohman 1996: 50). This creates a sense of power and domination over the Third World countries and takes away the agency of locals near the resort and their ability to have control over the land and resources.

5Although the development brought to Third World countries is sometimes seen as a benefit, for the most part resort locations are expected to remain static and available for tourist consumption (McRae 2003: 237). When people go to a resort they usually choose a place that is not very developed, where the land is secluded and exotic, like Mexico, Cuba or the Caribbean. If Third World countries developed to the extent of developed countries, they would lose their appeal. This causes a limit as to how much a resort location can develop and takes away significant power from Third World countries as they must change development strategies depending on the needs and wants of Western tourists.

The effect that a resort has on the local community is large and for the most part negative. Integration of tourists from developed nations into Third World countries creates conflicts that result from the contrast of different ways of life (United 1976: 79). The tourists bring new ideas, culture and practices with them to Third World country, which will inherently affect the cultures of the people already living there. When a resort enters a community the locals have two main options, either exploit their culture and market it in order to make money (Backman, S., et al 2000: 88). For example selling souvenirs or putting on shows and exhibits. Or the locals can keep their culture private and therefore more authentic (Ibid: 88). However, keeping their culture private and unchanged is virtually impossible, when a resort is built they lose their cultural identity and social control.

7 Not only do the locals lose control over their culture but also over their land and resources. Economic benefits from tourism for a Third World country correlates with the amount of control the local residence have over the tourism (Ibid: 88). However, the majority is controlled by large companies from developed countries. The bulk of the profits go to these large foreign corporations and Third World countries do not see much of the revenue (Ibid: 88). This takes away the traditional means of sustenance from the locals and makes them dependent on developed countries. This has the same effect that transnational corporations have on Third World countries. They exploit the people and the resources of the country in order to make a profit. The locals then become dependent on the foreign resorts for economic survival. This is made even more problematic by the fact that resorts have fluctuating success. Not only are there off seasons where few

people come to the resort, but also a recession in a developed country could have devastating effects of the amount of revenue a resort makes (Brohman 1996: 50). Resorts, like TNCs, cause dependency and exploitation. Foreign resort companies are able to exploit Third World Countries as they are competing with other countries to gain the resort. This takes the control away from the locals and gives it to those in developed countries, which further emphasizes the distinction of superior developed countries and inferior Third World countries.

8 Segregated vacation resorts pose a large threat to the cultures of the locals as well as creating a distinction between developed nations and the Third World in terms of superiority and inferiority. Third World countries are being exploited for their pristine and exotic locations, and they are losing their social identity as well as their control over the land. Resorts cause the Third World to be dependent on developed countries for their economic success, however barely any of the revenue from tourism actually goes to the Third World country as it is controlled by large foreign organizations. These problems are similar to ones that have been discussed in DEVS throughout the year. A common trend that I have found during this course is that we are taught the problems, but there very seems to be a clear solution. An approach needs to be taken when considering whether a resort should be built or not where the interests of the locals need to be considered alongside the economic benefits (Ibid: 65). This requires institutional reform so that the people have opportunities to organize themselves into groups, represent themselves and exert some influence over decision-making (Ibid: 66). Tourism planning should be made accountable to the local governing

bodies so that it can be sure that the specific needs of the people are met. This will give Third World countries more power in respect to tourism, support their culture and hopefully dismantle ideas such as Orientalism and that the Third World is inferior.

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