

# Social, economic and environmental impacts in tourism

[Sport & Tourism](#), [Ecotourism](#)



The large scale impacts of Tourism include environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts.

Impacts can be positive, as well as negative, but should never be underestimated. The concept of sustainability is factored into these tourism impacts, when the size of the impacts become large enough to drastically alter economic, socio-cultural and environmental areas of a tourist destination. The importance of these impacts will be analysed and evaluated in this essay, keeping in mind that this will be kept within the context of sustainability. With the use of academic literature, the three impacts highlighted will be discussed, along with the concept of sustainability, to highlight the importance of these crucial issues to sustainable development of tourism.

The term sustainable tourism means, tourism that is developed in such a way so as to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Lawton & Weaver, 2006, pp. 343). This is an important concept when analysing the various impacts of tourism industries within a particular area. Keeping this in mind, the Sustainable tourism values and principles model will be used to demonstrate points of interest, and to analyse the various impacts in more detail. The importance of the economic impact on a tourist destination cannot be stressed enough.

According to Gartner (1996, pp. 64), " The money brought into an area through the process of hosting tourists provides more economic return than simply the sum of the expenditures accruing to the few businesses that

come in direct contact with tourists. Almost all sectors of an economy benefit economically from tourism". The monetary benefits that are generated by the local economy can be used to re-invest in the tourism industry, and also be used in sustainable development practices. The following example is taken from an article titled, " Estimating the Economic Contribution of Visitor Spending in the Kruger National Park to the Regional Economy", and will help to highlight the economical impacts of tourism. Kruger National Park is located in South Africa and is known for its abundance of exotic and rare animal species.

A recent study, including a survey, into the economic contribution of the National Park to the regional economy suggests that a total of 241, 038, 644 rand, which roughly equates to 42 million Australian dollars. The results of the survey show that visitors to the park contribute most of the revenue towards accommodation and shops. According to a tourism audit conducted in 2002, there are a total of 2, 077 people employed within the National Park, which amounts to 7. 1% of total employment within the regional area, which is higher than other industries within the region, including electricity, construction and finance. As a result, the report concluded that it is very important to create a National Park, which is well equipped for tourists to spend their money in.

The economic impact generated by the National Park also contributes to the economic sustainability of the park, as the revenue generated by the park, can be used to develop and use conservation practices, to ensure the sustainability of the National Park for the future. The research also shows

that although the contribution is small to the economy, it is making significant contributions to the growth and development of the tourist industry, which is currently a significant sector in terms of production and employment. On the contrary, the economic impact of tourism doesn't always have an immediate impact. The following example, also based in South Africa, helps to show why economic impacts might not be felt straight away, and also have an impact on destination marketing. The journal article titled, " Analysis of spending patterns of visitors on three World Cup cricket matches in Potchefstroom, South Africa", will be the basis of this example.

According to the research conducted into the economic impact of these three World Cup cricket matches on a small regional town, the event had little economic impact on the town of Potchefstroom. Some of the reasons for this include less people attending the matches compared to larger cities and the short length of the events. The influx of visitors to the town can be the basis for developing a larger tourism industry, which can take years to develop. Local officials can use this event as a basis for what was done well and what needs to be improved, in order to maximise economic impacts. When the economic impact is maximised, the revenue generated can be used to improve facilities, for example, increase the capacity of the cricket ground, as well as improving accommodation, eating and nightlife components of the town, in order to create a better image of the destination and attract more international visitors to the town, as according to du Plessis et al (2005), the research conducted further proves that foreigners tend to spend more than nationals.

The social impact of tourism on a destination can come in many different forms. High levels of peace and understanding between different groups of people can be achieved, as tourism provides an avenue for sharing of one's culture and learning of another's culture to take place. Another positive socio-cultural impact of tourism is the sense of cultural pride it bestows on inhabitants of an area. Gartner (1996, pp. 177) observes, " The process of hosting guests implies a sharing of resources, both environmental and social. If tourism development is sensitive to the needs and desires of a host society, the type of tourism created will project a sense of place.

" Not only does the local community benefit from the rewards of tourism, they feel a sense of achievement and pride from the tourism industry they have developed. They exhibit pride in showcasing their community to tourists. Tourism can have a negative impact on the environment. As more strain is placed on our natural resources, and the ever increasing problem of global warming, the natural environment is now at its most venerable stage.

Gartner (1996) cites three changes in society that have affected the natural environment. The first change is the rapid population growth, which has lead to ever-increasing demand for further exploitation of renewable and non-renewable resources. The second change is the increasing industrial growth, which has accelerated the rate of air and water pollution. The third change is the general lack of public awareness of the value of natural resources and man's limited knowledge of the complex components of the environment.

For example, people might not know that damage to some parts of the environment, directly affects other parts of the environment. In terms of tourist generated impacts, many tourists are not aware of the environmental consequences of their actions. For example, research conducted by Harrington et al (2003) into the impact that tourism has had on the protected areas of the Australian Alps, it was discovered that water quality was damaged as a result of simple things such as runoffs from ski slopes, roads and car parks was an important issue that needs to be addressed. While little things like this may seem harmless, it must be kept in mind that thousands of tourists do the same thing, which inevitably multiplies the damaging effect. Another example of environmental impact that Harrington et al (2003) highlight is that of noise pollution. Noise from snowmaking machines, lifts, snowmobiles, generators and on site vehicles can result in trauma or damage to native fauna's hearing.

It can also cause native fauna to move out of the area, further devaluing the tourism experience. In terms of the sustainable tourism model, minimal degradation of resource values, acceptance of resource values and matching of supply and demand are all needed in order to achieve an equitable balance with social and economic goals, in order to achieve sustainable tourism. The increasing popularity of eco tourism is acting as a way of profiting from the natural environment, with minimal damage, and pumping the revenue back into sustainable tourism initiatives. The socio-cultural make up of a destination is dramatically impacted upon by a tourism industry. Tourism can allow for promotion of cross cultural understanding, as

direct experience of a tourist destination can abolish any stereotypes that might have existed. For example, according to Lawton & Weaver (2006), the Australian Government's attitude towards Japanese people during World War 2, were those of stereotypes designed to alter the population's perception of Japan, as it was the enemy at the time.

Tourism can also act as an incentive to preserve culture and heritage. This can happen directly as a result of the collection of entrance fees, donations and souvenir sales, or indirectly by allocating revenue from tourism to preservation projects and initiatives. Cities like York in the U. K. and Quebec City in Canada are prime examples of historic cities whose inner districts have been restored as a result of funding from tourism revenue streams.

Tourism can also promote social wellbeing and stability through the generation of employment and revenue. Increasing economic development results in increasing levels of social wellbeing and health. " This promotion also occurs when a destination attempts to improve its international competitiveness by offering services and health standards at a level acceptable to visitors from the more developed countries" (Lawton & Weaver 2006, pp. 74). On the other hand, tourism can encourage what is known as the commodification of a destination's culture, which means converting a destination's culture into a commodity in response to the perceived or actual demands of the tourist market.

This may mean an increase in tourism revenue, but the problem is the quality and meaning of the culture is eroded or lost altogether, at the

expense of generating higher revenue. Tourists are also more perceptible to crime. There are a number of factors that make tourists easy targets for criminals. Tourists are more likely to be carrying valuables like a camera, they can easily stray into unsafe areas without knowing it, tourists are highly conspicuous due to race, clothing, speech and objects carried, unfamiliar with local culture and services, and are likely to be in holiday mode, therefore less alert than usual (Pizam, 1982).

Other illegal services such as prostitution are also likely to pop up in tourist areas, as people look to take advantage of impressionable visitors. The socio-cultural impacts of tourism have a wider effect on society, and directly affect the lives of the inhabitants of the tourist destination. Negative impacts can do irreversible damage to a destination's culture, when it becomes a commodity, therefore loses any meaning as its values and beliefs are sacrificed for the dollar. The environmental impact of tourism has a wider effect than socio-cultural as it affects both humans, and animals. Damage that is done to the environment as a result of tourism is having an effect on native flora and fauna, which are often drawcards of tourist destinations. Extreme damage can lead to extinction of a species of flora or fauna, which is lost forever, therefore devaluing a tourist destination.

The economic impact of tourism is the most important dimension out of the three, as it has the ability to generate revenue, which can be used for sustainable tourism practices, which are designed to restore, maintain and preserve the natural environment, as well as culture and society as a whole. Environmental impacts of tourism have a damaging effect not only to



humans, as they are damaging the thing they have travelled to experience, but also the home of native flora and fauna\*. The socio-cultural impact of tourism can help to harmonise cultures together and promote understanding and pride in one's own culture, but it can also lead to commoification of a society's culture, which devalues the culture and its customs\*. The economic impacts of tourism allow for the funding of sustainable tourism projects, as well as create new jobs as a new tourism industry is created and grows. All these impacts have been analysed to highlight the result of their actions on the tourist destination on the natural environment and also the inhabitants of the destination.

The most important point to remember is that all these impacts must be taken seriously if a tourism industry is to be successful and sustainable. They are all relevant to the sustainable tourism model, as the right balance of all three, achieves an outcome of a sustainable tourist industry. Reference List  
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