

Impacts of mass tourism on ecotourism sites tourism essay

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



This essay will mainly deal with the social, economic and environmental impacts of mass tourism on ecotourism taking into consideration that ecotourism can be seen as a form of mass tourism (As Weaver (2001: 112) says, '...ecotourism can be and usually is a variant of mass tourism.'). It will begin by examining ecotourism - looking at what ecotourism is and some examples of ecotourism sites such as Couran Cove Island Resort and Boondall Wetlands Reserve in Queensland, Australia. It will then move onto mass tourism - again looking at what defines mass tourism and looking into areas that are considered to be mass tourism sites such as Benidorm and Mallorca in Spain. This will then move onto the impacts of mass tourism on ecotourism - taking into account the social, economic and environmental impacts, drawing examples from the case studies above in Spain and Australia. Then it will briefly examine ecotourism as a form of mass tourism as stated by Weaver (2001).

The most common definition of ecotourism is that it is a nature-based tourism and a form of sustainable tourism - ecologically, socio-culturally and economically (Font & Buckley, 2001: 32; Weaver, 2001: 105; Lim & McAleer, 2005: 1431) and also as Ceballos-Lascuráin 1996 (cited in Scheyvens 2002: 71) says

Ecotourism is environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.

The International Ecotourism Society has six main principles for ecotourists (this is the term this essay will use for tourists visiting ecotourism sites throughout the essay). These include:

Minimizing impact on the environment

Gain environmental and cultural awareness of the site to help respect and conserve the site.

‘ Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.’

‘ Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.’

Provide economic benefits to the host locals.

‘ Raise sensitivity to host countries’ political, environmental and social climate.’

(The International Ecotourism Society, 2010)

Ecotourism can be divided into hard and soft-ecotourism. Hard ecotourism generally does not impact as much negatively on the environment as it tends to deal with tourists who are aware of the importance of sustainability, visits tend to be prolonged visits so the tourists actively engage in conserving the environment and respect the environment in which they are visiting (Weaver & Lawton, 2002: 362). According to the International Ecotourism Society (2006: 4), ‘ In Europe: 20%-30% of travelers are aware of needs & values of sustainable tourism.

10%-20% of travelers look for 'green' options.

5%-10% of travelers demand 'green' holidays.'

Soft ecotourism, which is the type of ecotourism that is most associated with mass tourism, is when tourists have a level of understanding of sustainability but are not as committed to actively participating in being sustainable and so do not respect the area they are visiting as much (Weaver & Lawton, 2002: 363). Visits tend to be once-off day trips – resulting in groups of people arriving by bus, which could happen a few times a day. These short term visits could potentially be more harmful, as the tourists may not have as much of an awareness or interest in protecting the environment they are visiting and may not be as careful as they should be – they could cause physical damage, by stepping on plant species, which could in turn reduce biodiversity, which is harmful to an ecosystem. In the case of Queensland, Australia, it could be argued that it is a soft-ecotourism site, taking a figure from Lim and McAleer (2005: 1433) seen below, overnight visitors have fluctuated between 1995 and 2000 – however, in the case of intra and interstate visitors they have increased since 1995. The fact that the figure deals with overnight visitors, could be seen as a short-term stay, which coincides with soft ecotourism activity.

Figure 1: Visitor arrivals in Queensland.

(Source: Ibid: 1433)

Examples of ecotourism sites include Couran Cove Island Resort, Boondall Wetlands Reserve Australia and the Great Barrier Reef, in Australia.

Mass tourism can be defined as ‘ a quantitative notion, based on the proportion of the volume of the population participating in tourism or on the volume of tourist activity’ Burkart & Medlik 1974 (cited in Bramwell, 2004: 7). Coming into the notion of mass tourism is the concept of the 3S’s – Sun, Sea and Sand holidays. Spain became the most popular area for tourism by the 1990’s – there was a need to develop new products and promote new destinations (DeCleir, 2010). Mass tourism can also be associated with winter sports – taking the Alps for example, which will be discussed later on in the essay. Mass tourism can tend to increase the pressure on the environment due to the large tourist volumes, which is not unlike soft ecotourism. Examples of areas that experience mass tourism are Benidorm and Mallorca in Spain and the winter sports in the Alps. Benidorm, a fishing village in Spain, so it could be deemed an ecotourism site, has seen considerable mass tourism effects – ‘ The demands of mass tourism have turned this place into a monster of an urban resort with high rise hotels, a shopping mall, bars...’ (Schindler and Mindjov, p. 1). Mass tourism can be seen to have an impact on ecotourism sites also.

The three main areas where mass tourism has an effect on ecotourism are socially, economically and environmentally. Firstly, this essay will examine the economic impacts of mass tourism on ecotourism sites drawing examples from Spain. As can be seen from Table 1, tourism contributions to Spain’s Gross Domestic Product has increased significantly from 2000 to 2007, increasing by €38, 995 in seven years.

Table 1: Tourism Contribution to Spanish GDP.

(Source: Spanish Statistics Institute, Tourism Satellite Account of Spain (cited in Spanish Tourism in Figures 2009: 8).

Tourism is an economic generator, not only do the host destination benefit from the amount of money coming in from the tourists but also, the fact that the site is a tourist site, creates employment in the area. As Lim and McAleer (2005: 1432) says, ' For many countries and regions, tourism represents one of the few opportunities for local development, employment and revenue generation.' However, regions can develop an over-dependency on tourism in relation to GDP. Taking the Maldives for example, 80% of their GDP comes from tourism (DeClair, 2010). This over-dependence on tourism can result in the tourism industry in the region declining.

Another impact of mass tourism is environmental. Environmental impacts include: sustainability - preservation and conservation, physical damage - which can result in a reduction of biodiversity and visual impact, and pollution. Taking the effect winter sports in the Alps as mentioned earlier, as an example - The Alps could be considered to be an ecotourism site as it is a natural area, however it could be argued that it has not really been very beneficial at having a low impact on its environment through extensive tourism - mass tourism. The winter sports that take place on the Alps have done a lot of damage to the mountains in terms of loss of biodiversity. For example, there have been reports that the black grouse population has declined and ' the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has suggested that this decline is linked to the spread of winter sports...'

(Patthey et al., 2008: 2). In the Couran Cove Island Resort, they have measures in place to protect their environment from tourists, for example, they have put into place a 're-vegetation and rehabilitation program' which they hope will help conserve existing vegetation and integrated within this program they hope to provide education to the local community about the fragile ecosystem (Lim and McAleer, 2005: 1433). They have also built eco-cabins that are built on stumps, the idea being that the surrounding environment can be left undisturbed and yet the tourists can still see the habitats in their natural environment (ibid: 1434). Mass tourism can cause congestion in an ecotourism site during peak seasons - this could result in pollution of an area and visual degradation.

In the case of the economic and environmental, these two impacts can be linked together. If a ecotourism site is getting a lot of tourists, then they are taking in revenue. The more money generated from tourism, the more the money that can go back into the conservation and preservation - the sustainability - of the area.

In the case of social impacts on a site, as Hall and Lew (2009: 180) say, 'the development of the tourism industry can contribute broadly to changes in the quality of life, social structure and social organization of destination communities.' These social impacts can be both positive and negative. Generally, however, the host residents are prepared to put up with the negative impacts as the positive ones are so desirable (DeCleur, 2010). Employment, although mainly an economic impact, can also be a social impact. With employment, comes the need for education and upskilling,

which can be seen as a personal social benefit. When a person has a job, they are getting a regular income and so will feel safer in knowing that they can meet their basic needs (Hall and Lew, 2009: 180). In addition to this, when people have more money, they can go out and socialise with their friends or meet new people. Acculturation (when two cultures are in contact over a long period of time, there is a danger of them becoming similar (DeCleur, 2010)), can become a problem in a tourist area, which could eventually lead to the loss of an original culture of the area. This can lead to a reduction in diversity - the loss of cultural identity can affect host destinations local people, especially the elderly, as they may lose the traditional ways of life that they grew up with, which could affect their sense of security in where they live.

According to Weaver (2001: 104) '...ecotourism as both a reality and an ideal can logically be conceived as a form of mass tourism...' Although mass tourism can have an effect on ecotourism, ecotourism can be seen as a form of mass tourism. Soft ecotourism in particular is more often associated with mass tourism as shorter, more intensive trips are considered more damaging than longer trips as, as said at the beginning of this essay, visits tend to be once off day-trips, with loaded tour buses arriving with groups of people to visit a site all in one day; whereas with longer trips, the tourists are less likely to stay or impact upon a site all day continuously.

Mass tourism can have both positive and negative effects on ecotourism sites. Positive impacts include, an increase in popularity of a site which will lead to more revenue being created which can in turn be reinvested back

into the conservation of the site. Negative impacts of mass tourism tend to outweigh the positive impacts; some negative impacts include, physical impact - the damage that can be done to the site, its attractiveness and reduction of biodiversity, for example, the winter sports in the Alps - increased congestion during peak seasons and seasonality - for example, in Greece, most hotels are closed for six months of the year (DeCleur, 2010). All of the above effects can be separated into three categories of impacts - social, economic and environmental, which have all been dealt with in this essay.