

# Myanmar tourism should take responsibilities



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Tourism is like fire: you can cook your dinner on it, but if you are not careful, it will burn your house down. " Asian saying (1) It is an Asian saying about tourism, which shows us that we need to take the negative impacts of tourism into consideration. Nowadays, tourism is becoming one of the most continuously growing industries. This is because it has many gains upon the respective countries in many different means. The most fundamental reason for countries to improve their tourism industries is that tourism is the main income source for their economies.

According to the research of the UNWTO, the income earned from international tourism increased to US\$ 1030 billion in 2011, up from the US\$ 927 billion in 2010. (UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2012)(2) It can support 5% of direct global GDP (Gross Domestic Product), offer about 235 million jobs worldwide and also include 30% of world exports of services. (Why Tourism? , 2012)(3) On the other hand, it can affect the local environment seriously. There are three main disadvantages.

The first one is building many infrastructures and facilities for tourism may affect the lives of local people in the way that many local residents' homes are transformed into hotels and tourist facilities, making the natives homeless. Secondly, abundant natural resources may be overused such as trees are depleted for building facilities; lands are used for developing resorts and, also water and food. Moreover, rebuilding and renovating ancient buildings and architectures can cause these places to lose their specific values.

In addition, welcoming tourism too much makes everything expensive and for locals shopping becomes unaffordable. Therefore, as the Asian saying, tourism has various advantages if it takes responsibilities but if it is not effectively managed, it has a lot of negative influences upon the environment. About Myanmar Tourism Nowadays, tourism is one of the high priorities in Myanmar to boost their economic development. The income from tourism increased from 196 million dollars in 2009 to 254 million dollars in 2010 and from 254 million dollars to 315 million dollars in 2011.

Myanmar Tourism Statistics, 2011)(4) Myanmar is struggling with the recent tourism development, and many people are worried about that it will follow the adverse examples of other developing countries. However, tourism will be the main source of foreign income for Myanmar in the near future.

Myanmar is still one of the most mysterious and unexplored destinations all over the world. All the traditional pleasures of Asia can be seen, and Myanmar is also a home for about 135 different ethnic groups. So, there is no surprising why people come and visit Myanmar.

In 2011, about 820000 tourists came to Myanmar, mostly from China and Thailand. (Myanmar Tourism Statistics, 2011)(5) There are many tourist attractions in Myanmar, and the difference between these places and destinations from other different countries is that most of the attractions are religious places. The top well-known places are Yangon, Bagan and Inlay Lake. In Yangon, there are a lot of colonial architectures that were left by British Colony in 19th-century, and there is also the Shwedagon Pagoda, the heart of Myanmar, where the holy hair relics of the Buddha were enshrined.

Top 10 Myanmar Travel Destinations, 2012)(6) Bagan is a place where a lot of pagodas were built, and it is famous for being a place where more than 2000 pagodas can be seen together. Inlay Lake is well known because of the rowers in the lake and the floating market. The rowers in Inlay Lake use their legs rather than their hands to row their boats. Negative Impacts of Tourism

Firstly, welcoming tourism needs a lot of preparations like building hotels, roads and airports, renovating the attraction places, improving services as transportation and so on.

For the purposes of building tourism facilities, many local residents' homes are removed, and they have nowhere to stay. The prices of hotels and transportation charges rise, and even the shopping of household basic needs become unaffordable for locals near tourism attractions. In Bagan, many people are in poverty. When their houses were transformed into hotels, restaurants and other facilities, they became homeless because the compensation they got was not enough to buy a new home. In places around tourist attractions, the expenditures of households are high although their income is extremely low.

A lot of forests are cut down for building hotels, tourism facilities and infrastructure. In Inlay, where almost everything is built with wood, a great amount of trees are cut down every year and this causes deforestation. In addition, the scarcity of water is a prominent concern for Myanmar tourism because, in many tropical places in Myanmar during these years, there was no water even for the daily uses of local people due to extremely hot weathers (peak at between 43 and 45 degree Celsius).

Many parts of the Inlay Lake were dried up, and abundant fishes were killed, and the local people who depend on the lake as their primary source of food and water were in trouble. In these conditions, tourism may put pressure on the natural resources. Finally, much unique and ancient architecture are renovated and rebuilt, and many others may be renewed in the near future only for the profit-oriented purpose. Many pagodas in Bagan were renovated and some of them lost their unique value of being ancient architectures.

In addition, whether we should destroy the colonial buildings in Yangon is in the government's consideration. Seeing the colonial buildings is one of the purposes that many tourists come to Yangon. Approaches of reducing the impacts Firstly, Myanmar is now planning projects to conserve the environment. For instance, in Inlay Lake, there is a three-years conservation project with the purpose to keep the lake environmentally clean and prevent the animals in the lake from dying.

This project costs \$100, 000 and is operated by local travel and tour agencies. (Norway to Help Myanmar Manage Tourism Boom, 2012)(7) Moreover, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and domestic environment conservation-related organizations have made a draft proposal about a project worth of \$5. 35 million to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for maintaining the Inlay Lake. (Feng Yingqiu, 2011)(8) Similarly, there are many other projects, meetings, workshops and conferences about tourism.

In December 12, a workshop supported by ADB and Norway was recently held to generate a sustainable tourism master plan. This will firstly examine

the situation of Myanmar tourism, numbers of visitors, infrastructures, existing laws and policies, and the role of civil societies. It will also look for how tourism impacts on the environment and the local culture, and recommend new policies and investments to ensure the industry's development is sustainable. Furthermore, Myanmar has some rules to avoid deforestation and extreme weathers.

One of them is that everyone who cut down a tree must be in jail for three years. There are also new policies concerned with tourism like Responsible Tourism Policy (support of UN and UNWTO), which has an aim to conserve the environment, issued in September 12, new booklets like DOs & DON'Ts for tourists, civil societies like Tourism Transparency, Info Burmanie (French NGO), EcoBurma (Czech NGO) and so on. Myanmar has rejoined UNWTO in June 12 and generating plans and projects with consultation of many international organizations.

All of the projects, organizations, workshops and conferences have one fundamental objective that is to develop the tourism that can take responsibilities for its consequences. Conclusion To conclude, tourism can help Myanmar to be back on the map. However, a wide range of disadvantages must be seriously considered in developing tourism. Myanmar is trying for its tourism to take responsibilities from the beginning but it is more important to change the visions into actions. Although there are new policies, notices, books, and websites about Myanmar tourism, whether the tourists look through these or not cannot be known.

Therefore, encouraging the tourists to search and learn about Myanmar is also a high priority. Planning the tourism to be responsible one, the mix-efforts of all the sectors, the government, tourists, private companies, and civil societies, are required. Tourism is like an egg, a book and also a money note. An egg is fragile, but nutritious, a book can provide information but sometimes may be misunderstood and money can cause greed although it is valuable. Tourism is also like that, having not only good points but also bad points.

Therefore, in order to promote tourism, both the negative and positive impacts must be considered and it should have the plans to take care of its negative influences, especially on the environment. This is because income can be gained from other industry, wealth can be earned in other ways but there is only the earth and it cannot be replaced. As the Asian saying, tourism is like fire but it can be used wisely and properly to avoid drawbacks. So, tourism is a good thing if we have plans for its negative impacts and also plans for the tourism to be the ecotourism, green tourism and the responsible one.

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