

The galapagos and sustainable tourism

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The Galapagos and Sustainable Tourism

I was watching the National Geographic channel on cable TV the other day, and a scene that I had found fascinating as a child was flashed onscreen. It was the scene of flamingos moving together, a mass of pink fluff, spindly legs, and long graceful necks bending and stretching, moving in tandem as one, heads turning side to side, much as the elegant movement of a corps de ballet. I had forgotten how as a child I regarded the sight of this natural behaviour with awe, and for a fleeting moment I was reverted to a simpler time and place, memories of parents, home, a sense of renewed wonderment and peace, that everything was bigger than you were, and not just in a physical way. Then the announcer's voice comes over the almost hypnotic spectacle: the flamingos were among the inhabitants of the Galapagos Islands.

I was mildly surprised because we had just finished a research on the Galapagos, where my group and I discussed the unique and delicate ecosystem of this isolated archipelago. Flamingos are not found solely in the Galapagos, to be sure. But something in their beauty and grace will tell you that the loss of even one of these to the pollution and degradation of human wastefulness is an unspeakable thing. What more those species that could be found only in the Islands? Once they are gone, they are gone forever.

I think that this is the remarkable concept behind sustainability, the acknowledgment that earthly life should go on to take its natural course for as long as it can, as it had for millions of years before man even appeared. Man's emergence in the last second of the earth's clock, as it is so often described, should not be the cause of her sudden demise, least of all because people wanted to go around enjoying themselves.

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Tourism is more than just having fun. The saying is that travel is the best teacher, which is entirely true because travel enriches one's experiences, broadens his perspective and expands his understanding. The first and foremost lesson of travel is that every place is valuable, together with its plant and animal life, its native resources, its people and their way of life. As such, all tourist destinations should remain intact, as much as possible, in their original condition after the tourists have left. This is the only way to ensure that the value which makes them good places to visit remain undiminished for succeeding waves of visitors to likewise cherish and experience.

The theories we have learned in this course have been thoroughly enlightening, bringing the importance of sustainable tourism into sharp focus, which in every way is a life-changing force. I do not believe that anybody who took the course seriously will ever view any place they visited with anything less than total respect and uncompromising regard for preservation. Learning sustainable tourism does not stop with memorizing principles and theories; it goes deep into one's psyche and changes the way people see things, whether as a visitor or as a resident.

It would have been wonderful if, as a class, we could have visited these places we researched about, as it would have added a third dimension to the book pages we have been moving around in. Other than this, this research project has afforded each of the group members a chance to see the application of what we have learned. Through looking at video and reading other peoples' articles, I have gotten much vicarious experience in coming to an understanding of sustainable tourism. It had enabled me to put myself into the shoes the people whom they interviewed that made a living out of

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tourism. It drove home the point that tourism may be an activity of fun and leisure for many of us, but it is serious business that could spell economic survival or demise for thousands of people. Therefore, causing damage that diminishes the value of a site as a tourist attraction will impact upon the lives of the people who rely upon it for their bread and butter.

Because of my foray into sustainable tourism, I will never look at any animal or plant specie, or the people who stood guardians over them, in the same way again. Someday, I hope I could bring my children to the Galapagos Islands, so that we could see for ourselves the graceful dance of pink flamingos, which hopefully will always be there for countless generations to come.

WORD COUNT = 750 excluding title

Source of picture: Adventure Life, Galapagos Pictures (undated).