

# The cultural impacts of tourism on the host communities



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The cultural impacts of tourism on the host communities The impact that tourism has on the cultural lives of communities is one of the most important issues debated by tourism researchers and academics today. There is an increasingly growing concern that tourism development is leading to destinations losing their cultural identity by catering for the perceived needs of tourists. Although they take longer to appear, the cultural consequences of tourist activity have the potential to be much more damaging in the long term than environmental or social effects.

In many countries, tourists are not sensitive to local customs, traditions and standards. Offence is given without intent, as tourists are short-stay visitors carrying with them their own cultural norms and behavioural patterns. They are usually unwilling to change these norms for a temporary stay - and may be unaware that these norms are offensive to the host community.

Commercialisation of traditional cultural events and customs is leading to 'fake folklore' for the tourists, but more importantly, with no cultural value for the local population or the visitors. The issue is the potential conflict between the economic and cultural interests, leading to culture being sacrificed for reasons of promoting tourism i. e.

creating an additional economic value at the price of losing a cultural value.

Leonard J. Lickorish, Carson L. Jenkins (1997), *An Introduction To Tourism*

Tourists are sometimes presented with a commercialised and stylised presentation of a destination's cultural identity, which may lack authenticity.

This is currently happening in parts of South America, for example.

This destination is becoming ever more popular and in places such as Paraguay, the cultures and traditions are in danger of disappearing. The native Indians have become mercenary, changing their traditional dances for the tourists' benefit. The dancers now put on a show for the tourists and are dressed in a caricatured approximation of the costume their ancestors would have worn when the dance was not a show, but the centre of an intense religious life. The dances, in which participation was traditionally limited to men, now includes pretty girls in short-skirted imitations of traditional costumes, wearing cutely stylised versions. Tourism can turn local culture into commodities when religious traditions, local customs and festivals are reduced to conform to tourist expectations, resulting in what has been called 'reconstructed ethnicity'. This is also apparent in the growing tourism industry in South America.

For example, the culture in Paraguay has been adapted to what the tourists want to see i. e. cultural events designed primarily to satisfy the tourists' requirements, and also what will generate more profit; the dancers charge tourists extra if tourists want to pose with one of the costumed dancers.

Culture clashes can also occur because tourism involves the movement of people to different geographical locations and the establishment of social relations between people who would otherwise not meet.

Cultural clashes can take place as a result of differences in cultures, ethnic and religious groups, values, lifestyles, languages and levels of prosperity.

For example, tourists visiting Nepal are attracted not only by the forests, ancient villages and cities, but also by the variety of people and cultures of

the country. In Nepal there are 70 ethnic groups who speak roughly 42  
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languages and people come from all over the world to experience the diversity of culture and way of life. [http://unesdoc.](http://unesdoc.org/images/0012/001226/122619eo.pdf)

[unesco.org/images/0012/001226/122619eo.pdf](http://unesdoc.org/images/0012/001226/122619eo.pdf) Although it may be considered a positive impact in some cases, the mixing of people with different lifestyles and from different cultural backgrounds can create negative issues. The 'demonstration effect' can become apparent due to the mixing of people from widely different cultures in tourist settings. Another example of this can be seen in western Amazonia's Jurua Valley, most of whose tribes have had decades of contact with a non-indigenous society, the Ashaninka people of the River Amonia have been so besieged by visitors and journalists that they have resorted to virtually closing their reserve to visitors.

The reason for the Ashaninka's attraction is the photogenic 'authenticity' of their material culture; as opposed to neighbouring groups who have abandoned nudity for shorts and T-shirts, they still wear their distinctive kitarentsi robes. Few visitors are aware that these robes themselves represent a 'foreign' cultural influence; the Ashaninka copied them from the Incas, whose forest stronghold of Vilcabamba they helped defend against the invading Spanish. So, as a result of the continuous intrusion from visitors, the tribes have discarded their traditional way of living, and conformed to the way the tourists live by wearing shorts and T-shirts. The hosts try to follow the values and aspire to the material possessions of their more wealthy visitors.

This can lead to change in cultural values on the part of the host community; they want to change their traditional ways and live their lives how the

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wealthy do. [http://www.biodiversity.ru/coastlearn/tourism-eng/why\\_socioimpacts.html](http://www.biodiversity.ru/coastlearn/tourism-eng/why_socioimpacts.html)

Ray Youell (1998),

Tourism an introduction Although the cultural impacts of tourism are mainly negative, there are some issues that can be seen as positive both to the host community and the visitors. Cultural tourism can make a contribution to the conservation of an areas cultural heritage by, for example, helping to maintain cultural traditions and preserving heritage sites.

It can also contribute to improvements in the quality of life for the local residents of tourist resorts by offering them an enhanced programme of cultural and social events, designed primarily to satisfy tourists'

requirements but also available to the host communities. Ray Youell (1998),

Tourism an introduction Another positive cultural aspect is that experiencing different cultural practices enriches experiences, broadens horizons, and increases insight and appreciation for different approaches to living. Often, declining interest in host cultures is revived by reawakening cultural heritage as part of tourism development, which increases demand for historical and cultural exhibits. This interest by tourists in local culture and history provides opportunities to support preservation of historical artifacts and architecture.

By learning more about others, their differences become less threatening and more interesting. <http://www.seagrant.umn.edu/tourism/pdfs/ImpactsTourism.pdf>

Bibliography

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