

The whaling and whale watching industry tourism essay



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The ecotourism industry, once a niche market for the environmentally concerned travellers is getting more popular in the recent years and the number of tourists participating in this particular tourism segment is increasing (Wood, 2001).

Ecotourism initially describe the nature-based travel to relatively undisturbed areas with education as the main purpose. Through the years, the concept of ecotourism has matured to a definition that should comprise of a few elements including nature-based, active participation, progressive education travel, interpretation of natural environments, social and cultural components, involvement and returns for the local community and also the management to be ecologically and environmentally sustainable (Parks, Parks, & Allen, 2009).

In ecotourism, the activities can range from a few hours of nature appreciation to a long duration tour that will take months. This includes activities such as presentation of the marine biology on a cruise (cetacean-watching), a guided tour in a national park, snorkelling and many more.

The main objective of this essay is to further discuss whale-watching, a type of cetacean watching, around the world and if this activity is affecting the behaviours of the whales population near the coastal area.

Whale-watching

Whale-watching is a commercial activity that is carried out by the tourists to observe, swim with and/or listen to the whales in their natural habitat. These activities are normally for recreation purpose; however whale-watching can also serve scientific and educational purpose.

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During the past years, a phenomenal growth for whale watching as tourism activity has been observed around the world. This particular activity has involved an estimated of 9 million participants yearly in 87 countries and generates approximately US\$1 billion each year (Hoyt, 2000)

With the lucrative profit from obtainable from whale-watching activity, this have led to heated debates on the whale-watching and whaling industry. It has been argued that whaling is incompatible with whale-watching (Parsons & Draheim, A reason not to support whaling - a tourism impact case study from the Dominican Republic, 2009). In a survey conducted, it was found out that 91.4% of whale-watching tourists would not go to countries whereby they hunt whales for commercial purpose to engage in whale watching; and that 79% of them would even boycott visiting the country (Parsons and Rawles, 2003, cited in (Parsons & Draheim, A reason not to support whaling - a tourism impact case study from the Dominican Republic, 2009)).

A few of the more popular sites for whale-watching includes: Kaikoura, New Zealand; Tofino and Telegraph Cove, in British Columbia, Canada; Ogata and Ogasawara, Japan; Friday Harbour, Washington, USA; Hervey Bay, Byron Bay, and Monkey Mia, Australia; Husavik, Iceland and many more. According to Hoyt (2000), the most common focal species for whale-watching industries are the humpback whales, gray whales, northern and southern right whales, blue whales, minke whales, sperm whales, short-finned pilot whales, orcas and bottlenose dolphin.

Despite the benefits obtained from whale-watching activity, operators should take caution while carrying out these activities as the recreational activities

in the inshore water can pose a major threat to the whales and dolphins. The threats can be due to direct cause such as injuries due to accidental cuts by the boat's propeller, or an indirect stress to them from the high frequency sounds made by the vessel's motor.

In order to prevent such harms towards the animals, the operators should follow by the marine code of conduct in order to protect the animal's welfare. There are different set of code of conduct that are used across the world but the common rules found in these code includes maintaining a certain distance from the animals, maintain a predictable course and speed when near the animals and also move away if signs of disturbance are displayed by the animals.

However, is it sufficient to just adhere to the code of conduct and should there be more actions to be undertaken by the government to aid in the sustainability of this tourism activity. Several studies have been carried out throughout several regions to discuss more on the issues of the whale-watching activities and whether this activity is sustainable.

Literature Reviews

Whaling and Whale-Watching

Debates have been going on worldwide on the issue on whether whaling can co-exist with whale-watching in a region. It has been stated that there is an urgent need to evaluate the cultural and the environmental values of the tourists and find out what are the factors that attracts or discourages them from participating in whale-watching activity (Higham, 2007 and Lusseau, 2008, cited in (Parsons & Draheim, A reason not to support whaling - a <https://assignbuster.com/the-whaling-and-whale-watching-industry-tourism-essay/>

tourism impact case study from the Dominican Republic, 2009)). However, there are rebuttal on such claims, indicating that the fact whereby countries such as Iceland, Japan and Norway all engage in active whaling and yet have whale-watching activities within their countries and thus it is not valid to argue that whaling and whale-watching are incompatible (Corkeron, 2006, cited in (Parsons & Draheim, A reason not to support whaling - a tourism impact case study from the Dominican Republic, 2009)).

According to Parson and Draheim (2009), the tourists whom participated in cetacean tourism tend to hold strong environmental values and thus may have very strong sentiments against whaling. Also, tourism receipts is the major source of economic income for the Dominican Republic, any activity that may affects the stability of this income could have major impacts within the country. The study also shows that with a highly visible national policy towards cetacean conservation, and opposition to the hunting and capture of cetaceans, it would be beneficial in attracting tourists to the country, whereas a visible pro-whaling policy might repel the tourists (Parsons & Draheim, A reason not to support whaling - a tourism impact case study from the Dominican Republic, 2009).

Higham and Lusseau, (2008) also state that the answer to whether whaling and whale-watching activity can coexist depends largely in the perceptions, values and behaviours of the tourists themselves.

Effects of whale-watching on the animals

Despite the lucrative profits that can be obtained from whale-watching activity, the well-being of the animals involved in the activity, which mainly

includes the cetaceans should be emphasised, which thus leads to increasing number of studies focusing on whether the whale-watching activity will cause disturbance to the animals.

Disturbance in this case is defined as the negative influence that interferes with the natural behaviour of cetaceans and has a harmful outcome (Ritter, 2003, cited in (Stamation, Croft, Shaughnessy, Waples, & Briggs, 2009)).

One of such studies was carried out in the whale-watching site at New South Wales (NSW). The main focus of whale-watching in NSW is the humpback whales, although there are also tours to watch other marine mammals such as dolphins and seals. Most of the watching will occur during the whale's southern migration when the whales move much slower than on their passage northwards. Signs of disturbance in the humpback whales around the world include orientation away from the vessel, increased in swimming speeds, prolonged submergence and changes in the respiration behaviour and such avoidance behaviour are observed in this study (Stamation, Croft, Shaughnessy, Waples, & Briggs, 2009).

As this study is a short term study, it cannot be used to conclude that such avoidance behaviours will cause any detrimental outcome for the whales involved. However, the possibilities of inducing negative long-term effects onto the whales due to the reduction of the time spent foraging; resting, socializing or suckling should not be ignored. Conservative approach on the management of the humpback whale-watching industry should be adopted to ensure that the short term impacts that was discovered in this study does

not translate to the long term impacts (Stamation, Croft, Shaughnessy, Waples, & Briggs, 2009).

Another study has been done on the killer whales to find out the behavioural responses of this species towards the whale-watching boats. It was stated that with the exposure of millions of the tourists to the animals in their natural environment, this may change the attitudes towards the protection of the critical habitat and threatened populations. Guidelines for whale-watching should be based on the actual impacts of the human activity on the whale behaviour instead of the perceived effects. Once again, it have being emphasised that when a whale is been disturbed, it shows sign of avoidance either by varying the duration of its dives, or by swimming faster or altering the direction of swimming. Antagonistic behaviours such as slapping flukes or fins on the surface of the water may also be displayed. Since the changes in behaviours of the whales are observed when boats are near, management of whale-watching should adopt more conservative distance guidelines to present even greater benefit to the animals (Williams, Trites, & Bain, 2002).

Sustainability of whale-watching

As mentioned above, whale-watching industry has enjoyed a phenomenal growth and brings in lucrative profit for the community that carries out this activity. With that, there are more participants in this industry and hence leading to an increasing number of regulations and guidelines that were developed in an attempt to ensure the sustainability of the industry. The need to develop appropriate guidelines for the commercial whale-watching activities should be attend to. Also, with the limited data available on the species and their behaviours there will be an urgent need to develop new <https://assignbuster.com/the-whaling-and-whale-watching-industry-tourism-essay/>

knowledge and understanding to help guide management of the industry (Valentine, Birtles, Curnock, Arnold, & Dunstan, 2004).

The sustainability of the whale-watching activity and its associated benefits could be significantly affected by the changes in the occurrence of the local cetacean species in response to the global climate change. Global climate change refers to the net change in climate over time which is a consequence of either natural variability or human activity. It has been identified that both direct and indirect means by which changing of the sea surface temperature could affect the cetacean distribution. With that, it can cause the change in range of species distribution, the occurrence and abundance of individuals and the timing and lengths of migrations; the effects on reproductive success and mortality levels. The above have clearly shown the potential implications for both cetacean species and whale-watching tourism (Lambert, Hunter, Pierce, & MacLeod, 2010).

Findings

Studies on the operations of the whale-watching activities in two different regions, New Zealand and Iceland have been done.

Whale-watching in New Zealand

At Kaikoura, New Zealand, the male sperm whales are the primary focus for the commercially important whale-watching industry. With the growing industry, there is an increase in the concerns over the social, educational and environmental impacts of whale-watching on both the local human and whale populations.

The cetacean relies on echolocation for foraging and communication, hence these species becomes exceptionally vulnerable to changes in their acoustic environment. For example, the addition of anthropogenic sound sources via the boats presence (research boat and whale-watching boats) results in a reduction of the mean blow interval of the whales. These tendencies to shorten breath are due to the stress respond by the animals (Richter, Dawson, & Slooten, 2006).

On top of the decreased respiratory periods, shorter surfacing intervals and sharp directional changes have also been identified as potentially unacceptable changes in behaviour. The above are evidences that are enough to suggest that the whale-watching industry in Kaikoura is having an adverse effect on the whales (Curtin, 2003).

Whale-watching in Iceland

In Iceland the whale-watching industry did not begin until 1990 and the country is becoming a major player rapidly within the international whale-watching market (Parsons & Rawles, 2010). As the coastal water of Iceland host a variety of cetacean species which includes the humpback whales, minke whales, blue whales and killer whales that are the target of whale-watching operations. Although the whaling activity in the Icelandic waters had ceased in 1989, but then whaling resumes during 2003 despite there is no legal process for that.

The Icelandic government did little consideration on how the resume of the commercial whaling might impact on the whale-watching industry. And through the studies, it was discovered that the resumption of commercial

whaling could cause a massive and critical reduction in the number of whale-watching tourists going on whale-watching trips in Iceland which in turn results in a loss of direct income (Parsons & Rawles, 2010).

Since whale-watching is currently the pillar of the Icelandic economy, thus care must be taken so that the Icelandic government does not destroy it.

Analysis

Through the reviews of the studies that have been done on the whale-watching activity in various regions, particularly New Zealand and Iceland, it can be concluded that the whale-watching industry is a growing industry that is bound to bring in high revenue for the community that is conducting such activities. However, the whale-watching activity that is being carried out can cause disturbance to the cetaceans in the regions which leads to the change in behaviours of these animals. These changes in behaviours can cause adverse effect on the animals. On top of that, the whale-watching activity might cause direct injuries to these animals through the cuts by the propeller of the boats.

Another issue is that commercial whaling should not coexist with the whale-watching activity. As it has been found out that most of the whale-watchers are very environmentally motivated and they display great interest in the animal welfare issues (Parsons & Rawles, 2010). Since majority of the whale-watchers have voiced out that they would boycott visiting a country that conducts hunts for cetaceans, places with whale-watching activity should consider with care regarding the implementation of whaling activity in the region since whale-watching can bring in high revenue for the destination

and that introduction of whaling might bring down the benefit of whale-watching.

Recommendation

Voluntary approaches are being considered as an important tool for the conservation and environmental management. The voluntary approaches towards conservation can include agreements between regulatory agencies and private enterprise, agreements among the industrial firms, or code of conduct within a professional or industrial group (Wiley, Moller, Pace III, & Carlson, 2008). Voluntary agreement to the operational procedures can be established for commercial whale-watching vessels that are used to view the endangered or protected species of whales. Guidelines can be created to avoid whale strikes and to prevent the whale-watching boats from disrupting the animals. This is important as in some of the areas, commercial whale-watching boats have a relatively high frequency of collisions with the whales, contributing high noise levels around the whales, disrupting whale behaviour and reducing the reproductive fitness of the whale (Wiley, Moller, Pace III, & Carlson, 2008).

Besides the use of voluntary approach, collaborative relationships can be established between the whale-watching companies and the related organizations and individuals that make up the organizational field. These collaborations can play an important role in structuring the relationships and understandings of members of the field (Lawrence, Phillips, & Hardy, 1999). By collaboration, it refers to a cooperative, inter-organisational relationship that is negotiated in an ongoing communicative method.

Science education

Conclusion