



# International Tourism

International tourism is a common feature of many modern geography syllabuses and examination questions tend to focus on three main issues.

1. The size and nature of international tourism, including reasons for its variable rate of growth in different parts of the world.
2. The advantages and disadvantages of developing an international tourist industry. Here candidates need to be able to analyse tourism's intertwined impacts - social, environmental and cultural as well as economic.
3. Management strategies for addressing the negative impact of international tourism.

This Factsheet will summarise the key points of the above issues and, through examples, will consider how some countries have attempted to deal with the threats and opportunities of international tourism. Finally the opportunities and challenges of ecotourism will be briefly discussed through three case studies

### The Scope of International Tourism

1. The world has shrunk - almost everywhere is accessible and travel has become much quicker. International tourism now involves every country in the world as senders or recipients of tourists.

2. International tourism includes both business and leisure tourism. It is highly complex in its operations, with different sectors providing travel services, transport, amenities or accommodation, based in countries generating tourists and in destinations. Increasingly, large companies operate throughout the sectors - a phenomenon known

as **vertical integration**, e.g. transport provider British Airways also acts as a tour operator and owns hotels.

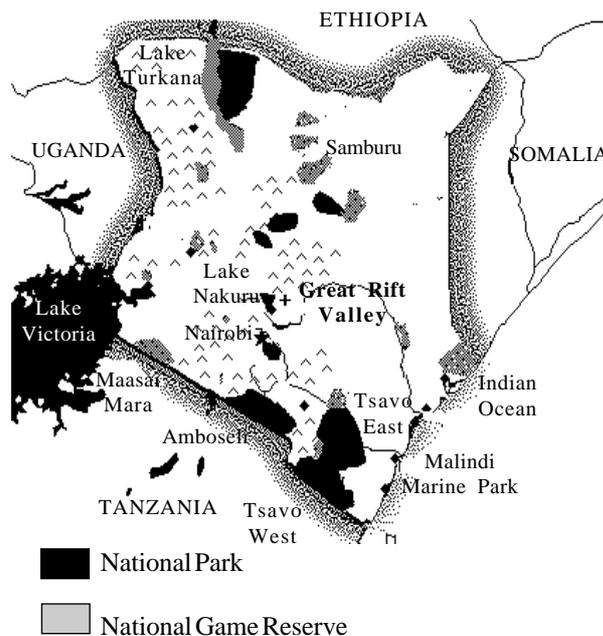
3. Countries may allow these sectors to grow 'ad hoc', responding to market demands or they may decide to regulate the nature and scope of tourism.

### Kenya Case Study- An example of government-led tourism growth

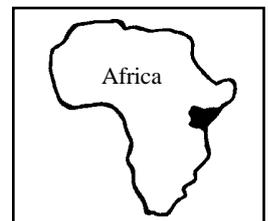
Tourism is Kenya's greatest source of foreign exchange and the Kenyan government have skilfully stimulated the tourist boom. Kenya made the most of an existing Safari industry and transport infrastructure left over from colonial times, rather than starting from scratch. It successfully diversified what it had to offer, so that tourists could combine a safari holiday with a sea/sand holiday on the coast.

#### Government Action!

- An entrepreneur was hired to raise the profile of Kenyan wildlife and scenery
- Tourist officers were posted to European embassies
- Visa and immigration procedures were simplified
- Tax incentives were offered to major airlines to encourage them to develop game lodges and hotels.
- Strict guidelines were, and continue to be, imposed on foreign tour operators. Local people must be preferentially employed, import of foreign food at game lodges and hotels is restricted.



Kenya has a unique wildlife resource - habitats range from mangrove swamps to mountains.



Huge inland lakes, dense wet forest and extensive savannah grasslands, give rise to fantastic species diversity  
10% of land area is either National Park or protected reserve

## Reasons for the Growth of International Tourism

- Changes in the nature of industrialised societies: increased standards of living among middle and working classes; introduction of paid holiday time; new work patterns; more holidays and earlier retirement.
- Changes in transport - increasingly sophisticated mechanised transport has revolutionised travel between and within countries, drastically reducing journey times. The introduction of mass forms of transport - e.g. wide-bodied jets, cruise ships and coaches, has made travel cheaper and more comfortable, opening it up to far more people.
- Changes within the tourist industry - since Thomas Cook's first 'package tour', new technologies, e.g. computer systems, have revolutionised the way holidays can be sold and organised as products, bringing down prices and making complex arrangements easy.
- Changes in society - education and the mass media have increased awareness of other places. Holidays are now seen as not just desirable but necessary consumer items in the annual budget of families in employment. Consumer culture has also encouraged the ongoing development by tour operators of new destinations, to satisfy customer demands for new places and experiences.
- Changes in the global economy and in politics - along with the major tourist sending regions of North America and Europe, the Asia Pacific region is now generating an enormous amount of tourism within the region and globally, as affluent sections of their societies adopt the West's consumer culture.

## Why does the size and scope of the tourist industry vary between countries?

As tourist fashions and global economic trends change, national tourist industries grow or shrink, in constantly shifting patterns. Factors such as these affect the way tourism has developed in a particular country:

- Transport links with major tourist-sending countries  
Australia is having great success attracting the Asia-Pacific region's affluent tourists as well as Europeans and North Americans, thanks in part to the introduction of cheap charter flights.
- Historical / colonial relationships with other countries  
68% of American visitors to Ireland in 1994 cited forebears as their reason for visiting
- Changing tastes  
The UK has a mature, broadly based tourist industry whose ageing and unfashionable coastal resorts are now having to find new ways of attracting visitors.  
  
Egypt's tourist industry has centred on its historic heritage, but is now diversifying to take advantage of the rise in special interest and sports holidays.  
  
Switzerland's mature industry based on its scenery and outdoor sports provision is facing competition from East European countries able to offer scenic beauty and competitively priced skiing facilities.
- Nature and uniqueness of natural, cultural and built attractions
- Climate  
The Gambia's stagnating tourist industry based on cheap winter sun holidays for European tourists may be revitalised if government plans to encourage tourism based on the country's wildlife and culture are endorsed by foreign tour operators.
- Government policy regarding international tourism  
Government attitudes to tourism are often a key factor in tourism development, helping or hindering the establishment of a thriving tourist industry. Some governments have been wary of encouraging tourism, but most have found the economic arguments for encouraging it difficult to reject and many, such as Kenya's government have enthusiastically promoted it as part of a diversified economy.
- Nature of political regime  
For many years South Africa's Apartheid regime deterred many tourists. Tourism has accelerated since the decline of apartheid.

Slow development may result from: lack of natural features or internal conflicts such as wars and political instability. Some governments e.g. those of some of the South Pacific Islands are wary of the social costs and uncertain economic benefits and have therefore deliberately restrained tourism growth.

## Benefits and Costs of Tourism

### Economic benefits

- International tourism creates jobs, particularly in the service and transport sectors of the receiving country. The development of hotels, apartment blocks, restaurants, taxi and bus services may dramatically stimulate the local economy. The provision of temporary and permanent employment opportunities has a **multiplier effect** on other labour intensive sectors. In the **Tunisian** resort of **Tozeur** each new hotel is estimated to created up to 100 new jobs for local people, while indirect employment is created by the demand for tour guides and drivers, souvenirs (rugs and carpets), restaurant and cafe staff and ancillary services such as banking.
- Consumption of local food and drink is often cited as one of the greatest pleasures of a foreign holiday and this increased demand helps to stimulate local, regional and national agriculture. The growth of '**fermes auberges**' (farm restaurants) in France is a good example of French success in linking local produce to the tourist industry.
- Tourists often have phenomenal spending power and this injection of capital into the towns, shops and leisure outlets dramatically stimulates the local economy and becomes an important contributor to the national balance of payments. Tourism on the **Indonesian** island of **Bali** has been an important contributor to the national balance of payments, so much so that the government has now adopted tourism as an economic strategy throughout the country.
- Finally, the need to attract and accommodate tourists often stimulates the development and improvement of local infrastructure such as roads, ports, airports and services such as water supplies, sewage, electricity and domestic waste disposal. The northern coast of **Penang Island** in **Malaysia** has been transformed by tourism. Where twenty-five years ago there were scattered villages without modern services, there is now a new highway and a highly developed infrastructure.

### Social benefits

- As local infrastructure improves, the standard of living of local people will also improve. The development of clean water supplies and reliable electricity will reduce the incidence of disease and local people, such as porters and shopkeepers, will have dramatically increased spending power, thus allowing a higher standard of living.

### Costs

- The economic benefits of tourism may be very selective; only very small areas of a country and only a very small proportion of local traders, hoteliers etc. may benefit from any increased trade and this may generate or deepen local or regional disparities in standard of living.

Only a very small proportion of the total spending of tourists may actually reach local people because hotels and holiday organisers, especially package tour organisers, may be in foreign ownership.

A high proportion of the total cost of a holiday may be transport related and this is usually paid for in the home country, bringing little benefit to the locals in the destination country. Tour operators may bring in their own non-local guides, managers and drivers etc. Many jobs may be only part-time or seasonal or temporary.

Significant numbers of tourists actually spend little money on local types of food and drink. In **Antigua**, although tourism brings in a sizeable amount of foreign exchange, this is leaked out again, paying for expatriate staff, for food and for consumer durables demanded by visitors.

- Tourism is strongly influenced by outside reactions to events in a country, by currency exchange rates and recessions elsewhere, and it is precisely because of this that tourism provides an unstable base for wider economic development. Political events in **The Gambia** in 1994 led to the collapse of its tourist industry and thereby its economy as the government of the UK (country of origin for 90% of Gambia's tourist clientele) advised the tour companies to avoid the country.
- Similarly, the rush to develop the sophisticated and efficient infrastructure which many western tourists demand may cause enormous strains on both the local and national economy. This may mean that other areas of the economy, such as those on which local people depend are neglected. In the **Indian** coastal state of **Goa**, there have been numerous protests about government policy giving priority for water supplies to hotels towards the end of the dry season, while local village wells run dry.
- Tourism also brings with it a set of values - consumerism is the most obvious example - and this may be in sharp contrast to the indigenous culture. The younger generation in particular are susceptible to the attractions of western lifestyle and this may lead to out-migration and change in the age structure of local populations. In **Turkey**, the traditional and conservative nature of society is changing in the new tourist resorts, as young people come in contact with radically different attitudes to women, nudity and religious observance. This is creating friction between the generations.
- The designation of protected sites for ecotourism may force local people off lands to which they traditionally had open access. In turn, this may mean agricultural land and sources of firewood are lost and this may disastrously affect the ability of local people to develop a sustainable economy. In **Acapulco, Mexico**, the people living by the magnificent bay were forced out as the resort grew. Many now live on the dangerous and infertile slopes above - miles from sources of work and food. Tribespeople who have lived for centuries on the **Thai-Burmese** border, within an area of tropical rainforest now designated as a World Heritage Site, have been moved out of its boundaries for reasons of strict conservation. However, tourists are being allowed in, and lodges for them have been built.

**Managing Tourism**

The tourist industry has taken some steps to support efforts towards sustainable tourism. For example, the International Federation of Tour Operators (IFTO) have proposed a model of sustainable tourism (ECOMOST) based upon studies carried out in Mallorca. This model suggests that there are three requirements for sustainable tourism:

1. The local population should remain prosperous and keep its cultural identity.
2. The area should remain attractive to tourists.
3. The economy of the area should not be damaged.

Below are examples of strategies undertaken by local or national governments. Not all are proving successful, since they are expensive and need the wholehearted commitment of the tourist industry, whose members want to maximise profits.

**EXAMPLES: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

**LOCATION**

**The Mara/Serengeti** ecosystem provides a habitat for some of Africa's most spectacular and valued wild life (see Kenya case study)

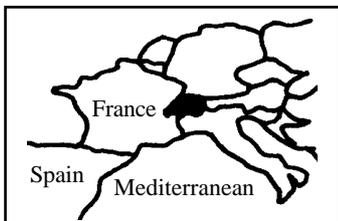
**IMPACT**

Off-road vehicles have severely reduced vegetation cover, increasing soil erosion; balloonists have frightened or disturbed the feeding and mating behaviour of cheetahs and gazelle.

**STRATEGIES**

Enforced use of primary, secondary and tertiary roads in addition to minimum flight levels and maximum flight duration of balloons with fixed take off and landing sites.

**The Swiss Alps**



Deforestation to create new pistes and holiday accommodation has increased the incidence of huge avalanches. Snow compaction vehicles have destroyed vegetation and damaged soil structure, reducing infiltration and increasing the velocity and erosivity of run off, which has led to flash flooding.

Maintain existing tree cover or afforest sensitive upper slopes. Strict control of ski permits to reduce numbers. Careful zoning of skiers.

**The Nepalese Foothills**



Hordes of trekkers have dramatically eroded the most common paths and left huge volumes of non-biodegradable litter in their path. As the number of trekkers has increased, the number of lodgers has also increased, along with the demand for firewood to allow tourists to take hot showers and indulge in camp fires. One two-month trek uses as much firewood as one family in a year. This unsustainable demand for firewood has led to widespread deforestation and, inevitably, siltation and flooding.

Small scale, community based afforestation schemes involving the planting of carefully selected tree species which can simultaneously provide fuel wood, fodder and large construction timber. Tight control of the number of trekking permits with careful time-zoning on the most heavily used routes.

**The Caribbean.**



The destruction of mangrove forests to build tourist accommodation and the construction of marinas and harbours has increased sedimentation and therefore the turbidity of shallow coastal waters, preventing coral formation by polyps.

Development has been prohibited on the steepest slopes. Large areas of mangrove forest have now been designated as protected areas. The emphasis is now on the upgrading of existing hotels to generate greater revenue, rather than the construction of new hotels.

**Mallorca**



Destruction of coastline landscape through high-rise development. A huge increase in demand for water in summer, much of which is obtained from ground water reserves, has led to over abstraction and lowering of the water tables and salination. There has also been a huge loss of fertile agricultural land to development.

Stricter implementation of planning controls on the height of buildings and the use of sympathetic design. The government have sponsored a marketing campaign to smooth seasonal fluctuations in the number of visitors by moving away from the image of sun, sea, sand, sex and sangria to one based upon the beauty of the environment and the historical and cultural attractions of the island.

## Ecotourism

Ecotourism may be defined as tourism which is based upon the observation of wild life or wild areas and which aims to be low impact and to involve the locals as much as possible. Ideally, the income generated from ecotourism is used to help conserve or preserve wild life or wild areas or to provide revenue or compensation for people in that area. While these ideals may be in the minds of governments and communities wanting to encourage ecotourists, it should be remembered that the term is used very loosely by the tourist industry and even by governments. These case studies show how widely the term can now be interpreted.

### 1. Costa Rica

The Rara Avis project in Costa Rica involves international tourists joining and living in a small forest village which has developed, with financial aid from the Costa Rican government, the concept of open air classrooms and laboratories in the rainforest itself. These attract thousands of scientists and students as well as tourists and it is estimated that 40% of all tourists to Costa Rica are involved in some sort of nature-oriented activities.

The total number of home and foreign tourists have however disrupted forest wildlife and accordingly the total number of tourists to any one area is now limited by the issuing of strictly controlled permits. The government has also encouraged the development of private reserves along the edges of the Costa Rican National Parks, allowing wildlife to move between the parks and reserves, thus allowing the reserve to act as a buffer.

However, Costa Rica's ecotourism image is gradually being tarnished. With newer, cheaper destinations tempting ecotourists elsewhere, the government has allowed large-scale tourist development to start. This could have dire consequences, critics argue.

### 2. Aboriginal tourism

People's desire to learn about ancient cultures has become big business. Nearly 50% of visitors to Australia in 1993 expressed interest in learning about aboriginal culture. Since this culture is inextricably linked with Australia's 'outback', there is potential for the perfect ecotourism product. Ayers Rock became the first aboriginal national park in

1985 and was the first national park in the world to be run jointly by a national conservation agency (the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service) and indigenous people.

Attracting 300,000 tourists annually, visitor revenue is split between the two managing groups. However, success has also been at a cost; some villagers feel that tourists have invaded their privacy and shown little respect for aboriginal beliefs or sacred areas.

### 3. Botswana.

The government of Botswana has set about developing ecotourism as a way of diversifying an economy which has been heavily dependant upon diamonds, diamond production and cattle farming. However, concern that the sheer number of tourists would damage the ecology of areas such as the Okovanga Delta, which is currently being considered as a World Heritage Site, has led the government to develop a high-cost low-density tourism policy. Cost of entry to game reserves has been dramatically increased and all visitors must show proof of hotel or safari bookings; cheap and cheerful back-packers are not welcome!

## Conclusion

By applying these criteria to new proposals for tourism development or to existing developments, it is hoped that some of the cruder mistakes of the past can be avoided or corrected. The future of international tourism will depend on many factors outside the control of the tourist industry itself, and even of national governments. In theory, demand for business and leisure travel is set to grow indefinitely as affluence increases in countries such as China whose populations has hardly begun to travel outside its borders.

However, economic factors such as changing patterns in world trade, environmental factors such as the availability of fuel for transport, congestion on land, air and sea and climate change and social factors such as changes in our consumer fashions caused by health or environmental concerns may cause the growth of tourist numbers to slow down if not decrease.

Whatever the future holds it will be crucial for governments and decision makers in the tourist industry to learn lessons from the

successes and failures of current policy and practice in tourism management around the world.

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