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# Taking Responsibility for Tourism

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# 2

## Responsible Tourism and the UK Marketplace

This chapter focuses on the ways in which Responsible Tourism has emerged as a significant force in the UK, a consequence of campaigning for change in tourism and of changes in the broader UK consumer market, of which travel and tourism are but a part. As Krippendorf concluded, the 'great turning point will come when informed tourists take to the road and simply demand a re-orientation of commercial policies'.<sup>1</sup> That reorientation has gathered pace in the UK in the first decade of the 21st century and Responsible Tourism has become a part of the operations of ABTA, the UK's major travel trade association, and major companies like TUI and Thomas Cook. It is no long a niche as it was in 2001 when Justin Francis and I launched ResponsibleTravel.com.<sup>2</sup> This is not a history of the development of sustainable and responsible tourism in the UK; it is rather an outline of the major elements of the process through which Responsible Tourism secured a following across significant parts of the tourism outbound sector in Britain. Campaigning in the market among consumers played a prominent role in making the case for Responsible Tourism. This approach has not been consistently applied in other originating markets; internationally great emphasis has been placed on a variety of certification schemes, which have not engaged consumers.<sup>3</sup>

It may be objected that the UK outbound market is a narrow focus. It is. The relative importance of the UK as an outbound market is declining and will continue to do so, the influence of UK operators in destinations, and their share of the outbound market, is declining. The importance of the approach adopted in the UK is the focus on campaigning for change with consumers and the industry and recognising that this campaign will be most successful if it builds on broader trends in the particular society and on the work of others. In the UK the concept of a real holiday has traction because of a campaign about beer and

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1 Krippendorf, 1987: 148

2 I have subsequently sold my shares.

3 See below p. 231–234

the way in which the term 'real' has for more than a generation been attached in popular usage to good holidays... we shall return to this root shortly.

## Cultures of consumption

There is an emerging body of literature which explores consumerism and the importance of the cultural context in which it occurs, emphasising the persistence of social and collective aspects of consumption practices and identities<sup>4</sup> Much of the success of the Responsible Tourism movement in the UK is attributable to broader cultural changes; Responsible Tourism has been grafted on to, and in turn contributed to, changes in the culture of consumption. The processes used in the UK, and described here, cannot simply be replicated elsewhere, but the story may be useful for those wishing to understand why Responsible Tourism has emerged so powerfully in this originating market, or wanting to consider how a similar process might be achieved in a different consuming culture, a different originating market. Too often the cultural differences between originating markets are ignored; there is no global market for tourism.

This is not a chapter about marketing; rather it is about the process of creating change in an originating market, about how, by working to raise the issues with consumers, the industry can be encouraged to respond. The first section of this chapter describes the consumer campaign, launched by VSO and taken on by Tearfund, which built on the work of others and took the issue to the mainstream commercial companies, and which launched Responsible Tourism in the UK. Subsequent sections look at the emergence of ethical consumerism, the experience economy and authenticity, before focusing on the informed and empowered tourist. The empowered tourist takes responsibility for sustainability, and is able and willing to make 'better' choices – choices which are better for the traveller, the local communities and their environment.

Tourism is unusual in that the purchase and consumption of travel and tourism services often taken place in different jurisdictions. The British government has, in common with other states, sought to extend consumer protection beyond its borders.

That said, originating countries governments can provide only limited assistance to their citizens abroad. This has been clear for centuries. The 17th-

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4 See for example Trentmann (2004), and Brewer and Trentmann (2006): even Coca-Cola is indigenised in consumption, Howes (1996): 6

century political philosopher John Locke put it most eloquently:

every man, that hath any possessions, or enjoyment, of any part of the dominions of any government, doth thereby give his tacit consent, and is ... obliged to [obey] ... the laws of that government, during such enjoyment, as anyone under it; whether ... lodging only for a week; or whether it be barely travelling freely on the highway.<sup>5</sup>

The UK, like a number of other countries, has sought to control the worst excesses of behaviour by its citizens abroad with legislation on paedophilia and football hooliganism. Thus, through legislation, a small measure of protection – both of and from the traveller – is embedded in the UK culture.

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) also recognises that neither travellers or destinations are homogenous, and that responsibility concerns vary from place to place and from traveller to traveller. It provides a 'Know Before You Go' (KBYG)<sup>6</sup> section on its travel advice website. It also gives limited advice on Responsible Tourism.<sup>7</sup> The KBYG campaign was launched in 2001 to promote a series of key messages from 'get adequate travel insurance' to 'research the destination before departure'. The FCO works with 400 travel industry partners<sup>8</sup> and provides advice by country and by particular groups – for example gap-year travellers, hen and stag parties, package holidaymakers and sports travellers.

Tourism is very diverse but discussion of tourism, and in particular the impacts of tourism, tends to be generic. We talk about tourists and tourism, most of the time, in an undifferentiated way. It is difficult to do otherwise given the aggregated data sources that we rely upon. It is important to enter the caveat that the argument presented here relies on data from just one originating market and that the focus is on outbound tourism, although it applies domestically too. In the UK, as in other countries with a part of their population wealthy enough in leisure and money to take holidays abroad, domestic tourism is less studied by academics.<sup>9</sup>

5 Locke: §219.

6 [www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/about-kbyg-campaign/](http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/about-kbyg-campaign/) accessed 24 May 2010

7 [www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/be-a-responsible-tourist/](http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/be-a-responsible-tourist/) accessed 24 May 2010

8 Under the EU package Travel Directive operators have some responsibility to provide assistance to their clients in the destination

9 It was Krishna Ghimire a social scientist, not a tourism specialist, working at the UNRISD who edited the first major text on domestic tourism documenting its significance in Brazil, China, India, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa.

Too often tourism is discussed as though it occupies a silo, with decisions being made about holidays in isolation from broader consumer trends. But, I believe, broader consumer trends in the UK have contributed to shaping decision making about holidays, by consumers and producers. Unfortunately there are very limited examples of campaigns for different forms of tourism in other originating markets; too much reliance has been placed on technical fixes like certification.<sup>10</sup> Research conducted by the Canadian Tourism Commission included for the first time in 2009 a standard question in large surveys of its 10 major source markets. They asked whether or not the interviewee agreed with the statement 'I always take environmentally friendly tourism considerations into account when making a decision about where to travel to.' Accepting that this only records self-ascribed aspiration there are significant differences between representative samples in Canadian source markets – 88% of Mexicans, 68% of Chinese, 60% of Koreans and 56% of the French ascribe to this view of their decision making about holidays, compared with 33% of the Germans and Japanese, 31% of Americans, 30% of Canadians and 28% of Australians. The British came bottom, only 23% responded that they always take environmentally friendly characteristics into account when making destination choices. Responsible Tourism has been successful in the originating markets which, amongst these eight markets, is the least predisposed to choose environmentally friendly options. Many will be tempted to dismiss the British experience as unrepresentative, but on the Canadian evidence there are originating markets which look significantly more propitious for this approach.<sup>11</sup>

As was argued in Chapter 1, Responsible Tourism is an approach which can be applied to any form of tourism. Similarly travellers and holidaymakers may use Responsible Tourism accommodation, attractions or destinations without having chosen them for that reason. They may enjoy them without having experienced the difference or been aware of the difference or they may look for all or some of the responsible elements again. The interest of the consumer in a responsible product is as likely, perhaps more likely, to be stimulated by their experience and enjoyment of it as by a certification scheme or admonition to save the planet. Justin Francis of ResponsibleTravel.com reports:

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10 See below pp. 231–234

11 Canadian Tourism Commission (2009): 23

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