

# Geotourism: The Tourism of Geology and Landscape



**Edited by**

**David Newsome, Murdoch University, Australia**

**and Ross K. Dowling, Edith Cowan University, Australia**

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# 11 Geotourism and geotourist education in Poland

Tadeusz Slomka and Wojciech Mayer, AGH - University of Science and Technology, Poland

## Introduction

Since its appearance in 1990s, geotourism has gained many, sometimes misleading definitions. An excellent overview of the genesis of geotourism has been recently given by Newsome and Dowling (2006) and Hose (2008). Hose (2008) provided the first sensible explanation of geotourism as:

*The provision of interpretive and service facilities to enable tourists to acquire knowledge and the understanding of the geology and geomorphology of a site (including its contribution to the development of the Earth sciences) beyond the level of mere aesthetic appreciation*

For further explanation see Hose (1995).

In Poland geotourism has been defined by Slomka and Kicinska-Swidarska (2004) as:

*Geotourism is an offshoot of cognitive tourism and/or adventure tourism based upon visits to geological objects (geosites) and recognition of geological processes integrated with aesthetic experiences gained by the contact with a geosite.*

Slomka and Kicinska-Swidarska (2004) also introduced some new terms:

- ◆ **geotouristic object (geosite)** is a geological site, which may become a tourist product after proper development and promotion,
- ◆ **geotouristic event** is a recent geological process which may become a tourist product,
- ◆ **geotouristic attraction** is a sum of geotouristic objects and events.

Geotourism emerged in early 1990s as a response to several factors among which the most important were:

- ◆ the growing and changing demand of the tourist industry, particularly specialized tourism,
- ◆ the growing understanding of the importance of the Earth heritage,
- ◆ the evolution of Earth sciences into more interdisciplinary issues including geology, geomorphology and environmental sciences.

The rapidly expanding tourist industry has been looking for new offers attractive for the growing number of tourists who were interested in something more exciting than a 'classic' formula of leisure holidays. Hence, attention has been paid to specialized tourism, including visits to objects of abiotic nature where elements of geology and geomorphology could be seen 'on site' and basic knowledge could be gained at the level

available for non-professionals. Such world-famous tourist sites as the Grand Canyon or Yellowstone National Parks in the USA have received a new role as educational centres where knowledge can be effectively communicated about the Earth, its history, evolution, relationships between geology and environment, and its future. Moreover, such a formula has provided an opportunity to develop thousands of abiotic nature objects all over the world as tourist attractions, even if these are not extraordinary as the two national parks mentioned above.

In 1991, a new initiative appeared during the Digny Conference: the 'International declaration of the rights of the memory of the Earth'. This provided suitable frames leading to international projects focused on the protection of geological heritage. As a result, in 2000 the European Geopark Network was established, followed by the Global Geopark Network (2004) (for details see, for example, Zouros, 2004, 2008). Both the protection and promotion of geosites has gained a new formula, much wider and comprehensive than just a simple sightseeing of geological/geomorphological sites, as it includes elements of history and cultural heritage as well as important economic and social issues in terms of revitalization of local economy and communities (Zouros, 2008). Finally, in the 1990s geological sciences gained a new impetus towards more interdisciplinary issues when environmental geology emerged as a response to new challenges including sustainable development, natural hazards and general shift from reactive to proactive involvement of the applied nature of Earth sciences (see, for example, Bennett and Doyle, 1997).

The appearance of geotourism has resulted in a growing demand for a new specialist – a BSc and/or MSc graduate who has knowledge of the principles and practice of the tourist industry combined with reasonable level of understanding and experience in Earth sciences, including geology, geomorphology and environmental protection. Such a specialist should be qualified not only to run a tourist business in all aspects but also to prepare a specialized geotouristic offer (product) and to guide geotouristic trips, explaining the details of geology and geomorphology of a particular site to a wide spectrum of visitors – from non-professionals to Earth sciences students and specialists. Such a demand led the authors to propose and develop in 1999, the MSc and engineer course in applied geology with specialization in geotourism.

## **Geodiversity in Poland**

In Poland three principal structural units meet: the Precambrian East European Platform, the Paleozoic orogens of Central and Western Europe and the Alpine orogenic belts of Southern Europe (Pozaryski, 1990; Guterch and Grad, 1996; Znosko, 1998; Stupnicka, 2007; Słomka, 2008), (Figure 11.1).

The northeastern part of Poland belongs to the East European Platform, which includes Precambrian magmatics and metamorphics covered by Paleozoic and Mesozoic sediments. From the southwest, the Platform is cut by the Trans-European Suture Zone (TESZ), which is a system of deep fractures and faults. The huge central and southwestern portion of Poland is occupied by Paleozoic orogenic belts of both Caledonian (about 490–390 Ma) and Variscan (about 380–280 Ma) ages. These rocks are covered by thick sedimentary pile of Permian, Mesozoic and Cenozoic sediments. Only parts of these orogens are exposed in southwestern (the Sudety Mts), central (the Holy-Cross Mts) and the southern (the Upper Silesian Coal Basin and the uplifted part of the Silesian–Kraków Upland) parts of Poland.

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