Global Geotourism Perspectives

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Geotourism: Opportunity and Tourism Significance

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Introduction

Some destinations are more 'geological' than others. In the United States, places such as the Grand Canyon, Carlsbad Caverns or Mammoth Cave are immediately identifiable as being geological attractions (Alden 2009). However, in other parts of the world there are numerous other geoheritage sites some of which are located in natural areas, with others in built areas such as in cities and along roadsides. For example, Siccar Point, on Scotland's eastern shore, and 'Hutton's Section' in Holyrood Park in Edinburgh, are two places associated with James Hutton, the father of geology. One is situated in a natural landscape, the other in the midst of a city. The Jurassic Coast of southern England is world-renowned for its dinosaur fossils (King *et al*., 2010) and Ayers Rock (Uluru) in central Australia is one of the world's geological icons. Thus geotourism sites and destinations may be found almost anywhere.

This book has illustrated the extent and breadth of geotourism around the world. With examples from six continents it shows clear evidence of an emerging type of tourism which is based on the earth's geological heritage, promotes geoconservation, enhances geological understanding and is locally beneficial. Whilst it has similar attributes to ecotourism, geotourism has two significant differences. The first is that whereas ecotourism focuses primarily on the biotic features of the environment, that is, the fauna (animals) and flora (plants), geotourism is focused solely on the abiotic element of the earth, that is, its forms and processes. Second, ecotourism by its definition, occurs mostly in natural areas, whereas geotourism can take place in either natural or built environments. Put simply it can occur wherever there is any significant geological feature of tourism interest.

Whilst there are many case studies in this book we now add some additional content in order to strengthen our thesis that geotourism is indeed a global phenomenon. Thus we present further examples that illustrate this growth and also depict:

- Area assessments
- Attractions
- Walk trails and drive tours
- Emerging destinations
- A final case study: the Galapagos Islands.

Area assessments

An approach to using landforms for scenic and recreational purposes was undertaken in the Riyadh area of Saudi Arabia (Al-Amiri, 1986). He suggested that the mountainous regions be left relatively untouched for scenic use but encouraged the development of land at lower elevations including the sand dunes and wide natural lakes for recreational purposes. His proposed method was wholly qualitative, based on aerial photographs and observation. He recommended the development of sand dunes for recreation, and wadis (seasonal river beds) as tourist attractions. For all areas he suggested the development of tourist infrastructure and services.

Pralong (2005) also presents a method for assessing the values of geomorphological sites for tourism and recreation. His method proposes a range of criteria to quantify and qualify their potential in relation to scenic/aesthetic, scientific, cultural/historical, and social/economic values. The assessment of the use value allows the notion of use intensity to be determined. The method has been trialled in a study of glacial, karstic, and hydrographic landforms in Chamonix Mont-Blanc (Haute-Savoie, France) and Crans-Montana-Sierre (Valais, Switzerland).

More recently Vasiljević *et al*. (2009) advocate the use of web-based dynamic maps in the promotion of the Titel Loess Plateau in Vojvodina, Serbia, a potential geotourism destination. The authors propose presenting web-based dynamic maps from the geographic and touristic information system for a potential Loess Geopark. This potential geotourism destination can be marketed effectively on the Internet by employing interactive thematic maps and other media. The maps of the area are based on data obtained by the Nature Protection Organisation of Serbia and representative papers from the Department for Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management from Novi Sad. Digitalization and an animation process were carried out with Macromedia Flash 8, creating two-dimensional animation, web page components and integrated video. The series of maps show the soils as well as the cultural and historic heritage combined with interactive maps of the area of loess, conservation zones, tourism sites, and accommodation. The maps can be used in other media formats such as CDs/DVDs which would serve to promote the region as a geotourism destination. They can further be integrated into the official website of Titel loess plateau, touch-screen panels posted in visitor centres or in other forms of promotion.