

Geotourism: The Tourism of Geology and Landscape



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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

1 Setting an agenda for geotourism

David Newsome and Ross Dowling

Introduction

Travel to and appreciation of natural landscapes and geological phenomena continues to grow as a niche area of tourism. Despite economic recessions, political problems, the increasing price of oil and even the risk of natural disasters, such as volcanic eruptions, people still yearn for new experiences and need to fulfil that deep aspect of our humanity, which is having a sense of wonder about the planet we live on. It is our belief that geotourism will continue to rise as an important tourism activity as our planet becomes increasingly overcrowded, as wild places continue to be diminished and people strive for sustainable lifestyles and authentic natural experiences.

Geotourism, as a distinct subsector of natural area tourism, has quickly evolved since the rapid expansion of the global geopark movement from 2002 onwards and the publication of Dowling and Newsome (2006). Accordingly, this is the second book that comprehensively explores the nexus between landscape, geological phenomena and tourism. As with its predecessor, in this book various researchers, specialists, practitioners and protected area managers from different countries have been invited to contribute their thoughts and experience of geotourism. This book therefore contains examples of geotourism concepts, development and practice from around the world. These accounts of geotourism provide insight and scope for further discussion as to what geotourism is, how it might be promoted, on how to present geotourism to the visitor, views on the management of geotourism and collectively they build and help to set an agenda for the future.

A question of definition

Hose (2008) fully explores the history surrounding the definition of geotourism and points out that a definition was not published until 1995 (see Hose, 1995). He also examines (Chapter 2 in this book) where geotourism has come from and further considers the importance of the historical perspective in helping to define what geotourism is today. However, the definition of geotourism remains contentious due to the promotion of a broad meaning as advanced by *National Geographic* (undated). Nonetheless, the extent to which a particular definition of geotourism will be accepted will depend on individual interpretation as to how someone wishes to develop geotourism and associated tourism activity in a particular country and/or location.

It is clear that as a consequence of the confusion surrounding the definition of geotourism there is a need for clarity. Moreover in order to set a widely accepted definition, and in an attempt to avoid confusion, the discussion here follows on from the first published definitions by Hose (1995; 2000) and expands on the argument raised by Dowling and Newsome (2006).

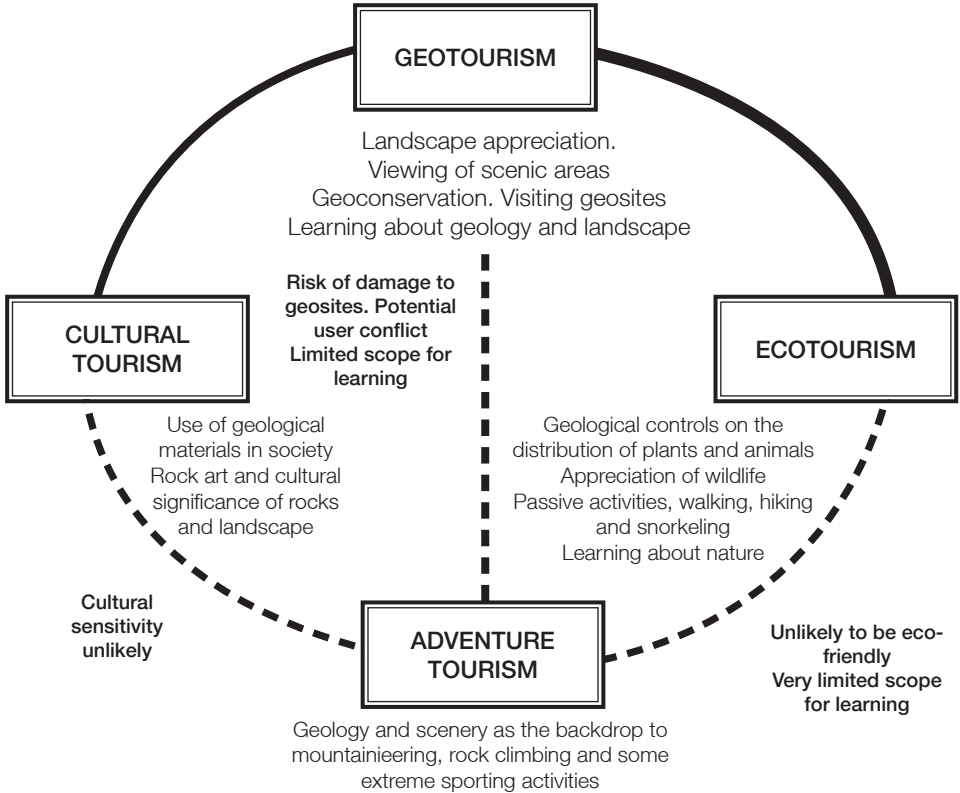


Figure 1.1: The relationship of geotourism with other forms of tourism. Solid and dashed lines represent interconnecting pathways. The connection between ecotourism and geotourism is represented as a particularly strong relationship

Figure 1.1 indicates the context of geotourism in relation to other forms of tourism. The *National Geographic* (undated) perspective includes cultural tourism and ecotourism and, possibly, because of its broad meaning, some examples of soft adventure tourism. While clearly there are strong links between geotourism and ecotourism as represented by the bold line connecting geotourism with ecotourism in Figure 1.1 and to a lesser extent with cultural tourism; the dashed lines connecting geo, cultural and ecotourism with adventure tourism (especially hard forms that overlap into extreme sporting activities) are more tenuous in regard to concepts of sustainability and an appropriate learning environment, both of which are essential aspects of natural area tourism. As indicated by Dowling and Newsome (2006) many forms of adventure tourism take place in geological settings which may be incidental to ‘geotourism’ as in the case of a mountain biking event taking place in a scenic setting. Alternatively geology may be the focus of the activity as with mountaineering, rock climbing, abseiling, large scale running events/challenges (e.g. Mount Kinabalu and other readily accessible and prominent mountains around the world), snowmobiling, quad biking in glacial environments and geo-caching. Activities such as these have limited capacity for a sensitive approach to environmental issues and may indeed be environmentally damaging (e.g. Cater *et al.* 2008; Newsome and Davies, 2009). With some sporting events, such as mountain bike challenges, participants and some managers informally claim there is potential for education and

Chapter extract

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