

# 1

# Geography and Tourism

## Introduction

This first chapter provides an introduction to the geography of tourism. It initially discusses the nature of geography, and indicates the major topics that the subject is concerned with, as well as presenting the types of questions that geographers ask. It then considers the activity of tourism, giving a brief overview of its importance and a discussion and consideration of definitions. The links between the two areas of study are presented, as well as a brief overview of different approaches to the relationship between geography and tourism.

## The nature of geography

In simple terms, geography is about people and places (Mason, 1992). The key word in connection with geography is location. So geography is about the location of places and also the location of people. It is about the relationship between different locations or places. This relationship is often described as a *spatial* relationship (Hall and Page, 2014). 'Spatial' is in effect another word for 'geographical'. However, geography is not defined in the same way by all authors interested in the subject, and the term 'spatial' is more specific and a more scientific concept as it refers to just space on the earth. The concept 'spatial' is not just two dimensions on the surface of the land, but also includes mountains, hills and river valleys as well as the depths of oceans and seas. So the concept of 'spatial relationship' does not necessarily have to refer to specific geographical features, be they physical or human geographical features. However, the concept of 'spatial relationship' is that it is concerned with the relationship between different geographical features.

Investigating spatial relationships can help in finding patterns (Hall and Page, 2014). Geographers are frequently involved in looking for patterns in the environment, as these can help understand, for example, features in a natural landscape. It also means that it may be possible to suggest that as a pattern has been discerned in relation to certain features in a specific location or area, if these features are found elsewhere, then this pattern may be evident again in this other location. It

may therefore be possible, if certain patterns are found, to make predictions about future relationships. Being able to predict what may happen in the future, or suggesting similar patterns between what is currently known and a new context, can be very useful for those who are planning future human activity.

Conventionally geography is subdivided into physical and human elements (Robinson, 1976).

- The physical aspects of geography are, for example, landscape features such as mountains, rivers, seas, oceans, coastlines and glaciers. The word *environment* is often used as a shorthand way of indicating physical geography, although this can be misleading as the environment can also refer to the human landscape.
- Human geography is concerned with human activity in the environment and will involve study of for example settlements, farming, fishing and forestry.

Whether it is physical geography or human geography, the geographer is interested in a major question – ‘*where?*’ The geographer wants to know where certain features are, be they rivers, lakes, cities or forests (Robinson, 1976). Geographers also want to look at relationships between different physical features in the landscape, such as rivers and coastlines. Geographers will also be interested in the relationship between human aspects of the landscape/countryside such as farming areas and towns. Physical and human geography are linked when, for example, a geographer studies the type of landscape and soil in an area in relation to the use of the land for farming or forestry.

Geographers are not just concerned with the question ‘*where?*’, but other very important related questions. The question ‘*what?*’ will be concerned with precisely what is there in a landscape, or in a particular location. This can involve simply studying and describing for example, different types of rocks, or landscape features such as waterfalls, or river valleys. However, it is likely to also involve investigation of, for example, what types of buildings are in a village, or the types of farming activity in a region. In fact, geographers are very likely to be asking the questions *where* and *what* together. They will want to know *what* is there in the landscape and precisely *where* it is (Robinson, 1976).

The geographer is also concerned with the question ‘*when?*’. The landscape/environment has evolved over a long period of time and will continue to change in the future. When certain activities take place now and have taken place in the past is very significant. Geographers may therefore be interested in looking back one hundred years, or even a thousand years, to investigate how, for example, a town has grown. In the case of a mountain landscape, a physical geographer will want to investigate several thousand years of development to try to understand why it looks the way it does today. However, a geographer may also look at a much shorter time period, such as for over one year, particular in relation to for example seasonal changes in the weather or plant growth. So the question ‘*when?*’ can be extended to ‘*for how long?*’

The sentence at the end of the previous paragraph has used the word *how* and this is another important question that geographers will ask. What geographers will be interested in is *how*, for example, a landscape has developed over time. This will require an understanding of the processes operating in that landscape. Some of this may be what we usually call 'natural' processes. These include the effects of climate such as rain, snow, wind and sunshine and, for example, the wearing away of the land through erosion by water or ice. Nevertheless, *how* the landscape or an environment in any one place has changed over time will frequently be a result of human activity, in terms of, for example, how we have farmed the land and built houses and roads.

However, probably the most important question a geographer will ask is '*why?*' A geographer may want to know why a particular city is located where it is. Trying to answer this question will focus on particular features of the landscape that have favoured the growth of the city, such as a river, or a natural harbour or the presence of raw materials for industry, such as coal or oil. A geographer will also want to answer the question: 'why is *this* city more important than a town that is nearby'. This will involve far more than a description of 'what is there and where it is'. It will require analysis of the processes in the physical environment and also activities by people and the reasons why particular decisions were taken. The relationship between these processes is often complex, meaning that answering the question '*why?*' is frequently difficult (see Mason, 2014). However, it is a very important question for all geographers, as answers to this question may provide information that can help change existing features and activities, may be useful to predict future processes and events and may provide opportunities for improvements to be made.

A further question that geographers are interested in is '*with what effects?*'. In relation to the question '*why?*' we have noted that attempting to get answers to the question will involve consideration of the reasons certain decisions were taken. 'With what effects?' is the question that considers, for example, what has happened following a decision taken by people in relation to a landscape/environment. 'With what effects?' may also involve the impacts that some features of the natural landscape have had on other parts, such as a glacier on a river valley. It can also involve consideration of what the natural landscape can do to a human landscape, such as a tsunami hitting settlements in a coastal area. 'With what effects?', however, is often a question concerned with what people do to a landscape such as drop litter, or trample vegetation, but can also involve consideration of how visitors to a heritage site can help contribute to its upkeep through the payment of an entrance fee.

Some of the questions in which geographers are interested enable *description* of, for example, a river valley or an urban landscape to be made. Answering the questions '*where?*' and '*what?*', will enable this type of description to be achieved. However geographers usually want to do much more than just describe what they see in a landscape – they also want to carry out a process of *analysis*. This