

Introduction to Sustainable Tourism

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Preface

How many times have you heard friends and family tell you to visit a place before it's discovered and everybody starts going there? Get off the beaten track, they say. Follow the path less travelled, they advise you. *See it before it's too late*, they may even warn you.

This book is about those fundamental ideas in tourism. What do we mean by too late? How do we recognise too late when we see it, and what do we do about it when we get there? Even better, how do we avoid ever getting to the point of too late?

These are the fundamental questions of sustainable tourism. First, we want to avoid "too lateness" – a form of intergenerational inequity, as what we are actually saying is "you should have seen it 10, 20, 50 years ago! It was so much better then". Second we also want to promote intragenerational equity, that we all have access to development opportunities to improve the economic (including financial), environmental and social conditions that we live in.

Sustainability and its origins will be defined in Chapter 1 of this book. For now, suffice it to say that sustainability in general has been very challenging to put into mainstream practice. When it comes to tourism, a number of challenges specific to this sector add to the difficulty of implementing sustainability.

First, tourism is not a clear-cut set sector when it comes to defining it. We may be fairly confident that the travel agent who booked your trip, the airline and hotel that you use are part of the tourism sector. But what about the taxi that got you from the airport to the hotel, or the train that took you from your home to the airport for that matter? What about the restaurants you will eat in, the supermarkets you'll use to buy the toothpaste you forgot to bring? The banks where you'll withdraw cash, and the police who will keep you safe in a destination? And each of these services has its own supply chain to think about – leading to a series of Russian Dolls, each one hiding another inside.

This interlinking of supply chains and diverse sectors and regions begs the question: does the whole complex system need to be sustainable – from tourism generating region to host destination, and all the carbon emitting transportation along the way – for tourism itself to be sustainable? The purists would argue "yes". The pragmatists might convince us otherwise, pointing out the value of trade-offs, and the need to start somewhere.

Second, tourism inevitably has impacts: the act of observation always changes the observed. The trick is to minimise the negative impacts and maximise the positive impacts. Sustainability is a process, like it or not, and it is incremental and adaptive. Tourism in particular, not only influences its environment, but is highly influenced by its environment (think rainy days, a pilot strike, a spike

in the value of local currency, a nearby earthquake, or a terrorist attack). Cause and effect is not always immediately apparent and linear relationships do not always exist, making managing this diffuse sector even more challenging. Finally, sustainable tourism means different things to different people.

Unpacking sustainable tourism therefore requires a good understanding of what it means, why it's proving difficult to implement and what its positive and negative impacts actually are. We need to understand the policy framework that binds sustainable tourism practices, as well as the diversity of individual choices that practitioners make within that framework, how they operationalise those choices and work with partners to implement sustainability. We'll review some cases where these have been most effectively carried out and how we know that they are being effective. Finally we'll then look at the future of sustainable tourism; how innovations are influencing sustainable practices and what the future trends are that need to be addressed.

The learning sequence will be as follows:

Section 1: Introduction

1: Definitions and origins of sustainable tourism

This chapter sets out the need for sustainability and the global framework for sustainability and how it relates to tourism. It looks at the various agreements and goals that exist as a framework for considering sustainability goals within tourism, and reviews the triple bottom line approach to sustainability

2: Challenges to implementing sustainability in tourism

This chapter examines the idea of a business case for sustainability, and asks why, if the business case is so clear, is it still so poorly developed in tourism? It also raises the question of tourism's carbon footprint, system-based incentives and disincentives for applying sustainability in practice.

3: Impacts of tourism

This chapter reviews the types of impacts, positive and negative associated with tourism, and introduces the types of case studies that will bring the material to life throughout the remaining book chapters.

Section 2: Managing for sustainability

4: Sustainable tourism policy frameworks

This chapter reviews the policy frameworks in which operators function, and how these affect consumer behaviour in tourism. It explains the importance of different policy structures to achieve the types of positive impacts outlined in Chapter 3 and contrasts progressive and less progressive approaches

5: Governance and partnerships

Based on Chapter 4, this chapter explores how partnerships can best be leveraged to integrate sustainability. This includes community groups, NGOs, certification agencies, etc.

6: Ethics and values

This chapter builds on Chapters 1-5 and explores how ethics and values bring to bear on integrating sustainability into business practice. It explores why the discussion of sustainability itself is problematic, and why any operationalisation of the principles must start with an understanding of how values play into the operationalisation of sustainability

7: Measures and tools

This chapter explores the different types of tools available to practitioners to measure, track and develop their pathway towards sustainability.

8: Operationalising sustainable tourism

This chapter presents business practices that have adopted a sustainability value and ethic, and looks at how sustainability is operationalised into business practice. It uses actual cases, and draws out lessons from those cases around the influence of policy, supply chains, and trade-offs to maximise benefits and minimise negative impacts

Section 3: Future of sustainable tourism**9: The future of sustainable tourism: change and innovation**

This chapter looks at some of the big issues that tourism will be facing in the next 20-50 years and asks how well we are prepared for these changes. Existing research suggests that tourism does not engage very well with the larger issues of geopolitical stability, a transition away from the carbon economy, etc. This chapter also reviews the types of innovation that are assisting the transition to sustainability as well as providing a framework for understanding innovation and its role in tourism as part of the service industry.

10: Concluding remarks

This chapter integrates the material presented in previous chapters and asks readers to think about how the systems-based, supply chain approach can be applied to respond to the bigger future challenges to sustainability in tourism

The textbook and its exercises along with supplementary material are designed to help you as a student or a practitioner appreciate the complexity of implementing sustainable tourism, but at the same time to help you focus on what you want to achieve in terms of sustainability.

It provides you with a range of resources and knowledge that you'll need to implement sustainability, including examples environmental impact assessments and indicators, an awareness of policy and regulations, and techniques to successfully engage with community. And it will hopefully inspire you by looking at a number of actual businesses who practice sustainability, and who give an honest account of challenges and rewards of doing so.

