Nature and Time

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Learning outcomes

This chapter will provide you with:

1. A basic understanding of how nature-based tourism is defined and an awareness of related types of tourism.
2. Knowledge on the motivations of nature tourists and what is driving demand.
3. An appreciation of how the temporal dimensions of wildlife migration, valuing time in nature and vanishing natural resources, contribute to the attraction of nature-based tourism.

Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter's focus on climate and natural seasons, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the rich complexity of inter-relationships between nature and tourism, from temporal constructs. It will define nature-based tourism and explore what is driving demand. It will illustrate how temporal natural wildlife migrations and natural phenomena influence tourism demand. It will also assess how concern over vanishing natural resources is inducing some tourists to rush to visit before they are gone or irreversibly changed. Finally, it will examine the relationship between nature-based tourism and the temporal practices of slow tourism.

Defining nature tourism

Nature-based tourism is tourism centred on the natural attractions or resources of an area. The term is closely associated with other types of tourism, such as ecotourism, adventure tourism, wildlife tourism, and wilderness tourism (see Table 4.1). Although these types of tourism often take place in the same environment (e.g., national parks, nature reserves, protected areas) and the terms are often used interchangeably, it should be noted that there is an ongoing debate about the definitions of and relations between these different types of tourism.

Table 4.1: Defining nature-based tourism and other related forms of tourism

Typology	Definition	Example activities
Ecotourism	"Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and creates knowledge and understanding through interpretation and education of all involved: visitors, staff and the visited" (Global Ecotourism Network, 2016).	Guided forest walks, mountain gorilla trekking, wildlife conservation volunteering holidays, Reforestation volunteering holidays
Adventure tourism	Trips that include "at least two of the following three components: a physical activity, natural environment, and cultural immersion" (Adventure Travel Trade Association, cited in UNWTO, 2014, p.10).	Walking, hiking, cycling, canoeing, kayaking, sky diving, bungee jumping, caving, rock climbing, trekking, mountaineering, snowboarding, skiing
Wildlife tourism	"Observing animals in their natural environment is the main purpose. This includes both land-based and water-based environments. The focus is on observation (wildlife watching tourism), but it can also involve interaction such as touching or feeding animals" (CBI, 2017).	Bird watching, safari tours, whale watching
Wilderness tourism	"travel to remote destinations throughout the world that may be designated wilderness, national park or other protected area" (Mintel, 2014).	Trekking, camping and caravanning, canoeing, kayaking

The debate is mainly associated with the differing tourist motivations and behaviours and the sustainable nature of activities involved. For each form of tourism listed in Table 4.1, the immersion in nature might be deep, such as in trekking and camping in a remote area for an extended period of time, or shallow, such as visiting selected natural beauty spots for a day. The main motives of visitors may vary too. For adventure tourists, participating in the physical activity may be the key motivator, rather than spending time in nature. Despite being frequently used synonymously with nature-based tourism, ecotourism is not simply travelling to a natural area for pleasure, but conservation and learning should be the main motives of ecotourists. Adventure tourism and wilderness tourism are difficult concepts to define as adventure and wilderness are subjective and socially constructed notions. Some people may also categorise consumptive activities such as fishing and hunting as wildlife tourism, whereas many would limit wildlife tourism to non-consumptive watching and interaction only (Mintel, 2019). Hence, defining the different forms of tourism is not easy.

Depending on how one defines the different types of tourism, the associated tourism products and activities will differ. Yet, in practice, nature-based holidays can include a range of activities across the different forms of tourism. For example, a holiday product labelled as 'astrotourism' can combine astronomy activities with other nature tourism activities, including outdoor adventure, wildlife watching or photography activities as well as visits to heritage sites.

An area's natural attraction or resources can differ significantly depending on natural changes in seasons and therefore it is necessary to consider the temporal dimension in nature-based tourism. Some activities rely on seasonal and weather changes (e.g., wildlife migration, winter sports) whereas others may rely on the time of the day (e.g., sunrises, northern lights), or changes in celestial cycles (e.g., eclipses). Natural tourism attractions are also affected by more long-term passing of time and changes in nature and climate. The impacts of climate change on natural resources of tourism destinations have become more visible (e.g., coral bleaching in the Great Barrier Reef). It is the focus of this chapter to integrate the concept of temporality into the nature-based tourism dialogue and how nature and time together create tourism experiences. Tourism organisations and businesses need to understand the temporal changes in natural tourism resources as they influence consumer demand and in return affect their product development and marketing strategies.

Tourism demand for nature

An increasingly digitally connected, work-centric and material world has resulted in many people seeking solace by looking inward and giving greater consideration to their own wellbeing whilst travelling (Mintel, 2019; 2021). Consequently,

> *"many travellers are turning to nature to reset and rebalance the composure that has eroded in their daily lives, as well as to find an environment that is attractive and spacious in which to physically improve their health"* (Mintel, 2019).

Consumers are also more aware of climate change and their impact on the environment, and a company's sustainability is now a key factor in their travel purchase decision, especially for young people (Mintel, 2019).

Correspondingly, nature-based tourism and the related areas of adventure, camping/eco-pods and wellness tourism are predicted to accelerate in future years (Mintel, 2019). In particular, walking and trekking that enable tourists to have close and intimate encounters with a destination's culture and natural environment are increasing in popularity (AITO, 2020). Similarly, responsible interactions with wildlife, such as swimming with sea lions in the Galapagos, kayaking through the Amazon jungle or tracking animals are becoming as popular as traditional safaris. The popularity of the traditional safari remains strong, in part due to the diversification of African safaris from simply providing travellers with photo opportunities of the big five to championing conservation and working with local villagers to protect the wildlife.

Tourism diversification also enables nature-based destinations to overcome the challenges of seasonally pronounced high and low peaks and encourage tourists to visit year-round. For example, in Africa, protected areas that offer wildlife watching tours are subjected to climatically driven seasonality (Mintel, 2019). During the rainy season, instead of focusing on wildlife watching, ecolodges can diversify their offer to wellness and adventure tourism. For example, the rainy season provides kayaking and white-water rafting opportunities, and, in some areas, rain holds deep cultural significance, and there are festivals and celebrations that tourists can experience centred on these.

Tourism, natural migrations and natural phenomena

Nature-based tourism relies on natural attractions and resources of a place, including flora and fauna and land-, water- and sky-scape. These natural resources change with the passing of time and these temporal changes in nature create tourism demand. Tourism is influenced by seasonal flora and fauna lifecycle patterns as shown in the annual wildebeest migration holidays in Africa, humpback whale migration in Australia (see Case study 1), spring cherry blossom holidays in Japan, and fall foliage (leaf-peeping) holidays in New England, USA.

Case study 1: Whale watching tourism, Australia

Australia is a popular destination for whale and dolphin watching. While dolphin watching tends to occur all year round, whale watching activities are concentrated during the whale migration seasons as the animals migrate from and to Antarctica around the country. Whale-watching tourism in Australia has gained popularity in recent years and is now an important economic opportunity to many coastal destinations (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017).

The Ningaloo Coast in the State of Western Australia is a popular location for whale watching. The area, already renowned for swimming with whale sharks, started a trial for swimming with humpback whales in 2016. The trial was expected to extend the tourism season as the humpback whale migration season almost perfectly coincides towards the end of the whale shark season (The Guardian, 2015).

Although whale watching is frequently promoted as ecotourism by destinations and operators, and regulations are in place, there are concerns about the impact of whale watching tourism on the welfare of the animals. The presence of people and repeated harassment can cause stress and behavioural changes in animals (Animal Welfare Institute, n.d.). Collisions between whale-watching vessels and whales can cause serious injury and death to the animals and in rare cases to the whale-watching participants too. Accidents have been reported where participants suffer serious injuries after being struck whilst swimming with whales. In 2020 at least three people got injured by humpback whales in two separate incidents in Ningaloo and in both instances a calf was present (Pascual Juanola, 2020).

Tourism activities are also affected by other temporally defined natural phenomena. A relevant example is astrotourism, which is:

> *"a special interest tourism (SIT) market, in which travellers are motivated by sky-observation related experiences and their travel/destination choices are based on these experiences"* (Soleimani et al., 2019, p.2309).

It includes travelling for purposes such as, stargazing, northern light sighting, eclipse chasing and visits to observatories. Most activities are temporal by nature and dictated by time of day, month and year, and celestial cycle. Astrotourism is often considered as a form of nature-based tourism or ecotourism (Soleimani et al., 2019) as unpolluted, dark night skies are the primary resources (See Case study 2).

Case study 2: Dark sky tourism, UK

As of March 2021, ten locations in the UK have been awarded International Dark Sky Park or Reserve status by the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA, n.d.). Such designation provides the areas with an opportunity to raise awareness and develop new tourism products. These locations offer waymarked paths, guided tours and organised astronomy events, including Dark Skies Festival throughout autumn and winter (Dark Skies National Parks, n.d.). Dark sky tourism relies on unpolluted, dark night skies and can benefit rural destinations by attracting tourists, particularly outside of peak season, boosting tourist expenditure and overnight stays. Protecting the night skies can also help protect habitats for wildlife, improve health and wellbeing of the community.

In Scotland, northern latitudes and long winter nights, and expanses of unpolluted, dark skies, present tourism businesses opportunities to benefit from dark sky tourism. The Galloway Forest Park was declared Scotland's first Dark Sky Park (the fifth in the world) in 2009 and used tourism and advocacy to lead, educate and change people's attitude on light pollution (Rinaldi, 2019). In England, the Kielder Water and Northumberland National Park were awarded Dark Sky Park status by the IDA in 2013. A survey of tourism businesses in 2017 revealed that dark sky tourism created economic benefit of over £25million, supporting 450 jobs with 15% businesses reporting an improved business performance in the area (Northumberland Tourism, n.d.).

Last-chance tourism

Last-chance tourism (LCT) is a travel trend based on the temporality of vanishing tourism resources whereby tourists seek to experience them before they have irreversibly changed or disappeared entirely (Lemelin et al., 2010). Motivated by an impending sense of loss, tourists rush to visit a destination perceiving that time is running out (Fisher & Stewart, 2017). For the most part, environmental and ecological loss has driven this demand, however, an expected change in cultural resources, such as historical sites and indigenous cultures, or political changes, such as visiting communist Cuba, have also pulled tourists to a LCT destination (Lemelin et al., 2010). Furthermore, seeing a destination before it becomes too commercialised or visiting a destination while one is still fit enough to make the journey, especially as some LCT destinations are in remote areas, have also been associated with this form of tourism (Fisher & Stewart, 2017).

The concept of LCT first emerged to describe an increased tourism interest in cold regions, especially polar regions which are highly vulnerable to climate and environmental change (Dawson et al., 2011) (see Case study 3). Consequently, climate change is commonly considered in relation to LCT and the impact it is having or will have on natural tourism resources.

Case study 3: Polar bear viewing tourism, Canada

Arctic temperatures are increasing and causing longer ice-free seasons. Polar bears feed on ice-dependent seals. The longer the bears are able to feed during the winter months, the better they are able to survive during the ice-free fasting periods (Dawson et al., 2010; Lemelin et al., 2010). Churchill, Manitoba, Canada is a popular destination to see polar bears as they congregate along the shores of the Hudson Bay for approximately six weeks during the autumn, where they decrease their metabolic rates and subsist on stored fat reserves (fasting), allowing them to conserve energy while they wait for the sea ice to form (Dawson et al., 2010; Lemelin et al., 2010). Whilst the extended ice-free season provides tourists with a longer period of time to see the bears, it is also contributing to the decline in the health of the bears, particularly for female bears, as the longer fasting periods are leading to a greater reduction in weight, making them less likely to produce cubs. Aware of the impact of climate change on polar bears, tourists are motivated to view the species before it is too late.

Tourists engaging in LCT have strong pro-environmental values and they behave in sustainable ways while in the destination (Denley et al., 2020). However, the long-haul travel necessary to reach remote locations contributes to the demise of the very attraction they visit through greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Dawson et al., 2010; Lemelin et al., 2010). In addition, an influx of tourism can result in excessive pressure on and exploitation of an already ecologically fragile area. Therefore, the impact of LCT is partly indirect and intangible, and it is implicated by spatial and temporal lags (Dawson et al., 2011). This makes it more difficult to manage and mitigate than other forms of tourism that involve direct and local impacts.

It is unclear why there is a misalignment between LCT travellers' pro-environmental values and their unsustainable behaviour of travelling long-haul to reach LCT destinations. However, Denley et al., (2020) consider two reasons. First, whilst tourists might be well-intentioned, they are not making the connection between their LCT trips and the impact of their travel on climate change and how it contributes to the demise of the destination they are visiting. Second, tourists could be 'impact neglecters' choosing to separate themselves from the harm they cause (p. 1874). Despite this misalignment, the pro-environmental values of these tourists could be harnessed to mitigate the impacts of LCT. For example, tourists could become ambassadors for the protection of the LCT destinations and support conservation activities and organisations (Lemelin et al., 2010). Another option would be to tackle the pro-environmental attitude-behaviour gap by emphasising the amount of GHG emissions associated with LCT trips and encourage travellers to either offset the emissions from their trips or live a more environmentally friendly lifestyle back home (Denely et al., 2020).

Slowness and the value of time in nature

Appreciating the natural environment on holiday has also been linked to slow tourism. This encapsulates spatial and temporal practices, and it is underpinned by the desire to connect in particular ways and disconnect in others (Fullagar et al., 2012). Slow tourism is premised by a need to savour time, to dwell and connect with places and value travel experiences as forms of lived knowledge (Fullagar et al., 2012; Varley & Semple, 2015). It provides temporal deceleration and spatial distance from fast paced modern life which is typified by timesaving, stress, pressure and tension (Fullagar et al.,

2012; Oh et al., 2016). Key motivations include relaxation, enriching oneself, restoring and revitalising body and mind, and engaging in the environment sensuously. Slow travellers are distinguished by a desire to experience a different temporality to those who have a list of things to see while away, which they tick off and move on from (Fullagar et al., 2012). Therefore, slow tourists reject fast tourism characterised by standardised products with predicted outcomes that do not provide an opportunity for self-enrichment.

Slow immersion of place can incite different transport modalities, such as walking, canoeing and leisurely cycling (see Figure 4.1) that value nature by enabling the tourist to immerse themselves in the natural environment and use low carbon forms of transportation. Therefore, enjoying the journey is an integral part of the holiday. Connecting with communities, such as enjoying cultural traditions and local hospitality, also characterise this form of tourism. Combined, these enhance wellbeing, enable self-growth, offer a genuine connection with the destination and create a sense of meaning (Fullagar et al., 2012; Oh et al., 2016). Accordingly, slow travel practices are informed by ethical sensibilities that engage people with nature and or culture and foster a critical awareness of the impact of one's own tourist behaviour (Fullagar, et al., 2012).

Figure 4.1: Slow tourism: Cycling the Coast to Coast, England

Adventure tourism, once defined by the fast and de-natured intense experiences of risk and thrill, such as a half-day activity or a multi-activity week, now captures the simple rich experience of extended time in the natural environment (Varley & Semple, 2015). Recognising the growing

trend to seek unusual new luxuries in the form of time in nature, cooking your own wild food on a wood fire and carrying your own luggage over rough lands (See Figure 4.2) or along remote coastlines in kayaks, Varley and Semple (2015) propose the concept of slow adventure tourism. In doing so they consider the temporal, natural and corporeal dimensions of being and journeying in the natural environment.

Figure 4.2: Slow adventure tourism: Backpacking in Scotland

For example, they discuss how time is felt via natural change such as the dropping of the sun, the air becoming cooler and shadows lengthening, as well as tides and weather. Being exposed to nature, especially when over an extended period of time, allows tourists to connect with nature, such as appreciating the stars in the sky without light pollution, watching a storm, sleeping outside and encounters with wildlife. Accordingly, a slow adventure journey through the natural environment can present challenges and it requires commitment from participants of both time and energy. Therefore, "*in slow adventure, time does not merely pass, but is felt, in bodily rhythms of tiredness, sleep, wakefulness and effort*" (Varley & Semple, 2015, p. 82). Although, slow adventure tourism offers temporal deceleration and a therapeutic space from hypermodernity, allowing one to dwell and connect with place, it is also through these challenges and embodied experiences that tourists learn about themselves.

Summary

The natural environment is an essential resource for many forms of tourism. Because of this, delineating nature-based tourism from other types of tourism is problematic, as their respective tourists share similar motivations and behaviours and use the same natural resources. Temporal constructs offer a lens to analyse the complex inter-relationship between nature and different forms of tourism.

Temporal changes in natural tourism resources, such as seasonal fauna and flora lifecycle patterns, natural phenomena and vanishing natural tourism resources are key pull factors to a destination for many forms of tourism. The natural environment also provides an opportunity for temporal deceleration and spatial distance from fast paced modern life. Immersion in nature enables tourists to dwell, savour time and recharge, and in return, improves wellbeing, be it physical or mental, which is a key motivator for all tourists. By immersing oneself in nature, tourists may experience an increased sense of responsibility towards the environment and become ambassadors for the protection of the destinations they have visited and the flora and fauna they have observed.

Self-reflection questions

1. Consider how nature is a key component of different types of tourism.
2. Taking a nature-based tourism destination of your choice, explain its natural resources and discuss the different forms of tourism that utilise these natural resources over the course of a year.
3. Summarise five key factors that are driving demand for nature-based tourism.
4. Animal Welfare Institute advised that whale watching operators should respect the animals first and the clients second, and tourists should not trust those operators guaranteeing a whale sighting. How can operators respect the animals and satisfy their clients at the same time?
5. Assess the positive and negative impact that last chance tourism is having on a destination of your choice.
6. Consider the role of nature in slow tourism and the benefits of slow immersion in nature for participants.

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