Chapter 13
Ethics of Global Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the largest global industries. Macro-economic data from the World Trade Organization show that, taken together, tourism, travel, and transportation rank fifth in international trade after trade in fossil fuels, telecommunications, computer equipment, and automotive products, and on a par with agriculture. Tourism is the largest provider of commercial services. From airports to hotels, from theme parks to restaurants, from tour operators to souvenir shops, it is the largest global employer of the tertiary sector. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, by 2020 the number of people employed in travel and tourism worldwide will be 275 million, i.e. one in every twelve jobs. Despite the spectres of economic recession, global warming, and terrorist threats, the demand for international tourism thrives and keeps increasing: according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, international tourism is forecast to reach 1.6 billion arrivals by 2020; this number has grown exponentially from 25 million in 1950 to 800 million in 2005.

The global tourism industry may provide millions of jobs and billions of enjoyable days for travellers and holiday-makers, but it also requires ethical consideration. This chapter starts by examining the ethics of global tourism around two questions: Firstly, are some tourist destinations unethical? Secondly, are some forms of tourism unethical? These two thematic presentations, based on many examples and controversies, are followed by a short discussion of two key concepts which help conceptualize the ethics of global tourism: exploitation and sustainability. The adoption of a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism by the United Nations World Tourism Organization in 1999, the publication of articles) and then books about tourism ethics, the implementation of corporate social responsibility policies in the tourist industry, as well as the increasing demand for ethical tourism products all show that ethics has now entered global tourism, both in practice and in theory.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the largest global industries. Macro-economic data from the World Trade Organization show that, taken together, tourism, travel and transportation rank fifth in international trade, after trade in fossil fuels, telecommunications, computer equipment and automotive products, and on a par with agriculture (WTO 2008). Tourism is the largest provider of commercial services. From airports to hotels, from theme parks to restaurants, from tour operators to souvenir shops, it is the largest global employer of the tertiary sector. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, by 2020 the number of people employed in travel and tourism worldwide will be 275 million, i.e. one in every twelve jobs (WWTC 2009). Despite the spectres of economic recession, global warming and terrorist threats, the demand for international tourism thrives and keeps increasing: according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, international tourism is forecast to reach 1.6 billion arrivals by 2020; this number has grown exponentially from 25 million in 1950 to 800 million in 2005 (UNWTO 2009).

The global tourism industry may provide millions of jobs and billions of enjoyable days for travellers and holiday-makers, but it also requires ethical consideration. Many tourists themselves will be aware of some of the ethical implications of their acts and actions, both positively (e.g. contributing to local economies) and negatively (e.g. increased carbon footprint when flying to a destination overseas). This chapter is purposefully critical and starts by examining the ethics of global tourism around two questions: Firstly, are some tourist destinations unethical? Secondly, are some forms of tourism unethical? These two thematic presentations, based on many examples and controversies, are followed by a discussion of two key concepts which help conceptualize the ethics of global tourism: exploitation and sustainability. The adoption of a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism by the United Nations World Tourism Organization in 1999, the publication of articles (Stark 2002, Holden 2003) and then books (Smith & Duffy 2003, Fennel 2006) about tourism ethics, the implementation of corporate social responsibility policies in the tourist industry as well as the increasing demand for ethical tourism products (Tearfund 2002) all show that ethics has now entered global tourism, both in practice and in theory.

ARE SOME TOURIST DESTINATIONS UNETHICAL?

This section examines two types of tourist destinations that may be regarded as unethical: destinations in countries where human rights are being violated (such as Burma) and sites of 'dark tourism' (such as concentration camps).

Destinations Where Human Rights are Being Violated

According to the NGOs Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, human rights are severely violated in many countries all around the world, from Sudan to China and from Israel to Congo (Amnesty International 2009, Human Rights Watch 2009). On that list, Burma (Myanmar) occupies a particular place because of the mediatized profile of Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi; she was democratically elected prime minister of Burma in 1990 but has been kept under house arrest by the military junta since then. Long is the list of human rights violations in Burma: no freedom of expression, unfair trials, forced evictions, internally displaced people, forced labor, confiscation of crop and food-stock, arbitrary levies and fines, even shooting on sight and killings as collective punishments. In that context, is it ethical to travel to Burma?

Travelling to Burma (be it to visit the ancient capital of Bagan with its dozens of temples, stupas and pagodas from the 12th century, or to go div-

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