

Tourism in the Environment

by

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To effectively study tourism within the environment of the Great Barrier Reef, we must consider its place in the environmental pattern of Queensland. Tourists come and will continue to come via the coastal towns. The continental islands, coastal roads, and even the hinterland form part of that package which is popularly known as the Great Barrier Reef.

'Tourism' for my purpose today means travel beyond the confines of one's home and the enjoyment while away of leisure, change or recreation, or a combination of all three. 'Environment' means the surroundings in which this travel and enjoyment take place. 'Conservation' means the use of a resource without diminishing its quality or endangering its supply. This glossary of terms will not please everyone.

In this paper we are going to consider:

1. The requirements of the tourist from his environment.
2. The impact of the tourist upon his environment, and
3. How this impact may be mitigated to serve the requirements of the tourist and to preserve as much of this environment as possible for all sections of the community and for future generations.

These three headings must be considered within a total framework of urban, country and coastal environmental divisions, otherwise we shall fall into the trap of partial thinking about a subject which can only be whole and indivisible.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE TOURIST FROM HIS ENVIRONMENT

Tourism and the environment are inter-dependent. For many tourists the basic ingredient of sun, sea and sand must be present, or at least available just over the hill. The environment consists of the landscape, the beauty of coast and countryside, our offshore islands, flora and fauna and by no means least the lure of an historic heritage in timber, block and stone. One or all of these ingredients tourism demands - or there can be no product.

For this reason nations rush to restore their beaches after oil spillage. The Netherlands belatedly rescues the last of her windmills. Britain seeks to preserve the last remnants of the Industrial Revolution. Ireland refurbishes her cottages. The chateaux of the Loire gain a new lease of life. Australia discovers the pull of her gold towns and America rediscovers her colonial past. For this reason too, international money flows into the coffers of Florence and Venice to ensure their continued preservation.

History, tradition, customs and characteristic scenery, buildings, monuments and food bring the tourist and the tourist brings the money. It is that simple or difficult.

What then is the quintessence of Australia?

The one natural phenomenon that captures the imagination of the overseas visitor, that gives an immediate corporate identity to Australian tourism is, the Great Barrier Reef.

Its preservation and conservation is essential to the Australian tourist industry and of course to Queensland in particular.

THE IMPACT OF THE TOURIST UPON HIS ENVIRONMENT

Let us now consider a number of prime factors arising from tourism which impinge on the environment and affect the environment in varying degrees of intensity.

To do this let us consider the special impact that tourism exerts on:

- (a) the urban and historic heritage;
- (b) the countryside;
- (c) the coastline of Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef, and
- (d) general impact factors that affect all three including that insidious enemy - overexposure.

(a) The impact of tourism on our urban and historic heritage

The world has a breath taking treasury of historic cities and towns, tombs, cathedrals, historical castles, houses and gardens, ancient monoliths and archaeological sites of all kinds.

They have been called civilisation's memory and memorial.

They are usually beautiful. They are always irreplaceable. This heritage is under constant attack by decay, pollution, neglect, war or by the more mundane forces of urban renewal and road construction.

The laws of no country are inviolate and what is conserved today can be destroyed by legislation tomorrow. The future will show the depth of our values and whether the temporary expedience of these demands will draw upon us the curses of future generations.

(b) The impact of tourism on the countryside

As tourist pressures on our cities and coastlines increase a corresponding and increasing emphasis is given to the development of rural tourism.

The type of tourism best suited to a countryside environment is undoubtedly self catering such as caravanning and camping, farmhouse accommodation, cottages and chalet development all of which are daily increasing in importance.

(c) The Impact of tourism on the coastline of Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef.

The coastal landform of much of the world follows closely our pattern here in Queensland. Historic and modern routes thread between mountain and sea.

The building of harsh coastal roads has scarred ribbon development along many a scenic coastline. Coastal dunes are particularly susceptible to tourist depredation along with unique and often beautiful coastal vegetation. Private development can block access to the sea for long distances and lack of coastal planning can create a nightmare of urban sprawl which begins not far from the high water mark. This can come either in concrete boxes or in regimented bungalows.

The continental islands of Queensland and the cays and reefs of the Great Barrier Reef are perhaps among the most delicate subjects in our world environment. Quite apart from ecological considerations and the unique character of its marine life, the scenic beauty of this area presents one of the greatest potential products in world tourism, and tourist pressure on this area will of necessity entail some form of control if the tourist is not to damage or destroy the product he comes to see. It may well be that this control can only be exercised through powers invested in a national park authority.

(d) Overexposure

Over-capacity for motor and power driven transport and the increasing strain being placed on the environmental capacity of the tourist product by the industry itself are two considerations the tourist industry, is, or should be, vitally concerned.

There should be a master plan for resort development which provides for the maximum number of visitors consistent with the protection and enhancement of natural, historical, aesthetic and environmental values.

The resort area should not be swamped by people, vehicles or noise. It is just as important to establish the physical capacity of a national park or scenic reserve as it is to determine how many tents and caravan spaces one can fit into a holiday camping ground.

The problem, of course, is made more acute by the fact that recreation is so often a peak-period phenomenon and that within limits so many people tend to be gregarious. For all our technological capacity, we cannot re-create another Grand Canyon or Great Barrier Reef. With each increase in our guest numbers, the availability of space to each person decreases.

Conservationists complain of the visual pollution of tourist infrastructure on the beauties of scenery and seacoast, and of islands and reefs. There is also constant complaint about the power and manipulation of the political and entrepreneurial forces which support tourism. It is true that much tourist development has been promoted by nothing more than financial speculation or by the impetus of the national policy of the moment and this may well conflict with the long term interest of the site where development occurs. Even the social segregation of tourism has come under criticism as a divisive influence.

HOW THE IMPACT OF TOURISM CAN BE MITIGATED AND CONTROLLED TO SECURE THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE TOURIST HIMSELF

Remedy is impossible without control which must be exercised in a democratic society by the people themselves, if not voluntarily, then most certainly through their democratically elected government. It matters little whether we use the euphemism "management techniques" which is current today for the word "control"; the result must be the same.

Capacity must be the key to thinking about access to all leisure facilities. We must find ways to judge how many cars, boats, recreational pursuits each island resort or stretch of coast can take; and what can be done in landscaping road improvement and access to increase the capacity without damage to the essential character of the place. And having done this what then? Well we have to come back to the single word 'control'.

In a recent United States report it was stated:

"In this era of enormously increasing vacation traffic, it must be assumed that those who visit our National Parks do so for the purpose of enjoying a unique experience, and are therefore willing to accept necessary restrictions, including those regulating numbers of people and their means of travel. Such regulations may, in fact, deepen the awareness of visitors that they are truly in places of special importance. It has been proposed that a national system of classification and zoning of recreational areas should be established, based on the concept of environmental capacity. Provision could thus be made for every kind of outdoor recreation in an environment where it can be most enjoyed. From "high density and recreation areas" to "wilderness areas", the aim would be to control numbers of visitors primarily by the extent of the provision of facilities and amenities - including roads, food and accommodation."

The British Tourist Authority's Chief Executive, Mr M.J. Licorish, has maintained on a number of occasions and to many international bodies that, if possible, education, publicity and information are far more preferable to government dictates; and I would agree with him where this is possible. "It is better to recommend" he says "to encourage, to say 'Do this' rather than 'Don't do that'. The positive element must be stronger than the negative. Recommend we must, and influence we must. Public relations and sales promotion, in the service of influencing tourist demand, must be used in all its guises; for promotion paid or unpaid, can influence the tourist consumer just as much as the consumer of any other product or brand. The national and regional tourist offices, the travel press, and above all the travel industry, can exert tremendous influence in guiding and controlling the public's tastes and requirements in travel to accord with the preservation of the tourism product. But if these methods fail I believe that we must be prepared to accept control by both central and local government and by coercion through entry fees and prior booking."

It is essential for the future success of tourism to the Great Barrier Reef and its supporting complex of continental islands and mainland access points that this whole area should be under the co-ordinated control of a single body which would have the interest of all sections of the community at heart and the power both to designate areas of special significance and delicacy and the powers of control. Nothing less than this can effectively preserve the tourist product in perpetuity.

However in addition to control, I believe that education is one of the most vital ingredients in the preservation of the tourist product through conservation. Its action can be two fold. First through the establishment of efficient and modern interpretive techniques throughout our national parks and recreational centres and secondly the provision of "activity" and "adventure" holidays for young people in these same national parks and recreational centres where they can learn sporting, athletic and recreational skills and at the same time learn to appreciate the value of a sound environment. But don't bank too much on it because one of the most prominent names carved into the ruined Temple of Poseidon on Cape Sounion in Greece (among many hundreds that desecrate this temple) is that of Lord Byron. If Lord Byron knew no better, what hope is there for the cream tea and candy floss brigade or we might say the stubbie brigade here.

Let me now end this paper on a strong and positive note and set out clearly the essential requirements for tourism in an acceptable environment.

Tourism is an expanding industry and a major force in the life of most nations. It makes a massive contribution to the recreation of mankind, to his health and his education and is a unique factor in the economic health of many countries. A national and international awareness is dawning that will establish the interdependence of tourism and conservation and ensure their future welfare.

The basic requirements for the happy union of conservation and tourism is:

- (i) To identify and protect our natural scenic, historic and architectural heritage.
- (ii) To plan tourist development with due regard to the character and capacity of the locality and the interest of its inhabitants. This requires a study of the coastal, urban and rural areas with a view to defining the types and volume of tourism which each can absorb, the ways in which tourism can be made compatible with local conditions and the measures necessary to prevent unsuitable, excessive or over-rapid development.

- (iii) To spread the benefits and pressures of tourism more widely in place and time.
- (iv) To achieve high standards of planning and design in all tourist development. This implies respect for the scenery, for coast and countryside, for the character of historic towns and sites, for national and local traditions of building and for the human scale in all development.
- (v) To ensure that all tourist development projects are judged both at their inception and throughout their implementation from the stand point of their effect on the environment.
- (vi) To secure an effective control of traffic in all places frequented by tourists.
- (vii) To secure the co-ordination of legislation and administrative procedures relating to conservation and tourism, which may well be through the establishment of protected areas and national parks.
- (viii) To encourage the widest possible education for all visitors and potential visitors through formal and informal education, the improvement of information services, the training of guides and the implementation of a code for tourists, this being linked wherever appropriate with the establishment of essential interpretive services.
- (ix) To establish a resource centre where the impact of tourism on the environment may be studied and where the exchange of practical information and expertise between bodies concerned with tourism and conservation can be carried out. This may well happen with the interests which we have represented at this workshop and with particular reference to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.