



Appalachia-Science
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A CRITIQUE OF ECOTOURISM IN APPALACHIA

Definitions

Tourism is rapidly becoming big business in Appalachia; it is the third largest industry in Kentucky and ranks high in neighboring states. People do come and visit and want to enjoy the area and culture. This tourist popularity may be due to a variety of causes: scenic views for sightseeing — the major physical activity of tourists; proximity by being within a day's drive of over one-third of America's population — a feature that cannot be equaled anywhere else in the U.S.; positive promotion by various state and regional groups to meet economic development needs; accessibility through the current interstate network; and natural hospitality by Appalachian service personnel and residents.

Ecotourism. A variation of general tourism is *ecotourism*, which has also enjoyed wide popularity in recent years, though accounting for a very small fraction of overall tourism. Here participants choose to travel to pristine and scenic natural wonders, often in areas too costly for average tourists. The rising earth consciousness coupled with the funds to make the trip encourages ecotourism. A driving force is to get off the beaten path, to act as responsible tourists, and to chalk up the conquest of specific high mountains, coral reefs or tropical forests. Ecotourism ventures have expanded to include acquaintance with threatened and endangered cultures in a world where half the world's languages are expected to disappear within this century by United Nations estimates. It has more recently come to include craftmaking, music, regional foods, appropriate technology or even sustainable community developments.

Positive Aspects

☺ **Tourism is Recreation.** This may belabor the obvious for travel is expected to be entertaining. However, one must understand that most people travel to get away, and so trip planning is part of the recreation. The actual operation may prove less exciting than the preparation. Furthermore, there is the cocktail circuit potential of visiting exotic and unique sites. And some can really enjoy such trips no matter how uncomfortable they are.

☺ **Tourism can be Educational.** Nothing equals face-to-face conversation and going to visit and see for oneself. Travel literature promotes trips that can expand the mind. The ecological travel guides advise people to cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and looking at others. Discover the enrichment that comes from seeing another way of life. The broadening travel experience has a non-monetary value worth treasuring. No doubt, the Appalachian region offers opportunities to experience the region's biodiversity, unique land forms, karst areas, and sustainable economic activities. The latter enhance the lives of human communities and natural systems when properly designed and executed.

☺ **Tourism can be Economically Beneficial.** The current issue of *BackHome* (March/April 2001, pp. 48-51) tells how agri-tourism is an ideal way to save the family farm by enticing tourists (especially parents and youth) to come and experience farm life and pet and observe the livestock first hand. The visits to living farms or museums or the tours of formerly operating coal mines can have similar effects and be quite beneficial to hard-hit company and former one-industry towns.

☺ **Tourism can be Socially Uplifting.** One rare sort of ecotourism is really environmental data-gathering in areas which have water or air pollution, or which have been damaged through human activity such as surface mining or clear cutting of forested areas. Generally, governmental agencies will refrain from showing such areas in order to minimize damage to the state's economic image. The book *EARTH ODYSSEY: AROUND THE WORLD IN SEARCH OF OUR ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURE* by Mark Hertsgaard (Broadway Book, New York, 1998) is a narrative of a gifted writer who posed as a tourist in China, Russia, Africa, the Amazon and other places in order to talk to people who were affected by environmental degradation. He admits that more can be done when called a tourist rather than a media reporter.

Negative Aspects

☹ **Tourism can be Exploitative.** While many including Appalachians do not want to be observed as “poor folks,” some observers minimize the effects on the target populations. People who take tours to “experience” poverty do not realize how demeaning the exercise is for us on the receiving end. Appalachians may pretend to cater to such tourists and gather compromising photographs or stories to feed tourist biases. The inarticulate may simply slip away and avoid tourists or their articulate neighbors may take precious time and try to explain how exploitative the practice can become — but they receive no compensation for their efforts.

☹ **Tourism Involves Impacts.** Areas visited by ecotourists suffer from the impact of people, even careful people. The danger is greater in those pristine areas of rare plants or animals which are sensitive to human impact. Certain animals in Africa such as the leopard are known to be highly disturbed by nearby human sight-seers. The Himalayas in Nepal have been restricted due to the sheer impact of human visitors far beyond the carrying capacity of these fragile regions. Ecotourists may litter or pollute less, but the services associated with their presence may be as careless as those catering to other tourists. A case in point is the oil spill in the Pacific a few months ago near the sensitive Galapagos Islands belonging to Ecuador. The fuel haulers were not ecotourists, but their business customers served and fueled the total ecotourist industry, just as the rapidly growing population of the Islands during recent years comes to serve ecotourists.

☹ **Tourism is Seasonal.** This is the weakest of the negative points but often raised by anti-tourist elements. Granted there are better jobs out there some place. However, these forms of employment are not necessarily where the jobseekers reside, nor of the type that they can fill. The tourist season generally lasts for only a part of the year, but it is better than no job at all, even when it does not pay much more than minimal wages. For the service person, it is honest employment and something that a person could commit oneself to with enthusiasm and some fulfillment.

Alternatives to tourism

Alternative Activities. Most of today's vacations include travel which reportedly makes us refreshed and the economies healthy. Could this be faulty reasoning? Vacationers can enjoy themselves at or near home by doing a different occupation, or an educational exercise, or assisting another through a less stressful service vacation. Vacation alternatives need not involve large amounts of travel time, resources or financial expenditures. Communications can be made as easily by phone, e-mail or fax, and the electronic media has many advantages. In trying both to do some hands-on tourism and some alternatives, one solution would be to encourage people to vary their vacation trips to include a little of each as their own lives might require.

Virtual Touring. Special attention must be given to ecotourism which includes scenic fragile areas and yet gives the participant experience of nature and Appalachian beauty. From an environmental perspective the best solution might be *virtual tourism* experienced through videotapes, or from the air in a low-flying aircraft — though the latter may be highly energy intensive. Another alternative is viewing the fragile areas from ground

observation towers or platforms with suitable information brochures or posters. Through virtual tourism the land itself is not touched or trampled upon. Our ASPI trail network is next to lands owned by the Federal government and leased for trail use. However, since this is an old-growth forest area we are convinced that visitors should be shown the area from a distance and not allowed to walk directly on the fragile forest floor.

Some Operative Principles

If one decides on the regular tourist junket, remember the following two principles:

All tourism needs to be ecological. Co-op America's *Travel Links* has a number of guidelines for tourists which are listed in **Appendix 1**. Most of these points can be summed up by "don't be an ugly American." Anyone with a degree of sensitivity has found others including non-Americans doing things which are embarrassing and demeaning as viewed from the standpoint of the native population. As our awareness of the environment increases we discover recreational activities which have more or less impact both as to type and to manner of application.

All tourism activities need to be regulated. Some recreational activities are simply off limits either because of affecting people (e.g., excessive noise or danger from jet-skis) or the environment itself (cross country off-road vehicles). In **Appendix 2** are listed recreational activities categorized according to their degree of greenness. Some such as rock climbing with spikes need to be highly restricted or banned. Others need to be allowed on a limited basis (e.g., horseback-riding in dryer times of year) or marked off-limits for a longer period to allow the ecosystem to rebound from human impact. Some such as game-hunting and mountain-biking need to be honed to very specific times and places: big game-hunting instinct is satisfied in South Africa by allowing such tourists (at a very high fee) to fire dart guns at animals needing vaccination, tagging or transfer, using an anesthetizing drug — *not* a bullet.

Conclusion. We are far more interested in promoting the ecological nature of all tourism, especially the forms now found in Appalachia. Merely promoting one type of ecotourism would ignore the need for developing ecological principles. Flagging sensitive or fragile areas for targets by ecotourists could damage these areas, with our Kentucky Red River Gorge being a case in point — damaged by those calling themselves the ecologically conscious. We should promote only regulated tourist programs with ecology in mind. These should limit hiking and camping to restricted areas with proper toilet facilities, camping sites, fire rings, and potable water sources. They should forbid certain recreational practices in fragile areas. They should explain through literature the threatened and endangered nature of many of our Appalachian plants and animals. And we should have proper police protection for both people and the land. In such a way ecotourism and tourism becomes one single concept.

For further information visit the ASPI website: <www.aspi@a-spi.org>

Appendix 1 Travel Guidelines

Co-op America's Travel Links

1. Travel in a spirit of humility and with genuine desire to meet and talk with local people; travel to meet, not conquer.
2. Reflect daily on your experiences; seek to deepen your understanding. "What enriches you may rob or violate others."
3. Be environmentally friendly; use energy, water and other resources efficiently and in keeping with local practices. Only bring necessary technological gadgetry. Participate in local recycling programs where available. Try not to bring into the country any containers that you don't plan to take out.
4. Don't create barriers; take advantage of opportunities to walk, bicycle and use other forms of non-motorized transport.

5. Acquaint yourself with local customs. Be culturally sensitive, especially with photography; people will be happy to help you.
6. Realize that the people in the area you visit often have time concepts and thought patterns different from your own; not inferior, just different.
7. Be economically beneficial. Spend money so that it stays in the community. When buying, remember that a bargain may be obtained because of low wages paid to the producer. Don't purchase products made from endangered species.
8. Cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and looking. Discover the enrichment that comes from seeing another way of life.

Appendix 2 Green Recreation Activities

Some recreation activities are more green than others i.e., low resource intensity or less impact on air, water and land. Some are quite wholesome; others threatening and risky to human health and safety. Some use very little equipment, have low travel costs, and operate with little non-renewable energy; others are heavy users of the Earth's limited resources. The 99 activities listed below begin with the more environmentally friendly and proceeds to the least. How green is your recreation?

Socially significant and low resource use

1. Nature Observation
2. Wildlife Preservation
3. Organic Gardening (vegetable, herbs, flowers)
4. Home Rehabilitation and Repair
5. Solar Energy Development
6. Nature Trail Building and Maintenance
7. Environmental Writing & Publicity
8. Environmental Education
9. Visual Arts and Crafts (using safe materials)
10. Singing, Dancing, Music Playing, Performing Arts

Local and low resource use

11. Simple Toy
12. Board Games (non-electronic)
13. Bird-watching and Nature Observation
14. Walking, Hiking, Jogging, Running (cross-country)
15. Swimming, Wading, Beach Play (natural setting)
16. Snow-play, Sledding, Cross-country Skiing, Ice-skating (natural setting)
17. Reading
18. Picnics, Potluck, Social Events (local)
19. Fishing (natural areas)
20. Home Exercising, Weight-lifting

Local outdoor with equipment

21. Playground Activities (swinging, volleyball, sandbox, kite-flying)
22. Canoeing, Row Boating
23. Softball, Soccer, Baseball
24. Track, Field, Jogging, Running
25. Biking (hard surface)
26. Basketball, Tennis, Handball

- 27. Dry Land Skiing, Roller Skating SR
- 28. Antique & Collectable Assembling
- 29. Gym Games (acrobatics, handball, karate, judo, shiatsu, racquetball, basketball)
- 30. Model Plane-flying, Electric Toys

Outdoors with equipment and moderate travel

- 31. Camping and Backpacking (low impact)
- 32. Photography
- 33. Sailing, Crewing, Rafting
- 34. Rappelling, Rope Work
- 35. Summer Camp Game
- 36. Horseback Riding (on trails)
- 37. Lawn Croquet, Badminton, Lawn Tennis
- 38. Spectator Sports (outdoors)
- 39. Spelunking SR

Indoors with equipment, operating energy

- 40. Home Decorating (lights)
- 41. Wrestling, Fencing, Boxing
- 42. Movie-making, Home Video
- 43. Amusement Parks
- 44. Writing (computer)
- 45. Television-watching RE
- 46. Electronic & Video Games RE
- 47. Computer Hacking RE
- 48. Private Gym Activities (low use) RE
- 49. Private Swimming (low use pool) RE

Indoors with equipment, energy, some travel

- 50. Opera, Concert, Festival, Movie (by auto) RE
- 51. Spectator Basketball
- 52. Bowling (automated) RE
- 53. Ice Skating (artificial ice) RE

Outdoors with equipment, and human safety factors

- 54. Surfing, Surf Sailing SR
- 55. Ice Sailing SR
- 56. Scuba Diving SR
- 57. Target Practice, Archery SR
- 58. Hunting (consumed) SR
- 59. Contact Sports (football, rugby) SR
- 60. Ice Hockey (natural setting) SR

Outdoor, equipment, and travel

- 61. Camping & Backpacking (distant) RE
- 62. Touring & Sightseeing RE
- 63. Mountain Biking ED
- 64. Horseback Riding, Fox Hunts, Polo RE, ED

HR = Health risk
SR = Safety risk
ED = High potential environmental damage
RE = Moderate to high resource expenditure (water, land, energy)

Outdoors, equipment, human safety and travel costs

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| 65. Skiing or Snowboarding Downhill (mechanical lift) | SR, RE |
| 66. White Water Rafting | SR |
| 67. Motorcycling | SR |
| 68. Rock-climbing, Mountain-climbing | SR, ED |
| 69. Snowmobiling | RE, ED |
| 70. Auto-/Drag Racing, Demolition Derby | SR |
| 71. Rodeo Riding | SR |
| 72. Hang Gliding | SR |
| 73. Bungee Jumping | SR |

Outdoors, environmental threat

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| 74. Lawn Care & Gardening (pesticides) | ED, RE, HR |
| 75. Landscaping (with exotic species) | ED |
| 76. Wildflower picking, Wildlife Gathering | ED |
| 77. Beach-combing | |
| 78. Golfing (using lawn chemicals) | ED, RE |
| 79. Amateur Archeology | ED |

Outdoors, heavy Energy use

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|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 80. Overseas Vacationing | |
| 81. Auto-Cruising | RE |
| 82. Ocean Cruising | |
| 83. Horse Racing (jockey) | RE |
| 84. Deep-sea Fishing (small numbers) | RE |
| 85. Motorized Camping | |
| 86. Yachting | RE |
| 87. Airplane Touring | RE |
| 88. Hot-air Ballooning | SR, RE |

Outdoor, human and psychic health

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| 89. Sun-bathing (uv light harm to skin) | HR |
| 90. Gambling & Cock-fighting | HR |
| 91. Mallng & Compulsive Shopping | RE |

Heavy impacts of a multiple sort

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| 92. Parachuting & Sky-Diving | SR, RE |
| 93. Wildlife Hunting for Sport | SR, ED, RE |
| 94. Touring fragile lands, Dunebuggy Operation | SR, ED, RE |
| 95. Off-road Vehicles (cross country) | SR, ED, RE |
| 96. Motor Boating, Water Skiing | SR, ED, RE |
| 97. Big Game-hunting (distance) | SR, ED, RE |
| 98. Smoking Tobacco | HR, RE |
| 99. Substance Abuse (drugs, alcohol) | HR, RE |