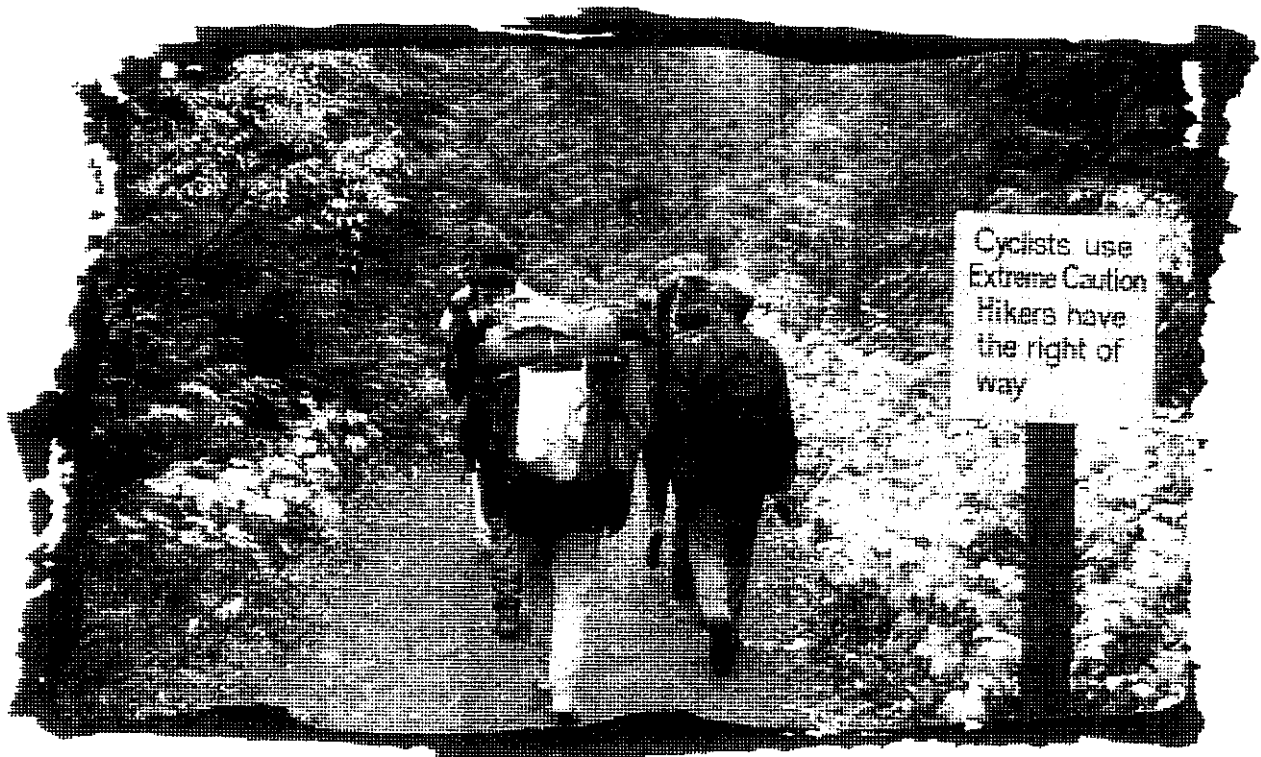


# RESOURCE- BASED TOURISM

AN EMERGING TREND IN  
TOURISM EXPERIENCES



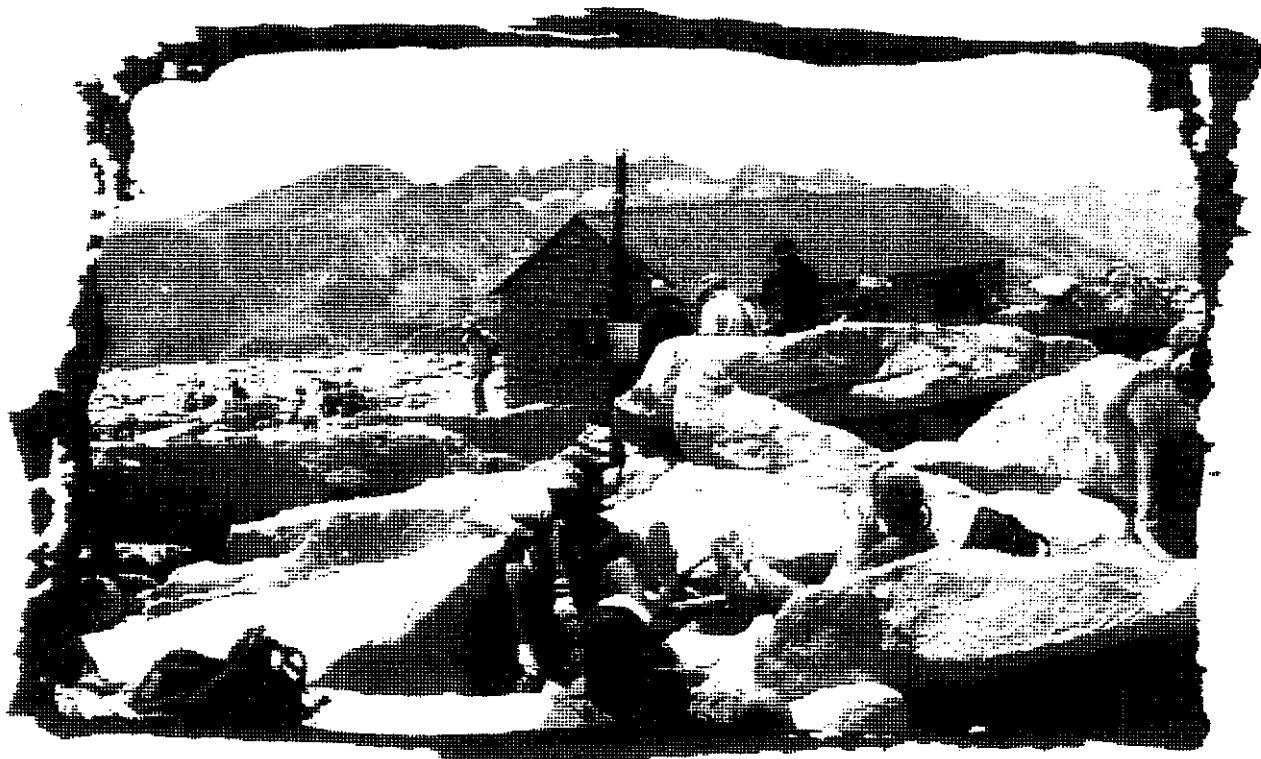
In 1996, more than 87 people reached the summit of Mt. Everest. During the same year, thousands of tourists rafted down the Colorado, Rio Blanco and Amazon rivers; went cave diving in Florida and Fiji; hiked the Tatshenshini-Alsek in British Columbia; skied the Sherburne Trail on Mt. Washington, New Hampshire; trekked in the Karakoram Range; or attended naturalist courses on the Galapagos Islands. What these activities have in common is that they fall under the rubric of a growing form of tourism known as resource-based tourism.

It is widely recognized that tourism is now one of the fastest growing sectors in the world's economy (World Travel and Tourism Council, 1992), and one of the most rapidly advancing segments of tourism includes those activities that are dependent on natural environments. Literally millions of tourists are attracted to areas that offer scenic beauty, unique natural settings, or opportunities for experiencing exotic cultures and locations. Within this context, resource-based tourism is defined in the following way:

*...tourism activities and experiences dependent on the attributes associated with natural and relatively undeveloped settings. These activities generally involve small groups of tourists and often include learning opportunities related to the local culture and/or natural environment.*

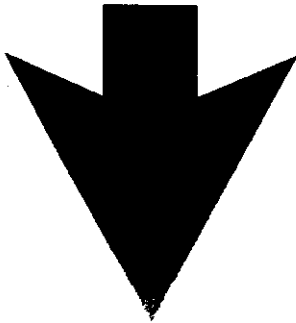
A growing number of tourism and recreational activities is encompassed by this definition, including hiking, kayaking, homestays in traditional villages, natural photography/observation, snorkeling, camping and rafting. Other terms that have been used in connection with resource-based tourism include sustainable tourism, alternative tourism and nature tourism. Whatever the term used, it is clear that resource-based tourism has a number of characteristics that distinguish it from traditional forms of tourism. These differences, listed in Table 1, illustrate how the delivery and experiences of resource-based tourism are substantially different from traditional tourism opportunities.

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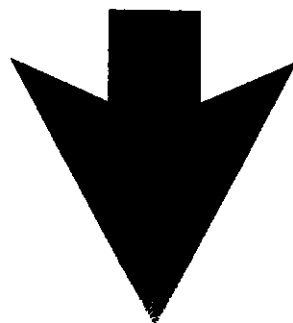
## RESOURCE-BASED TOURISM



### ECO- TOURISM

"Tourism in undisturbed natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying scenery, plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations found in these areas"

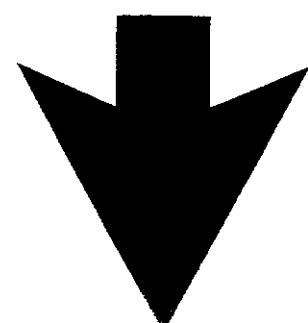
(Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987, cited in Boo, 1990, p. 2)



### ADVENTURE TOURISM

"A tourism-based activity involving a close interaction with the natural environment, that contains elements of risk or danger, in which the outcome is uncertain but influenced by the actions of the participant"

(Ewert, 1997, p. 60)



### INDIGENOUS TOURISM

"Tourism activity in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction"

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"types" of tourism endeavors; its three primary components are ecotourism, adventure tourism and indigenous tourism. In each case, while the ultimate goal of the endeavor is to experience a high-quality, satisfying and educational experience within a tourism context, the means to achieving that experience are slightly different.

### **Why Resource-Based Tourism?**

A small but growing number of studies suggests that there are multiple reasons why people engage in resource-based tourism: chief among these are nature appreciation, relaxation, and learning about the natural and cultural history of an area. Resource-based tourism implies travel to new locations featuring natural environments, often combined with an educational component or close interaction with the local culture. Research has shown that, when compared to the general population, resource-based tourists place more emphasis on settings such as protected areas (wilderness areas and national parks), historic sites, and cultural sites (Fennell and Mallory, 1995).

### **Past and Present Status**

Despite current academic and popular interest in the topic, resource-based tourism is not a new phenomenon. Greek traveler and geographer Pausanias' second-century A.D. *Guide to Greece*, one of the earliest travel guides discovered, described natural features such as sacred springs, as well as built attractions (Hughes, 1975). In the 18th century, a significant shift in aesthetic standards occurred that allowed the precursors of contemporary resource-based tourism to develop. This transition from a neoclassical conception of beauty, based largely on utility and geometric form, to a more modern conception, based on nature's variety and irregular beauty, led William Gilpin (ca. 1782) to write a series of guide-

books that championed the "picturesque tour." This tour became extremely popular, attracting thousands of tourists who previously shunned landscapes such as mountains, rivers, ruins, and scenic viewpoints. In a similar fashion, the Romantic and Transcendentalist movements of the late-18th and early-19th centuries promoted the aesthetic and moral sublimity of wild nature. Not surprisingly, the rise of the national park movement in the 19th century was strongly influenced by the scenic value attached to wilderness and the perceived physically and emotionally restorative power of wild nature (Nash, 1982).

For more Western nations, the economic boom after World War II led to an explosion in outdoor recreation activities for an increasingly affluent and mobile society. By the 1980s, the increased societal concern with environmental preservation, technological advances in the transportation, and communication sectors and increased disposable income helped push resource-based tourism into the mass tourism market. At the same time, a growing number of tourists began to desire a more authentic, environmentally sensitive tourist experience, one far removed from the traditional tourism experience. These resource-based tourism experiences are undertaken both as an alternative and in addition to more traditional forms of tourism. Most tourists do not completely forego traditional forms of tourism; instead, they will add resource-based tourism experiences to their itinerary. The popularity of resource-based tourism reflects a growing desire for new types of tourist experiences that are closely linked to relatively undisturbed environments and unique local cultures.

Between 1970 and '90, international tourism grew by approximately 270 percent (Eadington and Smith, 1995; Brandon, 1996). Most authors suggest that the

recent growth rates for traditional tourism now average two to four percent annually (Latham, 1994), while resource-based tourism has enjoyed an annual growth rate of 15 to 25 percent (Wild, 1994). In addition, recent surveys of current and potential resource-based tourists indicate that interest in this form of tourism is spreading throughout many different segments of the population—from students to retired persons, from white-collar to blue-collar. Moreover, characteristics of the resource-based tourism experience (see Table 1) are becoming increasingly incorporated into mainstream tourism markets (Wight, 1996).

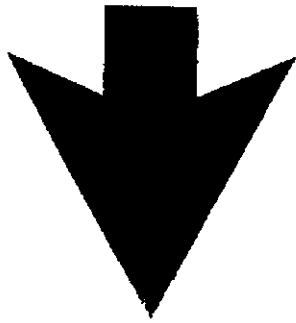
Just how important is resource-based tourism in the approximately \$3.5 trillion global tourism industry? Estimates vary considerably, primarily owing to the wide variety of definitions and terminology used to describe this market. Resource-based tourism may account for as little as 10 percent or as much as 50 percent of the international tourism market.

A recent survey of middle- to upper-income residents in seven major metropolitan areas in North America demonstrates the level of demand for resource-based tourism. Researchers found that 77 percent of those people surveyed had been on a trip that involved nature, outdoor adventure, or learning about another culture in a countryside or wilderness setting. The remaining 23 percent indicated they were interested in taking such a trip in the near future (HLA consultants and ARA Consulting Group, 1995). It is apparent that resource-based tourism is a rapidly growing segment that is becoming an increasingly significant component of the global tourism market. Indeed, the current demand for resource-based tourism appears to be extensive and embraces many segments of the population.

Not surprisingly, the growth in resource-based tourism has also caught the

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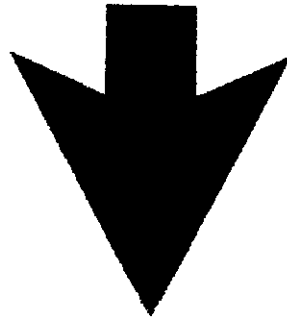
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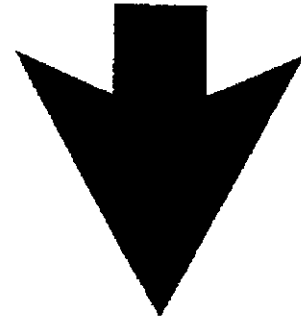
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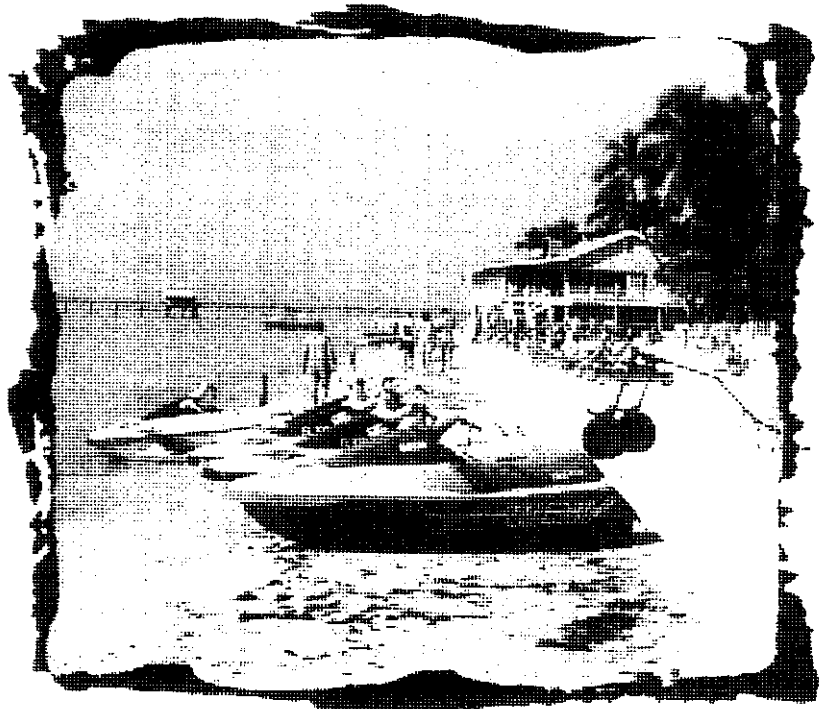
attention of park managers, as activities associated with this form of tourism are often located within or close to protected areas (Boo, 1990). Research suggests that a natural setting is the most critical factor in the delivery of a quality resource-based tourism product, with much importance being placed upon parks and protected areas (HLA Consultants and ARA Consulting Group, 1995). For example, Fennell and Smale (1992) found that "wilderness areas" and "national parks and reserves" were the top two attractions for Canadian tourists to Costa Rica.

**Emerging Issues**

Looking to the future, it appears inevitable that the resource-based tourism market will expand dramatically. These high growth rates are a double-edged sword; while the positive benefits of resource-based tourism (providing local people with equitable, sustainable economic opportunities and advancing the causes of conservation and social justice) will increase, the negative impacts of tourism (environmental degradation, social disruption, and economic inequities) will also escalate. How can a form of tourism supposedly characterized by its environmental and cultural sustainability also be typified by rapid growth rates and high levels of consumer demand? One of the critics of resource-based tourism cautions that it may become:

*...basically little more than a marketing vehicle, a green light for development ... Currently onboard a bandwagon, many proponents of ego/eco/sustainable tourism will soon discover—if they do not already know it—that they have been taken for a ride by a stampeding white elephant," (Wheeler, 1994, p. 10).*

At present, achieving the goals of environmental and cultural sustainability, while bringing increasing numbers of



## increasing numbers of people into the natural environment,

**TABLE 1. ATTRIBUTES OF RESOURCE-BASED TOURISM AND TRADITIONAL TOURISM**

| Attribute                         | Resource-Based Tourism                                      | Traditional Tourism                                   |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Dependency on natural environment | High  | Low   |
| Level of development              | Low to medium level   | Medium to high level                                  |
| Standard of development           | Basic to standard facilities                                | Range of basic to deluxe facilities                   |
| Local population                  | Involvement in planning management and operations           | No involvement in planning, management and operations |
| Tourist operators                 | Usually local, regional or national                         | Usually national or international                     |
| Tourist experience                | Emphasis on learning about natural and cultural environment | Emphasis on entertainment                             |
| Rationale                         | Community development, conservation, education              | Profit maximization                                   |
| Economic impact                   | Minimal leakage, small profits to local communities         | High leakage, large profits to non-local communities  |
| Social impact                     | Low to medium   | Medium to extreme                                     |
| Environmental impact              | Low to medium   | Medium to extreme                                     |

people into the natural environment, may be more an ideal than a reality.

In order to deal with potential impacts, a number of codes of ethics for both tourists and tourist operators have been formulated (Mason and Mowforth, 1995). However, without strict enforcement or disciplinary regulations, it remains unclear as to how effective these codes of conduct will be. In the future, enforcement protocols, fines, or other forms of disciplinary actions, either through policy or legislative directives, will need to be developed.

The creation of university/college degree programs in resource-based tourism has already begun, with institutions in Australia and North America taking the lead. The creation of specialty degrees

will hopefully produce graduates who are knowledgeable about specialized concepts and issues in resource-based tourism. In a related manner, widespread certification of resource-based tourism operators may not be too far behind. Certification of operators would help concerned consumers choose only those operators who institute environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable practices, and who meaningfully involve local communities in tourism operations and management. Environmental audits of resource-based tourism operators have also been suggested. These audits would document how well the operator was dealing with the economic, cultural, and environmental impacts of his or her operation. Table 2 provides a list of these emerging



## **E**nvironmental audits would document how well the operator was dealing with

issues in resource-based tourism and their potential implications for the recreation and tourism field.

### **Implications for Providers of Resource-Based Tourism**

A number of implications arise regarding the provision of resource-based tourism opportunities. First are the characteristics that can accompany resource-based tourism ventures: potentially large numbers of tourists staying for short periods of time, low expenditures relative to tourists engaged in more traditional forms of tourism, and expenditures tending to be more locally based, rather than "leaking" to remote franchises or organizations. In addition, because resource-based tourism opportunities often occur in remote settings, providers of these services are often faced with securing a highly trained, specialized staff.

**TABLE 2. EMERGING ISSUES IN RESOURCE-BASED TOURISM**

| <b>Issue</b>                    | <b>Implications/Purposes</b>  |
|---------------------------------|---|
| High demand                     | People in affluent nations are extremely interested in tourism in natural and cultural settings/protected areas.  |
| Increasing supply               | Proliferation of operators to meet demand; strain on existing infrastructure and increasing environmental, economic and cultural impacts  |
| Code of ethics (regulations)    | Code of ethics for both tourists and operators to address concerns with sustainability of operations; self-regulation or external regulation— at present, industry is attempting to self-regulate with limited success. |
| Enforcement/disciplinary action | Without enforcement or disciplinary action, code of ethics (regulations) is toothless; who enforces regulations?  |





the economic, cultural, and environmental impacts of his or her operation.

**TABLE 2. EMERGING ISSUES IN RESOURCE-BASED TOURISM (continued)**

| Issue                | Implications/Purposes  |
|----------------------|--|
| Education            | High growth rate in tertiary diploma and degree programs in resource-based tourism; graduates should have knowledge base and skills relevant to this specialized segment of the tourism industry |
| Certification        | Certification of operators would help address concerns over sustainability of resource-based tourism; may allow tourists to choose operators that meet or exceed established standards           |
| Environmental audits | Auditing operators' compliance with regulations and their environmental, economic and cultural impacts; may allow tourists to choose operators that meet or exceed established standards         |
| Ownership/control    | Will resource-based tourism follow traditional tourism or will ownership/control be locally/regionally based?  |

Resource-based tourism generally involves a unique relationship between public, private and local communities. For example, a private guide business might take clients on a canoeing trip along waterways managed by any number of public land management agencies. Often, these types of excursions traverse areas in which indigenous peoples live. Thus, to be successful, many providers of resource-based tourism must forge effective relationships between a variety of groups—both public and private.

In short, providers and hosts of resource-based tourism activities will increasingly need to be concerned with the following topics:

- The acceptable number of tourists visiting an area and the amount of environmental, cultural, and economic change permissible for that area.
- The character of the industry that pro-

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vides for the resource-based tourism (e.g., employee recruitment, staff training, and development).

- If the setting is within a protected area, the manager must decide what numbers, activities, and impacts are acceptable. Also, what percentage of total use should be allowed for commercial tourists versus other users of the area?
- Tourists' expectations regarding standards of care for facilities, service, educational/recreational opportunities, the local culture, and the tourism experience.
- Who will benefit from providing this tourism opportunity, the individual tourist, the local community, or an international corporation?

### **Conclusion**

There can be little doubt that resource-based tourism will become an increas-




**important sector in the tourism industry.**



ingly important sector in the tourism industry. Impacts will include revenue generation, absolute numbers of tourists, and impacts to the natural environment and local cultures. Urry (1990) suggests that while the economic benefits derived from resource-based tourism are often less than anticipated, the environmental and social impacts are often more extensive. The challenge to the tourism profession will be to offer high-quality, resource-based tourism opportunities for a variety of segments of the public, while at the same time safeguarding the very environments and experiences to which people are so strongly attracted.

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