Responsible Tourist Behaviour

Clare Weeden

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What is important to ethical consumers when thinking about going on holiday and how do they incorporate their lifestyle choices into these holidays? What values inform their lifestyles and how do they satisfy these values on holiday? Do ethical consumers automatically become ethical tourists or is the situation a little more complex than this?

In an attempt to answer these questions, this book explores:

- The ethical dilemmas associated with tourism
- The concerns and motivations of ethical consumers on holiday
- The role and importance of values in holiday decision making

This book offers a highly original contribution to the debate surrounding the demand for ethical and responsible holidays. It explores the consumption concerns of ethical consumers and their motivational values, and offers a detailed examination of how they manage these values on holiday. This book offers a new and challenging perspective to the study of responsible tourism by providing a unique empirical insight into how responsible tourists incorporate their norms and values into their holiday decisions. The text will be of interest to undergraduates, postgraduates and tutors on courses that have tourism and the tourist at their centre, and to academics in other disciplines such as marketing and consumer behaviour. It will also be highly relevant to the global tourism industry.

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Routledge Advances in Tourism

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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Preface

I have been interested in ethical tourism and responsible tourist behaviour since 1999, when I first began researching the competitive opportunities for UK small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) tour operators selling responsible holidays (see Weeden 2002). This study indicated that companies were able to achieve some advantage, but while this corporate research revealed that clients wanted to buy a holiday from a responsible operator, operators were unsure whether customers were ethically motivated or just interested in small-group, quality holidays to destinations off the beaten track. Additionally, while these SMEs believed that they offered something different from their competitors, and knew their clients wanted to buy high-quality experiences, they were less confident about them being prepared to pay a premium price for the responsible component of a holiday.

Clearly, these issues required further investigation, but whilst there had been some recognition in the business and management literature regarding the difficulties faced by companies seeking to attract the ethical consumer (see Boulstridge and Carrigan 2000; Carrigan and Attalla 2001), researchers had not so far addressed these issues to any great extent in tourism. Indeed, apart from a caution over tourists being pleasure seekers rather than moral crusaders and therefore unlikely to be interested in being 'ethical' on holiday (McKercher 1993), a few early papers urging the travel industry to be more ethical in its activities (Font and Ahjem 1998; Hultsman 1995; Krohn and Ahmed 1991; Payne and Dimanche 1996), and the notable work of Fennell and Malloy (1999), and Cleverdon and Kalisch (2000), there was relatively little academic research into the challenge of selling 'ethics' to the tourist.

In contrast, by the late 1990s, the ethical tourism market had started to attract the attention of several commercial and third-sector organisations, including Mintel (an international market research company), and Tearfund (a UK evangelical Christian relief and development agency). While these organisations' research provided useful information about UK consumers' opinions about ethics in tourism and reported on the industry's response to a perceived increase in demand for ethical holidays, arguably their most significant contribution was confirmation of the inconsistency between people's stated concerns about ethics in tourism and their subsequent holiday

purchases. For example, while 27 per cent of UK tourists claimed a company's ethical policies were of high importance when choosing a tour operator, and 52 per cent of tourists said they were willing to pay an average of 5 per cent more for a holiday from these companies (Tearfund 2000b), the reality of the marketplace was a little different – responsible holidays accounted for only 7 per cent of UK holiday sales in 2001 (Mintel 2001).

The contradictory nature of this information not only validated my initial query but also piqued further interest: why did people say they were concerned about the ethics of tourism and hoped service staff were paid a 'fair' wage, but when it came to planning and buying their holiday, concerns about the weather, the quality of accommodation and a destination's nightlife appeared to be of greater significance (Tearfund 2001)? Were tourists really worried about service staff being paid adequate wages in tourism and hospitality, or did they just say they were when questioned by a researcher? Could these variances be explained by social desirability bias, where survey respondents like to appear 'ethical' in front of others, or was this an example of an attitude-behaviour gap, where people believe they want to be fair, but at the point of purchase favour convenience or lower price over altruism? Or might the discrepancies be due to the 'sacred' nature of holidays, and the general perception that responsible holidays are too 'worthy', when tourists just want to relax, have fun and forget about the problems of the 'real world'?

Looking for answers to these questions, particularly explanations of the variance between stated intention and actual behaviour, I turned to the ethical consumption literature, where such issues had already been acknowledged. Ethical consumer research had been slowly gathering pace again after a hiatus in the early to mid-1990s, but was largely focused on fair trade and organic grocery consumption (McEachern and McClean 2002; Shaw and Clarke 1999). There was no evidence at that time of any investigation into ethical consumers' holiday decision making, even though the late 1990s had seen rising numbers of ethical consumers (Cooperative Bank 2010). This perceived lack of attention offered an opportunity: could insight be gained into why the general public were seemingly uninterested in buying responsible holidays by exploring the travel decisions of ethical consumers? These people were familiar with the moral choices involved in consumption and spent a lot of time and effort seeking out products to avoid compromising their 'ethical selves' (Varul 2009). Arguably, understanding how these individuals reconciled their ethical priorities when planning and buying a holiday, could offer unique understanding of the trade-offs and coping strategies required to 'manage' potentially conflicting aspirations.

Researching how (or indeed whether) ethical consumers are successful in satisfying their ethical ideals, whilst also having fun and enjoying their holidays, could provide valuable evidence for those seeking to persuade the general public that responsible holidays were neither dull nor too 'worthy'. Indeed, understanding the complexities involved in being responsible on holiday would give key stakeholders critical data on how to support and encourage

those who said they wanted to buy responsible holidays, but were unsure of how to achieve such a goal. The information generated by this research could also facilitate the development of appropriate strategies to help those who were unaware or apparently uninterested in ethical travel to adopt at least some element of responsibility in their holiday choice. Potentially, therefore, a research study into the holiday choice decisions of ethical consumers would produce a unique collection of data that could be used not only to assist the promotion of responsible holidays but also to inform the creation and development of a more sustainable tourism industry for the future.

This preface has set out a brief description of the thought processes behind the origins and early development of the study presented in this book. My hope is that people who are curious about ethical consumers' holiday choices will find the content informative and constructive. I do not claim to have written the definitive treatise on responsible tourist behaviour. Rather, this book is offered as a personal contribution towards what I hope will be a greater understanding of ethical consumers' holiday motivations and their travel practices. It is intended that this information will prove helpful to those seeking to encourage a greater demand for, and supply of, responsible tourism products.

Book structure

This book is presented over the course of eight chapters. Chapter 1 examines the context for the book and sets out the factors responsible for tourisms' continued success and development. It explains some of the key debates surrounding tourism and travel, including its potential for destruction but also its ability to offer significant economic benefit to stakeholders around the world. Chapter 2 offers an overview of research into consumer decision making with a specific focus on tourist motivation, and discusses the key variables considered important for understanding tourist behaviour. These include consideration sets, the concept of involvement and attitudes. The chapter concludes with an introduction to values, their link to attitudes and their utility for understanding human behaviour.

Chapter 3 focuses on the ethical consumer and provides a detailed examination of studies designed to understand these individuals. The chapter starts by discussing the grand models of consumer behaviour and psychographic variables such as personality, self-identity, moral obligation and altruism. It continues with an explanation of alternative tourism, ecotourism, community-based tourism, pro-poor tourism and justice tourism. It also introduces responsible tourism, and reviews research of responsible tourist behaviour. This chapter concludes by charting the confused and confusing nature of terminology used to describe these individuals' holiday motivations.

Chapter 4 centres on the role of values in understanding ethical consumer behaviour, and discusses why they offer researchers a unique perspective on responsible tourist motivation. The chapter continues by reviewing significant

values research, including the work of Rokeach (1973), Schwartz and Bilsky (1987), and Schwartz (1992), and investigates the use of values in tourism research.

Chapter 5 addresses the study at the heart of this book, which investigated ethical consumers' values in connection with their holiday choices. It presents the findings of the research via the use of qualitative quotes and reveals significant detail of their holiday motivations and ethical concerns about tourism.

Intended as a companion to Chapter 5, Chapter 6 presents a detailed discussion of the study findings, specifically the values of ethical consumers. It offers unique insight into the key debates surrounding ethical consumption in tourism. Chapter 7 takes a more applied perspective and reflects on the practical marketing applications of the study findings. It discusses how a greater knowledge of ethical consumers' holiday motivations can be used to develop campaigns that encourage an increase in the demand and supply of responsible tourism products. It also examines the challenge of marketing ethical products, reviews the corresponding difficulties of promoting responsible holidays, discusses the mainstreaming of fair trade products, and reflects upon the use of social marketing in selling responsible holidays.

Chapter 8 offers concluding thoughts on the processes involved in researching responsible tourists, and provides a short set of recommendations in the hope that studies will continue to be undertaken in order to ensure that responsible tourism has a viable and successful future.

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January 2013

Acknowledgements

1   Introduction

Introduction

This chapter sets the context for the book by detailing the key success indicators associated with the global tourism industry. It continues with an evaluation of concerns over the potentially negative impact of international and domestic leisure trips and considers the links between calls for sustainable development and its manifestation within tourism. The chapter explains some of the key products and also approaches that have been offered as alternatives to mass tourism before examining the provenance of responsible tourism. The chapter concludes with a brief look at the challenges facing those seeking to increase consumer demand for responsible holidays.

The success of tourism?

Each year millions of people travel, take holidays and pursue leisure experiences in search of self-discovery, learning and relaxation. Because such aspirations have become increasingly important and are often regarded as essential to modern living (Smith and Duffy 2003), demand for leisure travel has grown exponentially these past 60 years. This trend looks set to continue despite ongoing political upheaval and global environmental challenge. The desire to experience new places, to meet different people and to enjoy contrasting environments is not new; people have travelled for centuries, and will continue to do so for many more. What is different in the 21st century, and something that represents a significant future challenge, derives from the vast number of journeys being taken.

There are now more than 4.8 billion international and domestic trips taken each year (UNWTO 2012a). Whilst impressive, this figure pales in comparison with future estimates: in conjunction with a rapidly expanding global population and an equally notable increase in the number of tourists from the BRIC countries of Brazil, Russia, India and China, forecasts indicate more than 1.8 billion international arrivals and more than 7 billion domestic leisure journeys will be recorded annually by 2030 (UNWTO 2011; UNWTO 2012b). While disquiet is expressed over the impacts of such high numbers of

people travelling the world, most notably the detrimental effect on the environment, the financial benefit accruing to the global economy of such a popular leisure and business activity is immensely persuasive for those keen to see tourism continue to succeed. Indeed, spending on travel and tourism in 2013 is set to exceed US$6 trillion, provide more than 9 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) and sustain 255 million jobs. Given the already noted increase in demand, these figures will likely rise to $10 trillion, 10 per cent of global GDP, and 328 million, or one in 10 jobs by 2022 (WTTC 2012). Taken at face value, these figures go some way to explain why tourism is often considered essential for income and development by a significant number of economies around the world.

However, while many have welcomed tourism's continual success, not everyone is happy with the pace and nature of its development, and not all stakeholders believe they benefit fairly from tourist expenditure. The complexity of the product and the multifaceted nature of its impact on society and business means that tourism can, and does, generate powerful emotion, and not just in those who participate in its activities. There are a number of reasons for this. First, tourism is undoubtedly capable of facilitating economic benefit if developed sustainably, but it also has the potential to reinforce social and economic inequalities because of a characteristic style of development that preferences high-volume, low-price tourism (Cleverdon and Kalisch 2000). Expansion and progress on these terms can result in excessive economic leakage with little long-term benefit to local, regional or national economies (Curtin and Busby 1999). This has prompted consternation and debate about tourism's ability to deliver a fair, equitable and socially just system (Carlisle 2010; Higgins-Desbiolles 2008; Wearing 2002).

A second problem concerns the natural environment. The scarcity of pristine environments, coupled with their attractiveness for tourism, prompts an inevitable tension between those who seek to conserve nature for its intrinsic value, those who need access to it for subsistence, and those who use the environment for tourism, leisure and recreation purposes. Leaving aside the essential needs of the global population regarding the production of food and access to clean water, and the local realities of such requirements in a world impacted by climate change, the tourism industry is by necessity financially dependent upon a high-quality environment in order to attract tourists. While there exist a few examples of successful sustainability projects involving tourism (Holden 2009), questions remain about the perceived unwillingness of practitioners to wholeheartedly protect the vital resources on which they depend.

It is not only the environment that is impacted through the production and consumption of tourism. A third problem concerns the long-term human cost associated with the phenomenon. Numerous case studies question the sector's ability to manage itself along ethical lines, especially when it concerns the impact on local communities (Andereck *et al.* 2005; Tosun 2002), the appropriation of culture and heritage for the purpose of tourism (Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2004), and the consequences for community cohesion of

poor tourism planning and ineffective business practice (Honey and Gilpin 2009). While some commentators persist in arguing over the management implications of community attitudes for optimal tourist experiences (see Deery *et al.* 2012), more fundamental debates focus on the ethics of representation and commodification of indigenous peoples (Caton n.d., forthcoming; Saarinen and Niskala 2009), the disempowerment of local communities through international investment (Mbaiwa 2003), and the prevention of access to farmland and other critical resources as a consequence of conserving wildlife for tourism (Rutten 2002; Snyder and Sulle 2011).

Although this is not an exhaustive list of the ethical dilemmas inherent in the production and consumption of tourism, individually they act as reminders that the movement of people around the world for pleasure prompts unease over whether tourism might ever conform to socially just and equitable principles, particularly when it relies on people, culture and the environment for financial sustainability. While many of these resources are exchanged willingly for economic benefit, there are inevitably occasions when the consequences of such exchanges are borne not by the tourist, or the organisations supplying and selling the products and services, but by the people and culture being visited and by the natural environment. For these reasons alone, tourism must focus more on developing fair and cooperative relationships and depend less upon exploiting unequal power relations and fostering social practices that rely on an unjust appropriation of human and non-human capital.

Sustainable development in tourism

It is clear from this brief introduction that tourism presents several ethical issues. While these are deliberated further in Chapter 3, concern over the exploitative potential of tourism has long prompted demand for a more responsible approach to its production and consumption (Font and Ahjem 1998; Forsyth 1997; Hultsman 1995; Payne and Dimanche 1996). The 1970s and 1980s in particular evidenced much heated debate on this topic (see for example, Wheeller 1991), with discussion focusing on calls for a different approach to tourism (de Kadt 1979; Krippendorf 1987). The majority of these deliberations prompted demand for an 'Alternative Tourism', defined by Holden (1984, in de Kadt 1992: 51), as 'a process which promotes a just form of travel between members of different communities. It seeks to achieve mutual understanding, solidarity and equity amongst participants'. While it is hard to deny the attractiveness of such an aspiration to all those involved in and impacted by tourism, the most difficult challenge concerns their physical embodiment – how would (and how does) 'alternative' tourism manifest itself in reality?

As yet, there is no definitive answer to this question even though more than 40 years have passed since 'alternative tourism' was first mooted as a sustainable approach to tourism (for early discussions see Britton and Clarke 1987; Butler 1990, 1992). One of the most influential catalysts in this was Krippendorf (1987: 105), whose vision for a 'co-operative world in which