

Introduction

In 2015, almost 1.2 billion tourists travelled internationally, a number that is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years.¹ There is significant potential for states and indigenous communities to benefit from tourism, but doing so in a responsible and sustainable manner can be difficult, especially in less developed states.² The modern concept of sustainability stems from the 1987 report *Our Common Future*, which defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” While frameworks on sustainability have advanced, this definition is the basis for sustainability in tourism.³ Sustainable tourism can be defined as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities.”⁴ Tourists are increasingly seeking out tourism offerings that are sustainable and provide authentic natural and cultural experiences, including on indigenous lands and within indigenous communities.⁵

The United Nations (UN) Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) generally defines indigenous peoples based on their historical connection to pre-settler societies, connection to lands and natural resources, distinct language, culture, and beliefs, and, most importantly, self-identification.⁶ Indigenous peoples comprise only 6% of the global population, but indigenous lands constitute 20% of the Earth’s territory.⁷ The tourism industry often treats indigenous lands as commodities, building infrastructure and enterprises in such a manner that it negatively impacts local ecosystems, many of which are crucial to indigenous peoples’ culture and traditional ways of life.⁸

While ecotourism, which refers to “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people,” has been positive in some indigenous communities, businesses sometimes use the ecotourism label to engage in “green washing,” a practice in which they claim environmental virtue where there is none.⁹ Still, the opportunity for touristic enterprises to be harnessed for the benefit of indigenous peoples is growing and the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has identified tourism as a key tool in the achievement of the Sustainable Development

¹ UNWTO, *UNWTO Tourism Highlights: 2016 Edition*, 2016.

² Martín, *How Emerging Market Growth is Changing Tourism*, World Economic Forum, 2015.

³ UNEP, *Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers*, 2005, p. 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Indian Country Today Media Network, *Canada Tourism Grows as Visitors Seek Authentic Aboriginal Experience*, 2013.

⁶ UNPFII, *Who are Indigenous Peoples?* 2015.

⁷ UN DESA, *State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples*, 2009, pp. 72-73.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Barna et al., *Ecotourism – Conservation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage*, 2011, p. 87; UN DESA, *State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples*, 2009, pp. 72-73.

Goals (SDGs).¹⁰ However, realizing those benefits will require political will, financial and technical support, and the progressive development of international frameworks on sustainable tourism.¹¹

International and Regional Framework

The earliest tourism frameworks, including the 1980 Manila Declaration on World Tourism, narrowly focused on the protection of tourists, the right to leisure, and the maximization of economic gains.¹² However, as the concept of sustainability was accepted internationally, the focus of tourism frameworks shifted.¹³ The 1989 Hague Declaration on Tourism was the first document to recognize the need to educate tourists on the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, a shift that quickly influenced other frameworks.¹⁴ In just three years, sustainable tourism became a topic of discussion at the UN Conference on Environment and Development.¹⁵ Among the outcome documents of the conference was Agenda 21 (1992), a set of voluntary guidelines on sustainable development that included a recommendation that Member States formulate environmentally sound and culturally sensitive tourism programs.¹⁶ Agenda 21 was used as a base for action plans throughout the 1990s that culminated in the creation of the UNWTO's 1999 Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, a set of principles that, for the first time, provided a comprehensive tourism framework for mitigating the negative impacts of tourism.¹⁷ The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism references several fundamental human rights documents, including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and relevant International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on the rights of indigenous peoples.¹⁸ The rights to freedom of movement and leisure, which are key in many tourism frameworks, are both enumerated in the UDHR.¹⁹ Indigenous rights groups, however, most often cite the ICESCR, which guarantees the right to self-determination in article 1 and the right of ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities to enjoy their own culture in article 27.²⁰ The 1989 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention from the ILO more specifically established the right of indigenous communities to exist distinctly within their respective Member States and also recognized their right to maintain traditional cultural practices, livelihoods, and institutions.²¹ However, these documents do not codify indigenous sovereignty, which in this context refers to "the ability of a people who share a common culture, religion, language, value system and land base, to exercise control over their lands and lives,

¹⁰ UNWTO, *Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2016.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² UNWTO, *Manila Declaration on World Tourism*, 1980.

¹³ UNWTO, *Hague Declaration on Tourism*, 1989.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ UNCED, *Agenda 21*, 1992.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ UNWTO, *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*, 2001.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

²⁰ UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966.

²¹ ILO, *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (C169)*, 1989.

independent of other nations.”²² Sovereignty is often central to indigenous peoples’ concerns over tourism as its lack of codification limits their ability to control how their lands and cultures are used.²³

The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) forms the modern basis for indigenous rights and is designed not only to reinforce indigenous peoples’ basic human rights, but also to correct for a historic lack of respect for their self-determination and sovereignty.²⁴

Major themes of UNDRIP include the right to a cultural identity; the right to protection from discrimination; and the right to free, prior, and informed consent, which means that indigenous peoples must be consulted and given information in any decision-making process that may affect their rights.²⁵ UNDRIP specifically highlights that indigenous peoples have the right to “maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands” and “the right to own, use, develop and control the lands...they possess by reason of traditional ownership.”²⁶ UNDRIP has yet to be incorporated into multilateral tourism frameworks, although some regional bodies have referenced UNDRIP in the context of their own frameworks on tourism.²⁷ In 2012, the Larrakia Declaration was adopted at the first Pacific Asia Indigenous Tourism Conference hosted by the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA).²⁸ While voluntary and limited in scope, the Larrakia Declaration does outline some basic principles centered on ensuring that the rights of indigenous peoples are upheld.²⁹ In 2016, the Organization of American States adopted the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which recognizes many individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples, including their right to their lands, territories, and resources.³⁰ It also provides protections for cultural heritage and intellectual property beyond those called for by UNDRIP.³¹ At the international level, the UN General Assembly renewed its focus on sustainable tourism in 2015 with the adoption of resolutions 69/233 and 70/193, which promote sustainable tourism, call for indigenous peoples to be involved in tourism policy development, and designate 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.³² In the same year, they adopted the SDGs, which will be a major driver of international discussions on sustainable tourism moving

²² Haunani-Kay, *the Struggle for Hawaiian Sovereignty - Introduction*, 2000.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ UN General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*, 2007.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Pacific Asia Indigenous Tourism Conference, *the Larrakia Declaration on the Development of Indigenous Tourism*, 2012.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Organization of American States, *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 2016.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² UN General Assembly, *Promotion of Sustainable Tourism, Including Ecotourism, for Poverty Eradication and Environment Protection (A/RES/69/233)*, 2015; UN General Assembly, *International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, 2017 (A/RES/70/193)*, 2015.

forward.³³ Several of the SDGs incorporate tourism-specific targets, including SDG 8 target 9 to adopt policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promote local culture and SDG 12 target to monitor the impact of tourism on sustainable development.³⁴ The breadth of activities involved in the tourism industry and its major impact on development is indicative of the central role that tourism will play in the achievement of the SDGs, especially for indigenous peoples.³⁵ In recognition of this, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development specifically calls for indigenous peoples to be incorporated into implementation and review processes for the SDGs at the national level.³⁶

Role of the International System

The cultural heritage of indigenous peoples includes over 5000 languages and distinct cultures that are often intrinsically linked to their lands and the natural environment.³⁷ At the international level, many institutions are already working to preserve cultural heritage in the context of tourism.³⁸ The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which is the principal agency charged with the protection of culture heritage, is the implementing agency for the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and maintains several programs that assist indigenous communities.³⁹ UNESCO's Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems initiative promotes the use of indigenous knowledge in the formation of environmental policy.⁴⁰ UNESCO also maintains the World Heritage List, a public record of sites recognized as having globally significant cultural or natural heritage.⁴¹ Sites that are included on the List often experience increased levels of tourist activity, which, if managed improperly, can have a negative impact on tourism sites and local communities.⁴² To address this, UNESCO has partnered with the UNWTO to launch the World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme, an initiative that aims to bring tourism stakeholders together to improve site management and protect local heritage.⁴³

Like UNESCO, UNWTO is responsible for implementing several international frameworks, although most of the on-site training, education, preservation, and maintenance work called for by the UNWTO is carried out by its affiliate members, which includes private companies, educational institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have expertise in promoting responsible tourism.⁴⁴ There are UNWTO affiliate members in more than 80 Member States.⁴⁵ In addition, there are many

³³ UN General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1), 2015.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ UNWTO, Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals, 2016.

³⁶ UN General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1), 2015

³⁷ UNESCO, UNESCO and Indigenous Peoples: Partnership for Cultural Diversity, 2007.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ UNESCO, Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, 2016.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ UNESCO, Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972.

⁴² Pedersen, Managing Tourism at World Heritage Sites: A Practical Manual for World Heritage Site Managers, 2002, p. 5.

⁴³ UNESCO, UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme.

⁴⁴ UNWTO, who are UNWTO Affiliate Members?

⁴⁵ Ibid.

NGOs specifically focused on protecting indigenous rights.⁴⁶ For example, the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa operates on behalf of the San indigenous people in five Member States to provide training and advice to San communities on developing and sharing sustainable tourism practices and also provides technical assistance on tourism development projects.⁴⁷ Similar NGOs contribute to international policy discussions by having consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which gives them access to meetings of most UN bodies.⁴⁸ NGO input allows high-level policy making bodies, such as the Human Rights Council (HRC) and UNPFII, to gain insight into the practical challenges of promoting tourism while protecting natural and cultural heritage.⁴⁹ The HRC also maintains an Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which published a report in 2015 offering advice on the protection of indigenous cultural heritage.⁵⁰ The Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples similarly reports to the HRC and these annual reports frequently include assessments on the impact tourism has on indigenous peoples.⁵¹ UNPFII has made direct recommendations on tourism at two of its sessions.⁵² At its second session in 2003, UNPFII asked that the UNWTO study and prepare an initial paper on indigenous tourism.⁵³ At its 12th session in 2013, UNPFII called for UN agencies to “affirm and make operational the right of indigenous peoples to determine their own priorities for development and opportunities concerning indigenous culture and tourism.”⁵⁴ In the past, UNPFII has also called Member States and other UN bodies to action on tourism, including in 2003 when UNPFII called for UNESCO to draft a convention on intangible cultural heritage and incorporate indigenous peoples in the process.⁵⁵ In 2014, UNPFII reaffirmed the principle of free, prior, and informed consent for activities on indigenous lands and called for Member States to work with indigenous populations to develop tourism policies that protect and promote their human rights.⁵⁶

The Impact of Tourism on Land and Cultural Rights

The commoditization of indigenous heritage is often a side effect of government and private sector attempts to grow the tourism industry.⁵⁷ The Government of Pakistan inadvertently engaged in commodification when it produced materials meant to draw tourists to the northern Himalayas and

⁴⁶ International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, *Links to Indigenous Organisations and NGOs Arranged by World Regions*.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ OHCHR, *NGO Participation in the HRC*, 2016.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ UN HRC, *Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples with Respect to their Cultural Heritage: Study by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/HRC/30/53)*, 2015.

⁵¹ OHCHR, *Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 2016.

⁵² UNPFII, *UNPFII 12th Session Recommendations for UN Agencies, 2013*; UNPFII, *Report on the Second Session (E/C.19/2003/22)*, 2003.

⁵³ UNPFII, *Report on the Second Session (E/C.19/2003/22)*, 2003.

⁵⁴ UNPFII, *UNPFII 12th Session Recommendations for UN Agencies, 2013*.

⁵⁵ Ibid. UNPFII, *Report on the Second Session (E/C.19/2003/22)*, 2003.

⁵⁶ UNPFII, *UNPFII 12th Session Recommendations for UN Agencies, 2013*; UNPFII, *Report on the Second Session (E/C.19/2003/22)*, 2003.

⁵⁷ Barna et al., *Ecotourism – Conservation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage*, 2011, pp. 90-91.

lands occupied by the Kalash people.⁵⁸ A Kalash representative described the advertising as making them “look like zoo animals.”⁵⁹ The packaging of experiences labeled as ‘authentic’ can be disrespectful with regards to indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge, oral traditions, and other heritage that they consider to be intellectual property.⁶⁰ Even where culture is not packaged this way, traditionally sacred sites are often ignored or abused by foreign companies or tourists, causing indigenous groups to claim that lack of recognition of their land rights is the root cause of the negative realities brought on by tourism.⁶¹

Touristic enterprises are usually owned by people from outside indigenous communities, leading to tension over land use even when companies attempt to involve local populations.⁶² In the worst instances, indigenous groups have been forcibly displaced by tourism activities.⁶³ In 1919, the Havasupai people were driven from their traditional lands in the Grand Canyon of the United States.⁶⁴ Even after a decade-long legal battle allowed them to return to some of their lands, the overwhelming amount of tourists in the area had caused high levels of pollution, damage, and erosion.⁶⁵ The problems faced by the Havasupai continue to worsen as tourism infrastructure intrudes on the Grand Canyon area in spite of its inclusion on the World Heritage List.⁶⁶ In 1997, Taj Resort Hotels, a group recognized for sustainability in tourism, attempted to build a so-called ‘eco-resort’ in Karnataka, India.⁶⁷ The resort was planned for a forested area where the Adivasis people lived, and as they fought to protect their lands, dozens of people were arrested.⁶⁸ Eventually, a court recognized the rights of the Adivasis people and ordered the company to cease its operations, but this type of outcome is rare, even in states where a strong legal regime to protect indigenous rights exists.⁶⁹ Without national implementation and enforcement of laws that secure true access to and control of land for indigenous peoples, some experts predict that indigenous cultures will be eroded until they no longer exist.⁷⁰

[Threats to and Protection of the Environment and Biodiversity](#)

Indigenous peoples occupy some of the areas with the highest biodiversity in the world, and their spiritual, cultural, social, and economic relationship with their traditional lands is often reliant on the biodiversity contained within them.⁷¹ One of the most widely ratified international treaties, the 1992

⁵⁸ Maya, Indigenous Peoples Find Frustration with United Nations Conference, 1999.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Barna et al., *Ecotourism – Conservation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage*, 2011, pp. 90-91.

⁶¹ McLaren & Ramer, *the History of Indigenous Peoples and Tourism*, 1999.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Belize: Our Life, Our Lands- Respect Maya Land Rights, 2013.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Maya, Indigenous Peoples Find Frustration with United Nations Conference, 1999.

⁷¹ OHCHR, Leaflet No. 10: Indigenous Peoples and the Environment, 2008, p. 2.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recognizes the dependence of indigenous communities on biological resources and calls for parties to the CBD to work with indigenous peoples to respect, preserve, and maintain those resources.⁷² In spite of this, the environment and the rights of indigenous communities tied to it are often cast aside in favor of economic benefits.⁷³ The infrastructure required to support tourism, particularly electrical and transportation infrastructure, can harm plants and animals and pollute natural water sources that are relied upon by indigenous communities.⁷⁴

To combat these realities, the Secretariat of the CBD has developed a series of guidelines designed to assist governments in protecting biodiversity.⁷⁵ The guidelines focus on assessing the environmental state of existing or potential tourist sites, continually collecting data, and developing plans in line with international guidelines to protect biodiversity.⁷⁶ Many governments lack the capacity to follow such guidelines, but UNESCO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) are increasingly offering technical assistance and policy guidance to assist in the protection of biodiversity.⁷⁷ UNESCO has developed guidelines for site managers to protect biodiversity as they are able to effect direct control over the design, use, and maintenance of tourist destinations.⁷⁸ Guidelines and vocational training can allow members of indigenous communities to step into site management roles, allowing them to directly oversee operations and ensure that local culture and biodiversity are respected.⁷⁹ In some states, NGOs conduct training seminars or even establish training and information centers to help indigenous peoples in building tourism infrastructure and businesses, as Nature friends International did in Kyrgyzstan from 2013 to 2015.⁸⁰ UNWTO has also conducted training seminars that brought together local actors, members of the private sector, and NGOs with the goal of harmonizing tourism site operations and biodiversity management initiatives.⁸¹

Models for Indigenous Tourism

Although tourism has harmed many indigenous peoples, there are high levels of demand for indigenous tourism and many indigenous communities want to benefit from this sector.⁸² Indigenous tourism refers to tourism “in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction.”⁸³ If practiced responsibly,

⁷² 241 OHCHR, Leaflet No. 10: Indigenous Peoples and the Environment, 2008, p. 2.

⁷³ Maya, Indigenous Peoples Find Frustration with United Nations Conference, 1999.

⁷⁴ OHCHR, Leaflet No. 10: Indigenous Peoples and the Environment, 2008, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Management, 2004.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ UNESCO, UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme.

⁷⁸ Pedersen, Managing Tourism at World Heritage Sites: A Practical Manual for World Heritage Site Managers, 2002.

⁷⁹ AbHadi et al., Poverty eradication through vocational education (tourism) among indigenous people communities in Malaysia: Pro-Poor Tourism Approach (PPT), 2013.

⁸⁰ ProNGO! Increasing Employment in Rural Areas through Tourism Development, 2015.

⁸¹ UNWTO, Training on Tourism and Biodiversity: Understanding Tourism Trends and Biodiversity Conservation for Innovative Products and Marketing, 2012.

⁸² Song, Indigenous Tourism – A Passport to Development for Indigenous Australians? 2008, pp. 271-273.

⁸³ Okada & Kato, Indigenous Heritage and Tourism: Theories and Practices on Utilizing the Ainu Heritage, 2014, p. 42.

indigenous tourism can produce economic and environmental benefits, help indigenous peoples realize their right to development, and, in the long run, aid in the achievement of the SDGs.⁸⁴ UNPFII has previously recommended high levels of involvement for indigenous communities in the context of the implementation of the SDGs, even calling on the International Finance Corporation to establish mechanisms for indigenous communities to provide input on sustainability funding, but the response so far has been limited.⁸⁵

Among the largest benefits of tourism expansion into indigenous communities is the creation of jobs and opportunities for indigenous peoples to increase their income.⁸⁶ Indigenous peoples can work as guides, entertainers, create artisanal goods to sell to tourists, and can also help to spread awareness of their culture and indigenous issues by providing educational opportunities and information to tourists.⁸⁷

In other cases, community resources can be leased or revenues can be generated by charging entrance fees to sites or issuing licenses for businesses to operate on indigenous lands.⁸⁸ It is important for such land licensing and leasing agreements to be controlled by indigenous communities or undertaken with their free, prior, and informed consent, in line with UNPFII recommendations, to maintain indigenous control of their lands and ensure that tourism does not inhibit indigenous populations' ability to realize their human rights.⁸⁹ Such control, especially when paired with community revenue generation, can be used to reinforce the rights of indigenous peoples by allowing them to build up social infrastructure and, where necessary, maintain or restore cultural sites.⁹⁰ Even in cases where such oversight occurs, however, there are still risks associated with the overuse of sites, financial overdependence on tourism,⁹¹ and an erosion of language and culture as higher numbers of non-community members enter the area.

Site management and planning⁹² remain generally important, but there are some models that have already proven to be successful.

Ecotourism & Cultural Heritage Tourism

Ecotourism is meant to manage the impact of tourism on nature and, although they are prone to green washing, ecotourism businesses have built up locally beneficial tourism industries in many indigenous communities.⁹³ The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), an NGO that promotes ecotourism, has

⁸⁴ Song, *Indigenous Tourism – A Passport to Development for Indigenous Australians?* 2008, p. 271.

⁸⁵ UNPFII, *Report on the Thirteenth Session (E/2014/43-E/C.19/2014/11)*, 2014.

⁸⁶ Song, *Indigenous Tourism – A Passport to Development for Indigenous Australians?* 2008, pp. 271-273.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ UNPFII, *Questionnaire to Governments for preparing pre-sessional submissions to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: Answers by the Government of Finland*, 2010.

⁹⁰ Song, *Indigenous Tourism – A Passport to Development for Indigenous Australians?* 2008, pp. 271-273.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Minority Rights Group International, *Trouble in Paradise – Tourism and Indigenous Land Rights: Together Towards Ethical Solutions*, 2007.

⁹³ *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, *Ecotourism: A Boon for Indigenous People?* 1999.

developed principles on conservation, community impact, and cultural understanding that are meant to guide ecotourism enterprises.⁹⁴ In spite of this, there are many instances of firms branding their services as ecotourism even if they are operating in such a way as to displace indigenous people or damage their lands.⁹⁵ For that reason, international bodies are increasingly focusing on educating tourists such that they can find and identify sustainable ecotourism enterprises that will positively benefit host communities.⁹⁶ To support this, TIES maintains an indexed database of member tourism organizations that allows travellers to research companies before making their travel decisions.⁹⁷

Often considered in the same breath as ecotourism is cultural heritage tourism, which can be defined as “trips whose main or concomitant goal is visiting sites and events which have cultural and historical value making them a part of the cultural heritage of a community.”⁹⁸ Cultural heritage tourism can provide economic benefits for indigenous peoples and assist them in realizing their right to self-determination, while promoting cross-cultural exchange and the preservation of cultural sites.⁹⁹ The Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) has studied cultural tourism in depth, and while they have recognized that successful cultural heritage projects have been incredibly beneficial to host communities, they also note that many attempts to establish them have failed.¹⁰⁰ As with other practices, the STCRC recommends high levels of control from indigenous communities, but also encourages financial training and planning as cultural experiences often take time to build up a critical mass of tourists.¹⁰¹

Social Enterprises

Social enterprises, which provide employment opportunities for marginalized groups and aim to meet social, environmental, and financial targets, may amplify the benefits of tourism for indigenous peoples.¹⁰² Unlike most companies, social enterprises engage in business models that reinvest profits back into the business and community rather than dispersing them to owners or shareholders.¹⁰³ Often, these enterprises incorporate training and education, the development of infrastructure, and culturally sensitive promotion that incorporates indigenous peoples in all steps of the processes as they generate most of the experience for tourists.¹⁰⁴ Ethos, a company operating out of Vietnam, works directly with the Hmong people to bring in small groups of tourists and allow them to experience limited aspects of

⁹⁴ The International Ecotourism Society, What is Ecotourism? 2014.

⁹⁵ Cultural Survival Quarterly, Ecotourism: A Boon for Indigenous People? 1999.

⁹⁶ O’Neill, Talking Point: Educating Guests = More Sustainable Tourism, Green Hotelier, 2014.

⁹⁷ The International Ecotourism Society, Explore TIES Members, 2014.

⁹⁸ Promoting Community led cultural heritage based tourism – Story behind TourEast, TourEast, 2016.

⁹⁹ Sustainable Tourism Online, Cultural Heritage Tourism, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Carlsen et al., Success Factors in Cultural Heritage Tourism Enterprise Management, 2008, pp. 36-37.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Rebutin, Social Enterprise and Tourism, the Key to a Better Integration of Indigenous Populations, 2009, p. 29.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ethos, Spirit of the Community.

their culture and livelihoods in line with the desires of the community.¹⁰⁵ Ethos asks tourists to commit to a code of conduct that encourages them to be sensitive to and aware of the peoples and cultures around them and to not further the negative impact of tourism.¹⁰⁶ While many of these initiatives are small-scale and focused, larger networks of social enterprises are also being created that may allow tourists to have easier access to sustainable indigenous tourism.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

There is a long history of indigenous peoples being negatively impacted by tourism, including tourism that is marketed as sustainable.¹⁰⁸ However, there is significant potential for indigenous communities to benefit from tourism, and tourism has already been recognized by the UN as a promoter of development that can help in the achievement of the SDGs.¹⁰⁹ As the tourism industry continues to grow into one of the largest economic drivers globally, the international community has an opportunity to leverage tourism for the benefit of marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples.¹¹⁰ While the rights enumerated in UNDRIP are often set aside for the sake of economic development, there are models of indigenous tourism that not only respect the land and cultural rights of indigenous peoples, but also reinforce them.¹¹¹ Utilizing these models has proven difficult, but the international community will likely continue to develop new frameworks for sustainable tourism, analyse its effects on indigenous peoples, and attempt to maximize its benefits while minimizing the harm.¹¹²

Further Research

While considering what recommendations should be made by UNPFII on the topic of sustainable tourism, delegates should contemplate the following questions:

- 1) How effective are international tourism and human rights frameworks at protecting the land and cultural rights of indigenous peoples?
- 2) How has your Member State or region benefited from tourism and have the indigenous peoples therein also benefited?
- 3) How can successful models of indigenous tourism be replicated? What UN bodies and programs are best positioned to assist Member States, civil society, and indigenous communities in benefiting from sustainable tourism? What role does the private sector have to play?
- 4) How can the negative environmental impacts of tourism be minimized?

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Backstreet Academy, About Us.

¹⁰⁸ McLaren & Ramer, the History of Indigenous Peoples and Tourism, 1999.

¹⁰⁹ Song, Indigenous Tourism – A Passport to Development for Indigenous Australians? 2008, p. 271.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Rebutin, Social Enterprise and Tourism, the Key to a Better Integration of Indigenous Populations, 2009.

¹¹² UN DESA, State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, 2009, pp. 72-73

