

# How are you travelling?

CAII • THE CHURCHES' AGENCY ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES: RESOURCING CHURCHES AND CONGREGATIONS ON GLOBAL CONCERNS

## What is Tourism Doing to Our World?



### WHY IS TOURISM A HOT TOPIC?

What are the problems with tourism? Writers and activists have noted three general areas:

- 1 Tourism is not always socially acceptable and just. In poor countries there are many examples of tourism exploiting local people: Land is confiscated, local customs are ignored and poor people receive no benefit.**
- 2 Tourism rarely brings economic benefit to the wider population. Tourism profits go mostly to those who control the trade and determine its direction. Over-dependence on tourism by small countries makes them vulnerable to foreign commercial interests.**
- 3 Excessive numbers of people are responsible for the destruction of many sensitive eco-systems. Tourism endangers the environment and can destroy the very beauty which is so attractive to the tourists.**

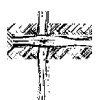
Travel has an ancient origin. From the time of our cave-dweller ancestors, people have travelled from necessity. But as society became organised people began to move around for pleasure and about 800 years ago this kind of travel was given the name “touring” (lit: going around). Religions were among the first to encourage people to travel for pleasure and devotees were enthusiastic to be pilgrims visiting holy sites as an act of faith. Destinations such as Jerusalem, Mecca, Machu Pichu, Benares and Stonehenge have been, and continue to be, host to millions of pilgrims.

Organised travel for pleasure is however, a relatively new phenomenon with its

beginning in England early last century. Such was its popularity that in less than 100 years it has gone from being almost non-existent to becoming one of the largest commercial activities in the world. By the end of 2007 almost one billion people travelled internationally for pleasure and the tourism industry is now so large that one worker out of every twelve on the planet is engaged in tourism-related employment.

Despite this phenomenal growth, the tourism industry itself has been accepted without question and there is little debate about the overall impact of this pervasive human activity. Most people in affluent countries gain huge enjoyment from the experience of travel and see no reason to

dig beneath the surface of tourism and understand its significance for human development. The tourism industry actively promotes a popular myth that tourism is a wholesome and positive activity that brings great benefit to both the tourist and the hosts. This study asks us to probe further and ask some of the hard questions about the contribution of tourism to social development.



The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia



The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.



The Methodist Church of New Zealand



The Religious Society of Friends



Christian World Service

# Does Tourism Help the Host Country?

Tourism must respect the rights of both the visitors and the hosts. But complications arise when the visitors come from affluent countries and the hosts are living in poor communities. In these cases the decision to invite tourism is made by the rulers of the country with encouragement from commercial interests. The people themselves are rarely consulted.

Having been persuaded by international pressure (from organisations like the World Bank) that tourism is the fast track to development many poorer countries have invested heavily in programmes to attract foreign tourists. The arguments are that tourism will give more employment to the locals, will bring in valued foreign currency and will develop a better infrastructure within the country.

Of course there is some truth in these inducements but the reality is not always so positive. Yes, there is more employment for locals but generally it is the low paid and menial tasks which they fill. The better paid positions are almost all taken by foreigners.

It is also true that foreign tourists bring in foreign currency but how much of it actually goes to the local economy? Much of the money spent in hotels goes to owners in foreign countries. Tourists are rarely adventurous with food and will want the comforts of home. Tourism destinations must cater for all these foreign tastes by importing such things as sake for the Japanese, hamburgers for the Americans and French wines for the connoisseurs. Then there is the regular cost of importing foreign automobiles, oil and machinery. Several economic studies have revealed the remarkable fact that even after several years of tourism, a small country can actually have a nett economic outflow on foreign exchange which means their economy is actually subsidising the tourist industry rather than benefitting from it. A United Nations environmental study showed that in all-inclusive package tours 80% of the income goes to the international organisations behind the



tour and a United Nations Conference on Trade and Development study claimed that overall no more than half of the tourism income stayed in the destination country.

Some of this could be forgiven if the new tourist infrastructure gave actual benefit to the local people. But this is also a debatable issue. Government money invested in tourism goes largely to improving airport facilities and hotel accommodation which do little to help the life of the locals and new roads follow tourist routes which may or may not be of help to local people.

In some countries, the result of these developments has been to alienate many local people from tourism development. The Malaysian poet Cecil Rajendra witnessed the early tourist plundering of his island home of Penang and wrote an angry response:

## When the Tourists Flew In

The Finance Minister said  
"It will boost the Economy  
the dollars will flow in"

## Hot Topics

Writer: . Ron O'Grady

**The Minister of Interior said**

“It will provide full and varied employment for all indigenes”

**The Minister of Culture said**

“It will enrich our life; contact with other cultures must surely improve the texture of living”

**The man from the Hilton said**

“We will make you a second paradise; for you it is the dawn of a glorious new beginning!”

**When the tourists flew in**

our island people metamorphosed into a grotesque carnival – a two-week sideshow

**When the tourists flew in**

our men put aside their fishing nets to become waiters - our women became whores

**When the tourists flew in**

what culture we had flew out the window  
we traded our customs for sunglasses and pop  
we turned sacred ceremonies into ten-cent peepshows.

**When the tourists flew in**

local food became scarce  
prices went up but our wages stayed low

**When the tourists flew in**

we could no longer go down to our beaches  
the hotel manager said “Natives defile the sea-shore”

**When the tourists flew in**

the hunger and the squalor were preserved  
as a passing pageant for clicking cameras  
a chic eye-sore!

**When the tourists flew in**

we were asked to be “side-walk ambassadors”  
to stay smiling and polite to always guide the ‘lost’ visitor...  
Hell, if we could only tell them  
Where we really want them to go!

## Tourism and the Environment

Tourism is often criticised for its abuse of the environment. Trampers in the Himalayas for example, will be shocked by the sight of rubbish left behind by earlier walkers on the route. Plastic bottles float in mountain lakes, batteries and oxygen tanks are dumped beside the trail adding to the toxicity of the area. Trampers fail to dispose of their human waste in a sanitary manner and others wash themselves with shampoo and soap in the pristine lakes.

It has become a growing problem in every popular mountain trail of the world. Part of the Swiss Alps is under threat from excessive use and local organisations have been formed to limit the number of tourists visiting the slopes. Mt McKinley, the highest mountain in North America is a challenge to climbers and has claimed over 100 lives. It is so insanitary in places that a survey taken in 2002 showed that more than a quarter of the climbers suffered from severe diarrhoea. The nature of mountain tourism is such that it takes place in isolated and remote areas where it is almost impossible to impose any kind of regulation. Just last year (2008) a young foreign tourist on Mount Cook was caught painting graffiti on the rocks.

The cruise ship industry is booming and has now become the fastest growing sector of tourism. Shipyards cannot keep up with the demand and at least 20 new mega-ships have been built in the last two years. Many of these new ships reach up to 18 decks in height and accommodate around 3,600 passengers and 1,400 crew. With each passenger and crew member producing at least 3.5 kilograms of rubbish a day many tonnes of waste have to be

stored every 24 hours. Some of this ends up in the ocean. The oldest cruise ship routes in the world pass through the Caribbean islands and these areas are now considered among the most polluted waterways on earth.

In recent years some major cruise ship companies have been found guilty of polluting the waters, lying to the court and illegally storing hazardous waste. In a single case, one company was fined \$18 million dollars for its actions. Some cruise ships try to save costs by dumping large amounts of hazardous chemicals at sea. Cruise ships produce a range of waste chemicals from such things as dry cleaning and printing photographs.

***“Some cruise ships try to save costs by dumping large amounts of hazardous chemicals at sea. Cruise ships produce a range of waste chemicals from such things as dry cleaning and printing photographs.”***

### Questions:

**Based on your own experience of tourism are you aware of instances where local people are being exploited?**

**Who owns the tourist facilities in poor countries and where do the profits go?**

**What effects has increased tourism had on New Zealand?**

**How much of the much hyped Rugby World Cup tourism income will reach ordinary New Zealanders?**

# Tourism to Antarctica – Case Study 1

New Zealand has a special interest in this issue because we are one of the few countries with a base in the Antarctica – the world's last pristine and unspoiled environment. Those responsible for the administration of the territories in Antarctica fought to stop the tourist invasion of the world's last great wilderness. The Australian Antarctic Division pointed out the obvious paradox that "tourism has the potential to damage the very qualities that draw tourists to Antarctica". The son of Robert Falcon Scott, Sir Peter Scott pleaded that "We should have the sense to leave just one place alone".

Regrettably there was very little political or public support for the protest in New Zealand when the mega-ships began to cruise into the Antarctica. The first ships left from Argentina, but now there are more ships sailing from other countries. This coming season (December to March) cruise ships to the Antarctica will be sailing from Dunedin, Christchurch and the Bluff.

This cruise ship invasion cannot be prevented in the Courts because Antarctica is a legal curiosity. Nobody actually owns the territory even though seven countries have, like New Zealand, a base on the continent. The Antarctic Treaty of 1959 does not recognise the Antarctic as a state and avoids the issue by neither recognising nor rejecting the claims of the seven nations.

Four years ago the cruise ship industry decided it was time to send in the tourists. The number of ships rapidly escalated. In the last recorded season November 2007 to February 2008 there were 30,000 tourists on 50 different ships in the waters. In the year 2008 to February 2009 there were more than

***"In the year 2008 to February 2009 there were more than 40,000 tourists."***



40,000 tourists. With no rules about the size or type of vessel permitted to enter Antarctic waters the potential for disaster is obvious. Few of the ships sailing south in 2006 have strengthened hulls to protect them against icebergs and pack ice. Even more dangerous is the fact that few ship captains and crew have had experience of sailing in the Antarctic. Events in these past two years could signal the danger and be the beginning of even worse pollution.

- January 2007 Norwegian vessel Nordkapp ran aground on Deception Island. It was towed off with no casualties but some oil spill.
- November 2007 Canadian ship Explorer sank with 180,000 litres of marine diesel on board. All 154 passengers were rescued.
- December 2007 Norwegian tourist ship Fram hits a glacier and is damaged. 318 passengers unhurt.
- December 2008 Panamanian registered Ushuaia ran aground. 122 passengers rescued by another ship. Some oil spill.
- February 2009 The Antarctic cruise ship the M/V Ocean Nova ran aground in Marguerite Bay, near the Antarctic Peninsula, with 106 passengers and crew aboard.

We can hardly imagine what this cruise ship invasion is doing to Antarctic waters.

## ***Questions:***

**Should tourism to Antarctica be ended? Severely limited? Or permitted?**

**Is our own New Zealand environment under threat from too much tourism?**

**How can we protect the environment from the impact of mass tourism?**

**In September 2009, House of Travel in New Zealand published a promotional magazine (Inspire) with an article called "Endangered Destinations". It started by saying "Social and political upheaval, the environmental crisis and mass tourism are bringing big changes to some of the world's most exceptional destinations. Here are five places you must see before it is too late."**

**Amazingly a local tourism organisation admits that tourism is helping destroy a pristine environment and then encourages people to join them in this destruction "before it is too late", because (as the article subsequently states) "who knows how long it will stay that way?"**

## Social issues for Tourists

There is a Japanese proverb which says “the traveller knows no shame”. It seems to be a fact that moral restrictions which apply at home have less impact in a foreign context. People who would never enter a casino in their home town have no problem gambling in Las Vegas.

The worst instance of these phenomena is called sex tourism.” This is a special issue for solitary tourists, business travellers and all-male parties. There are many tourist destinations where sex is openly and cheaply available and while this is usually not illegal it also opens the door for child sex tourism which is an illegal activity in every country.

A number of New Zealand men are among the regular sex tourists to destinations in Asia. Some have been caught abusing children and imprisoned in local prisons. This has happened in Goa, Cambodia and Thailand. ECPAT Child Alert New Zealand, the organisation which monitors child sex abuse by tourists, has a web site [www.reportchildsex.com](http://www.reportchildsex.com) which enables concerned tourists to report incidents of child sex abuse which they observe. The website receives regular messages from tourists and these are forwarded to the relevant law enforcement officers both in New Zealand and overseas.

New Zealand has a law (extraterritoriality) which enables New Zealanders to be prosecuted for abuse of children overseas and there have been a number of reported cases. These are all recorded but sadly New Zealand does not have the law enforcement capacity to follow-up on any cases outside this country. Australia has a similar law and has had more than 20 successful prosecutions.

Travelling responsibly means that you do not leave your morality behind when you travel. It means showing respect for those you visit and for Christians those rules need to be strictly guarded.

## Lessons from the Tsunami – Case Study 2

Sometimes it takes a major catastrophe to bring the issues to light. The terrible tsunami that ripped through South-East Asia December 2004 brought death and devastation on a huge scale. There have been earlier tsunamis that killed more people and caused more destruction (e.g. Bangladesh 1970) but these did not make the headlines and did not have the universal response from aid agencies and governments.

The difference this time is that the tsunami hit tourism areas and many foreigners were among those drowned or injured. There was international discussion about the event and especially what it said about the effect of tourism on the area.

A young tourist in Phuket, Thailand was quoted as saying: “If tourism is supposed to alleviate poverty how come so many of the communities which were devastated were living in poverty despite being in some of the most popular tourist destinations in the world? And a journalist for The Independent a UK newspaper wrote: “Tourists are the modern rapists of paradise and if one positive thing could possibly come from the tsunami it would be the rebuilding of local economies so that they are self-sufficient”.

The journalist asks a hopeful question but the answer is far from hopeful. The tourism areas of South-East Asia have been reconstructed to please the tourists not the locals. Hotel and resort owners have been permitted to construct their



P. Jeffrey/ACT International

buildings with an absolute beach frontage often out-of-bounds to local people. Mangrove swamps and reefs which would have softened the impact of the tsunami have long since disappeared in the effort to make the beaches look clean and beautiful.

Far from improving the situation for locals the tsunami has made it worse. Land tenure in the country is not safeguarded by legal documents but by tradition and long continuous land tenure. This is a constant irritant to property developers who are anxious to get the best sites. The tsunami was their chance.

***“The tourism areas of South-East Asia have been reconstructed to please the tourists not the locals.”***

Take the case of Baan Khao fishing village which the tsunami completely destroyed. The village sits on an idyllic small beach and is the home of 14 extended families that have lived in the same area for many generations. They fled to the hills when the tsunami hit. When the waters receded the villagers found that developers had moved in, put up high fences and staked their claim for this “unoccupied” land. The families are now homeless, jobless and landless. Baan Khao is one of an estimated 32 villages where this shameless land grab took place.

In Sri Lanka, traditional fishing communities continue to plead “Please do not bring tourism hotels instead of us”. They lost their homes, livelihoods and family members to the 26 December tsunami, and in the reconstruction their entire way of life was threatened by the demands of tourism.

The government limited where families could rebuild, effectively prohibiting construction within 100 metres of the sea. The rationale was ‘safety’ yet exemptions were made for tourism operations. The Sri Lankan Tourist Board said “nature has presented Sri Lanka with a unique opportunity, and out of this great tragedy will come a world class tourism destination.” Hotels, a marina, shopping centre, floating plane pier and helipad will replace what used to be largely fishing and agricultural communities in declared tourism zones. The people were moved inland over 1km from the sea and without access to their fishing areas.

In August 2009, Christian World Service partner MONLAR called once more for this policy to stop. It continues supporting fisher folk who are advocating for the return of their fishing rights. This is now linked to the food crisis and has an impact on sustainable fishing to service local markets. “It is essential to ensure that fisher people have the right of access to the sea and to water sources for their livelihoods,” states MONLAR.

These situations in Thailand and Sri Lanka partly emerge from the influence and greed of tourism developers who exploit the suffering of poor people.

## Dealing with a Rogue State - Case Study 3

What can be done when a country openly violates basic human rights but encourages tourism to try and improve its image? In 1996 this issue became an international debate when Burma announced it was ‘Visit Myanmar (Burma) Year’. The brutal military dictatorship in that country used forced labour to develop roads and tourism infrastructure in an attempt to improve its image. This action was condemned by the United Nations and many human rights organisations but not surprisingly some tourism organisations supported the action because it was claimed it would bring employment opportunities to the local people. A number of organisations in Europe continue to support a boycott Burma tourist campaign.

Closer to home there is another issue to confront. Fiji already has a growing and reasonably efficient tourism industry and many New Zealanders have been regular visitors to the island’s resorts. However, the military coup in Fiji in 2006 and the continual delay in returning to legitimate democracy has brought an angry reaction from

many governments and international agencies. In their anxiety to bring pressure on the leaders, tourism is seen as one possible lever. Countries such as our own have issued travel warnings and the Foreign Minister Murray McCully has raised the possibility of restricting New Zealanders’ ability to travel to Fiji. The task is now more complex because the existing tourism facilities are under strain and many resorts and hotels are offering real financial incentives for people to have a cheap holiday in the Island resorts.

### Questions:

**Would you consider a cheap holiday to Fiji in the present political situation?**

**How much do you consider the political situation of a country when making travelling arrangements?**



## The Silence of the Church.

For the most part, Christians have said little of significance about tourism. There is an international Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (based in Thailand) which was founded in 1982 to monitor tourism and report to the church. It has directed many successful campaigns but it has had little direct support from the churches themselves. See [www.ecotonline.org](http://www.ecotonline.org)

Only a few churches around the world have recognised the importance of tourism. The Balinese Church is one. In the early years of tourism Balinese Christians were disturbed at the way villagers were being exploited by tourist operators and they organised the villagers to oppose this exploitation. They went further and set up a training centre where young Balinese could be trained to make a positive contribution to Balinese development. This Church centre continues to provide this training and in addition

provide accommodation for tourists. See [www.dhyanapura-beach-resort.com](http://www.dhyanapura-beach-resort.com)

In Europe several church organisations have been active in raising questions about tourism. The German Churches work ecumenically to run an organisation called Tourism Watch. This programme has a close relationship with German tourism agencies and provides training and materials for those working in the tourism industry itself. Tourism Watch also provide materials to assist tourists. Germany has the largest number per capita of tourists of any country in the world, so the contribution of the church has had a significant impact.

Bali and Germany are good models of what can be done but for the most part churches do not regard tourism as a matter for Christian conscience. Church leaders have rarely seen tourism as an

issue for them to consider.

However there is one interesting exception. The late Pope John Paul II, himself an inveterate traveler, took an intense interest in the phenomena of tourism and regularly spoke against tourism excesses. Each year of his Pontificate he made a point of giving a major address on the issue. In 2001 the Pope warned against the growing mass tourism which “has produced a kind of sub-culture that degrades both the tourist and the host community – it tends to exploit for commercial purposes the traces of ‘primitive civilisations’ and initiation rites still practiced in some traditional societies”.

In 2003 he reaffirmed “a principle which is self-evident yet often ignored: our goal should not be the benefit of a privileged few, but rather the improvement of the living conditions of all. Applying this to tourism, he spoke of tourists visiting countries where there is poverty and hunger and, in such cases, “they, (the tourists) should resist the temptation to retreat into a happy cocoon distancing themselves from the social context, rather they should refrain from profiting from their own privileged position to exploit the needs of the locals.” The memorable phrase “happy cocoon” well describes many organised tours to economically poor countries.

Churches in New Zealand have made little or no comment about inbound tourism and its impact on the environment. Nor has it felt any responsibility to assist its members to be good ambassadors and sensitive tourists when they travel overseas.

### Questions:

**What actions should the New Zealand churches take to show concern for tourism?**

***“Our goal should not be the benefit of a privileged few, but rather the improvement of the living conditions of all.”***

## A Code of Ethics for Travellers



**The first regional consultation to give critical consideration of tourism was sponsored by the Asian churches and held on the island of Penang in 1973. That first small gathering felt it was important to look critically at the behaviour of tourists who were only just starting to visit Asia in reasonable numbers. Two of the participants drew up a Code of Ethics for Tourists. After thirty-six years, to the amazement of the writers, the code is still being reproduced in tourism publications more or less in its original form. Do you find it still relevant?**

- Travel in a spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to meet and talk with local people.
- Be aware of the feelings of other people, thus preventing what might be offensive behavior. Remember this especially with photography.
- Cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and seeing.
- Realise that people in the country you visit often have time concepts and thought patterns that differ from your own. Not inferior, just different.
- Discover the enrichment that comes from seeing another way of life through other eyes, rather than looking for the “beach paradise” of the tourist poster.
- Acquaint yourself with the local customs and respect them - people will be happy to help you.
- Cultivate the habit of asking questions instead of “knowing” all the answers.
- Remember that you are one of thousands of visiting tourists and do not expect special privileges.
- If you want your experience to be a home away from home, don’t waste money on travelling.
- Remember when shopping that the bargain you obtain may only be possible because of the low wages paid to the makers.
- Reflect daily on your experiences; seek to deepen your understanding. What enriches you may rob or violate others.

## Where to From Here?

Many people reading this *Hot Topic* will have a direct personal interest in tourism and most will be hoping to make a journey to another country sometime. If you have begun to plan that travel you have already been bombarded with ideas on when and where to go. That’s your problem. These studies have been raising a different question – not when or where, but **how** will you travel?

The Christian tradition is that the best journey is a pilgrimage. When we travel we should not go as spectators but as pilgrims with a receptive mind – listening to hear what God is saying and doing through the lives of other people in other culture -. searching for God in unlikely places.

So off you go and don’t forget to listen to the voices.

My prayer for you as you journey is this:

- **May you meet interesting people.**
- **May you be overwhelmed by the beauty and diversity of our world.**
- **May your journey give encouragement to your hosts.**
- **And may you return home a better person.**



## Resources:



### Useful Websites

Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism: [www.ecotonline.org](http://www.ecotonline.org)

World Tourism Organisation: [www.unwto.org](http://www.unwto.org)

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development:  
[www.unctad.org](http://www.unctad.org)

ECPAT International: [www.ecpat.net](http://www.ecpat.net) a global network of organisations and individuals working together to eliminate child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes.

ECPAT New Zealand: [www.ecpat.org.nz](http://www.ecpat.org.nz)

[www.reportchildsex.com](http://www.reportchildsex.com) If you need to report child sex tourism.

## How do you travel?

**If you have any feedback, reflections and responses on the issues raised in this Hot Topic please send them to [international@cws.org.nz](mailto:international@cws.org.nz) The Churches' Agency on International Issues especially welcomes suggestions for further developing the Code of Ethics for Travellers.**

### The Churches' Agency on International Issues:

c/- Christian World Service, PO Box 22652 Christchurch 8142, Aotearoa New Zealand  
Phone: (64 3) 366 9274 • Email: [international@cws.org.nz](mailto:international@cws.org.nz) • [www.cws.org.nz](http://www.cws.org.nz)