

INTRODUCTION

Islands have occupied a special place in tourism since the aristocracy of Imperial Rome made use of the islands of the Adriatic Sea for holidays more than two thousand years ago. An island holiday readily satisfies the essential criteria for a tourism experience: it involves a journey to another destination, one outside normal life; it provides ready contrast with the world of work; and its “differentness” promises pleasurable experiences (Urry, 1990). For islands, the physical isolation which creates many barriers to economic success in manufacturing (for example restricted markets and cost of transport) also provides opportunities for tourism development based upon exploitation of the particularities of their climate, culture and ecology. It is therefore not surprising that the centrality of islands to the imagery and operation of modern tourism has extended so that they figure prominently in the growth in ecotourism and the subsequent debates about sustainability and tourism.

Ecotourism has become one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourist industry, with destinations such as the Maldives, Kenya and Belize doubling their tourist trade through an emphasis on ecotourism during the 1980s (Cater, 1993). The late 1980s also saw increasing academic attention paid to the subject through conferences, journal articles and the publication of authoritative books on the subject (e.g. Boo, 1990). Of central concern in this scholarly work was a debate over what actually constitutes ecotourism, and over the extent to which it can contribute to developing a more sustainable tourism industry. During a workshop held by the Ecotourism Society (1991), discussion established four key elements which can be taken as defining ecotourism in terms of both its market domain and its socio-environmental consequences, and which include:

- purposeful travel to natural areas;
- gaining a greater understanding of an area’s culture and natural history;
- protection of the environment to minimise change due to tourism;
- generation of economic benefits to make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people.

The central challenge for ecotourism is that of retaining the fragile natural world that is central to it, whilst still operating a profitable industry. It can be seen as an integral part

in the emergence of what Poon (1994) describes as the “new tourism” in which concern for nature, catering for more individual tastes, and greater flexibility are all key components. Poon sees this as both a challenge and an opportunity for the industry since:

the changes brought in its wake are so rapid and so radical that they warrant competitive strategies to ensure success. The key decision for industry players and tourism destinations is not just one of opting for “new tourism” but, more profoundly, being leaders of the “new” tourism.

A key question for the development of ecotourism theory and practice, is whether the knowledge and experience that has been accumulated from the operation of “old” tourism will be appropriate as a basis for this new incarnation of the industry. This paper seeks to contribute to the exploration of the issues and challenges that ecotourism presents by examining its emergence on two islands which, although at different ends of the economic spectrum, share a desire to make ecotourism a central plank within their overall development strategy: Madagascar and Tasmania.

This is a comparative case study based on secondary data. The aim is to generate theory and provide lessons to guide future research rather than empirically investigate hypotheses or propositions.

MADAGASCAR AND TASMANIA—TWO ISLANDS WITH A SHARED INTEREST IN ECOTOURISM.

These large islands share a number of similarities but also have profound differences. Madagascar has over 12 million inhabitants and as the world’s fourth largest island has a land mass equal to France and the Benelux countries combined. This makes it significantly larger than Tasmania which has 468,000 people and a land mass that would fit comfortably into Southern France.

For both islands ecotourism provides rich opportunities, and is central to the economic development strategy of both. In Tasmania, tourism generates 8% of the state’s earnings and (directly or indirectly) an estimated 10% of its employment (CREA, 1993). The

state's Future Directions Policy Document, *Tasmania—A Decade of Growth*, identified tourism as key to its future development strategy. An emphasis on ecotourism fits in with the state's mission, articulated in the Premier's Direction Statement 1997 to become more clean, green and clever, and is made more attractive, given that "in general, ecotourism visitors spend comparatively more than the traditional holiday makers" (SoE, 1996).

The link between tourism and the environment in Tasmania is a very clear one since "the innate value of Tasmania as a tourism destination, and therefore the value of tourism in and for Tasmania, is directly attributable to its natural environment" (Hanson & Walker, 1997).

This is underscored by the fact that of the 480,000 visitors Tasmania attracted in 1995, around three quarters became involved in some form of nature-based activities during their stay (SoE, 1996).

Tourism in Madagascar has also grown significantly over recent years. According to the office of the Director General of Tourism, in the ten years 1984–1994 incoming tourist numbers rose from 11,900 to 65,000 with a growth target of 230,00–250,000 tourists annually by the Year 2000. Earnings from tourism rose almost six-fold 1987 to 1993 and the employment generated by tourism was forecast to rise from 7,728 jobs in 1993 to 11,657 in 1996 (Jolly, 1991).

Both islands are pursuing ecotourism as a key industry, and arguably they must identify and manage the factors fundamental to competitive advantage as an ecotourism destination. These can be distilled down to five key elements which will first be defined and then used to organise descriptions of the two islands:

- *Ecological appeal.* The key here is a perceptually attractive offering of the natural world. Manzanec (1989) in one study found "unspoiled environment" and "beautiful landscape" as key drivers of tourists' destination choice in Carinthia. Adopting Urry's (1990) distinction between "romantic" and "collective" tourism (used in his discussion of the tourist gaze) serves to further explain the draw of particular

ecologies. Romantic ecotourism emphasises a private, personal and semi-spiritual experience involving immediate and personal contact with nature. The ecological focus of such “communion” is both physically and perceptively fragile. Physically in the sense that over-use will lead to damage that degrades the eco-system that forms the basis of appeal. Also perceptively because degradation from too many simultaneously present users, or the presence of obvious infra-structure (even where it is for eco-system protection) will rob the experience of its personal and semi-spiritual essence. The collective use of ecological resources involves large numbers of people gazing at nature, perhaps in a coach-tour or when looking (as a group) at a tree which has been designated as a resource because it is old or tall or rare. The experience tends to be less personal and spiritual than the romantic category but is nevertheless ecologically centred.

- *A specific ecological/biological competitive edge.* All ecosystems are important and unique, and each will tend to have its own particular charm. An important aspect in relation to ecotourism potential is something which sets it apart. It could come from volume of biodiversity (e.g. the Amazon rainforest); rare or unique species (e.g. the Galapagos Islands) or species which are attractive for their “personality” more than their rarity (e.g. whales).
- *Accessibility.* In terms of accessibility and climate an area needs to be relatively hospitable to attract ecotourists in any numbers. Manzanec (1995) points out that potential tourists attracted by an exotic destination, but faced with a long-haul flight, may suffer an “attraction-avoidance conflict”. Similar conflicts may occur where destinations are attractively exotic but present a distinctly uncomfortable experience through extremes of temperature.
- *Cultural depth and diversity:* to complement the natural attractions. Vacations are typically measured in weeks, and even the most ecologically minded tourist will be likely to crave some culture and entertainment during the trip.
- *Tourism infrastructure:* in terms of tour operators, accommodation, transportation, guides and other measures to make the region’s attractions accessible.

Ecological appeal is something that both islands possess and seek to utilise in their ecotourism marketing. In 1995 45% of visitors to Tasmania visited a natural park or

State forest reserve, 44% went bushwalking (and therefore were, in Urry's terms, "romantic" ecotourists), 22% went on a river cruise and 7% went caving (Soffi, 1996:15.3). With more than 40% of the island comprising National Park, or otherwise controlled bush, the scope for ecological experience is wide. There are a variety of inland waterways (many well stocked with trout ready for fly fisherman) extensive mountain ranges, seemingly remote beaches and some of the most beautiful scenery in Australia (Hanson & Walker, 1997). Madagascar, despite population pressure on resources, retains a remarkable diversity of eco-systems including spiny deserts, dry forests, savannah, rainforest and the unique "tsingy", limestone plateaux eroded into forests of pinnacles (Jolly, 1991 a). It also has a number of tropical beaches, particularly on the smaller islands surrounding the main island.

In terms of a *biological competitive edge* both islands have distinctive wildlife which can prove a key attraction particularly for ecotourists. Madagascar is famous as the home of almost 30 species of lemur and is also home to the tiny hedgehog-like tenrec, which is the among the most primitive of all mammals (and which also resembles the Australian echidna). Madagascar is also home to two thirds of the world's chameleons; the world's most endangered reptile (the plough share tortoise); a number of endangered species of turtles and other land tortoises; and 148 species of frogs and toads found nowhere else.

Madagascar parted company with Africa about 165 million years ago. Like a vast Noah's Ark, the new island carried with it thousands of species which today are found nowhere else on Earth. Madagascar has been hailed as a living laboratory—every year new species are discovered. Others disappear forever before we have a chance to study them (Lean, 1995).

Although Tasmania cannot compete with Madagascar in terms of variety and rarity of species, it has a number of unique species and many with a high "personality" value including Tasmanian Devils, the duck billed platypus, kangaroos, wombats and fairy penguins.

In terms of *accessibility*, Madagascar is the more isolated of the two regions, being about 600 km off the coast of East Africa. Tasmania is separated from the rest of Australia by the Bass Strait which is approximately 300 km wide. Once Australia is reached, admittedly after a long journey from major world population centres, Tasmania is readily accessible by sea or air. Despite its geographic distance from Europe and the Americas, it still attracts over 70 000 international (mainly European) travelers each year.

Culturally, Madagascar and Tasmania are very different although they both share a colonial heritage. The Malagasy people originated from South East Asia. The Portuguese first brought the country to the attention of Europe, and Arab merchants and others coming from Africa gradually increased Madagascar's cultural diversity. From the seventeenth century onward a steady stream of French settlers arrived, culminating in the Island's seizure as a French colony at the end of the nineteenth century. Independence was restored in 1960 and the Republic of Madagascar's relatively new democracy was fully established in 1993. Tasmania's history of colonisation is rather shorter, and the original culture of the State's aboriginal peoples was largely destroyed. As one of the first parts of Australia to be colonised it does have a depth of colonial culture which adds to its attraction as a destination to other Australians and to those from other countries. The single most popular activity among tourists within Tasmania in 1993, for example, was "visiting a historic site", something done by 57% of visitors (SoE, 1996).

Infrastructure for tourism is perhaps the area where the difference between the two islands is most pronounced. Tasmania, which has positioned itself as "The Holiday Isle" has achieved the accolade of "Australia's Best Holiday" with a wide diversity of accommodation offered, restaurants, scenic cruises and flights. The wilderness areas and beaches are complemented by a wide range of tourism ventures and two cities which can provide a variety of activities and entertainment not directly related to the environment. Tasmania's transport infrastructure renders much of its wilderness more accessible than is the case in Madagascar. Madagascar is actively seeking to close this infrastructure gap with a schedule of 700 new hotel rooms per year planned by the

government, along with top priority being given to the improvement of the road network. The development of infrastructure to support ecotourism is a delicate balancing act. If facilities do not accommodate current visitor numbers, then particular sites can become damaged. Improving facilities can help to reduce the impact, but this in turn can attract more visitors, creating further demands on nature. The physical impact of tourism may be minimised but the perceptual impact of ever-increasing infrastructure aimed at accommodating tourists and minimising their impact on sites can be considerable.

THE SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE FOR ECOTOURISM

The essence of the sustainability problem in ecotourism has already been identified—how to manage nature so as to retain enough ecological integrity to attract people at a profit (see Hanson & Walker, 1997). This is a difficult challenge within a competitive global economy where companies strive to achieve competitive advantage which enables them to obtain “above average profits” (Hitt et al., 1997) and where fundamental anthropocentrism and growth-orientation creates massive pressure to exploit nature without regard for long term ecological or social consequences. Ecotourism that is genuinely sensitive to ecological concerns over the long term is likely to be a rare occurrence, a practice requiring a special sensitivity contrary to the mainstream, and an equally unusual set of skills in order to be able to handle the complex challenges posed by sustainability issues in ecotourism.

The difficulties involved in moving towards ecological sustainability are intensified for ecotourism by the degree to which the “ecotourism product” is so closely intertwined with particular (and often unique) ecosystems. The list of challenges is a daunting one built on the already challenging task of achieving sustainability in any operation:

- ecosystems’ lack of respect for political or commercial boundaries (or, in reverse, the fact that political boundaries do not follow those of ecosystems so that the same ecosystem may be affected by several sets of decision makers);
- ecosystem time cycles which vary between days, seasons and millennia (hence the impacts of ecotourism vary enormously);
- the lack of natural limits to ecosystem exploitation and threshold effects which are

difficult to uncover; (this is particularly important with respect to the impact of visitor numbers);

- the tendency of changes to eco-systems to be often irreversible;
- the ability of other enterprises to negatively affect your operation (and these may operate far away from one's operation);
- eco-systems' extreme complexity (raising the challenge of recruiting staff who understand these);
- the novelty of many of the problems met; and
- the pervasive uncertainty of information about ecosystems and the impact of human-ecosystem interaction (see Dovers, 1997).

The need to preserve the characteristics of nature that appeal to ecotourists accentuate these problems, and create major management and marketing challenges. These are further complicated by the variety of stakeholders with an interest in both tourism and the environment which can be used as a basis for ecotourism. Putting ecotourism onto a more sustainable footing will require a multi-layered mix of measures. An analysis of the Madagascar and Tasmanian experiences illustrates a number of these challenges, which, for the sake of convenience and memorability, can be grouped under seven headings [each starting with the letter "C"]: context (national and regional), credibility of experience, contribution of the tourist to the local economy, conservation, compromise (by the tourist) and culture.

Context—National and Regional

Although a destination's ecological and geographical characteristics may encourage ecotourism, the socio-economic context of the destination, and in particular the economic pressures on the environment from other sectors, will prove crucial to the future of ecotourism. In Madagascar, large elements of its environment face pressure from other industries and the remaining 12,000 acres of the country's unique littoral forest are currently under threat from a mining project led by RTZ. The short term gains in foreign exchange will make such projects attractive to the debt-burdened Government in the short term, but the price may be the loss of unique natural resources which could have contributed to the long term health of the country's economy. As Sir David

Attenborough commented:

It would be economic folly to exchange something that would bring revenues from ecotourism in perpetuity for a payment that will end within 40 years (King, 1995).

A parallel situation exists in Tasmania where there has been controversy surrounding the state's plans to develop a "world class forestry resource" by replacing large areas of old growth forest with pine plantations. This has led to localised opposition stressing the opportunities to use the forest for ecotourism instead of forestry.

In Madagascar the pressure on the environment comes from a combination of economic poverty and one of the fastest rates of population growth in the world, with each woman bearing an average 6.5 children.

A millennium and a half of tradition says that nature is there to be exploited, that more children mean more wealth, and that economic pressures pass down the line from rich to poor, who then use up the capital of forest and soil. Only a decade of increased environmental awareness now confronts those traditions (Jolly, 1991b).

Ironically in (first world) Tasmania gradual population decline is a key political concern. Here the economic pressures may be less intense, but they come from the perceived need for growth in an economy relatively distant from Australian and overseas markets. Although Tasmanians may treasure their environment and enjoy a quality of life that attracts some people to relocate from other Australian states, there is considerable local political pressure to move Tasmania up the Australian economic performance table and increase the economic opportunities available to young people in particular.

Another similarity between the two islands is the importance that power generation projects have had in the debate about the environment and development. In Tasmania the drowning of Lake Pedder, a unique natural resource, for a hydro-electric dam in the 1970s sparked an ongoing debate over whether projects aimed at creating economic

development and jobs should be allowed to take precedence over the conservation of specific environmental resources. In Madagascar, a debate about the value of power compared to environmental and tourism resources has also been sparked by plans to develop a nuclear power station on the important tourism region of Lake Evoron and concerns about the environmental impacts of the Katun hydro-electric power station (King, 1995).

Economically Tasmania is the least wealthy Australian state, but its first world income level, combined with its environment, climate and culture, provide an enviable quality of life. Madagascar by contrast, despite its ecological riches, is one of the poorest countries in the world and appears to be “caught in a spiral of environmental degradation and poverty” (Swaney & Willcox, 1994). The country has already lost 85% of its natural forest system and faces major problems from soil erosion and degradation. Hillside “slash and burn” agricultural practices are used to produce new pasturage for cattle and to increase water run-off into the paddy fields in the valleys. These bring short-term economic benefits, but create chronic Soil erosion which threatens the long term viability of the agricultural lands as well as the ecosystem generally (Jolly, 1991b). The pressure on ecological resources is therefore more intense in Madagascar than Tasmania, and the political and commercial challenge in preserving ecological integrity is consequently far greater.

Credibility of the Experience—Perceptual Integrity

Doubts about whether the concept of ecotourism is anything more than a new marketing ploy are have been around for some time. Hall (1995), for example, is highly critical claiming that:

despite its value in raising awareness of the relationship between tourism and the environment, the term has become so abused and misused that it is little more than a worthless cliché, which is probably at best as harmful as conventional forms of tourism.

Certainly uncontrolled growth in ecotourism can threaten to engulf the ecosystems that attract it, as happened when a rising demand for ecotourism coupled with exposure in a

popular TV series doubled the tourists visiting Brazil's delicate Pantanal swampland in the space of a year (Chapoval, 1989).

Ecotourism largely depends on its romantic appeal, which rests on a perceptually fragile "feel" of "naturalness" (Hanson & Walker, 1997 and Walker & Hanson, 1998). Too many people viewing nature simultaneously, too much obvious infrastructure, litter, or aircraft circling overhead, all rob the experience of its attraction & appeal. Solutions to this problem are difficult, particularly without complete control over all tourism operators and tourists, for in a fragile environment one "bad" company or group of independent trekkers can do immense damage. Options include making trips so expensive that few can afford them (difficult in a competitive environment), and limiting access via a permit system (possible and increasingly practised). To a limited extent both options are now practised in Tasmania and, increasingly, also in Madagascar.

Contribution of Tourism to the Local Economy

Tourism trade is sought by destinations for the contribution that tourism spending can make, and the ensuing employment and economic growth benefits. In Tasmania unemployment at around 10% is the highest of any Australian state. Tourism there accounts directly for about 7% of jobs, and ecotourism as a fast growing market segment is viewed as bringing significant local benefits with lower socio-environmental costs than conventional tourism. Ecotourism, though, perhaps needs a more holistic view of what tourists bring to a destination. Ziffer (1989) identifies participation as a key element of ecotourism in which:

the ecotourist... contributes to the visited area through labour or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic well-being of the local residents and in which the host country or region... commits itself to establishing and maintaining the sites with the participation of local residents, marketing them appropriately, enforcing regulations, and using the proceeds of the enterprise to fund the area's land management as well as community development.

In practice, ensuring that the benefits of any form of tourism accrue to the local area can

be difficult. Particularly in developing countries, the income gained from mass marketing tourism often remains in the hands of the transnational companies providing international travel services, and the remainder accrues to a local elite within a small area of the destination (Millman, 1989). While some commentators suggest that ecotourism benefits are more likely to accrue locally (Cater, 1993) others suggest that achieving this in practice can be difficult. Boo (1990) found that although ecotourism can boost local economies, many benefits accrue elsewhere through spending on infrastructure development, the importation of consumer goods and oil to cater for tourists, and the tendency of large scale tour operators to repatriate profits. The employment contribution of tourism can also be highly seasonal, and when superimposed on existing seasonal employment patterns (e.g. harvest times) it can create labour shortages and other problems which draw in outside workers temporarily.

Conservation

A major role of government is to declare and maintain protected environmental areas. Both Madagascar and Tasmania have these and in both cases they provide the basic resource used for ecotourism. Madagascar has 11 Natural Reserves, 5 National Parks, 23 Special Reserves and 14 sites of special biological interest. Its flora and fauna includes over 12,000 species of flowering plant, among with are over 700 species of orchid and several unique plant species such as the spiny cactus-like didierea and alluaudia. Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area comprises 20% of the island; a further 10% of is made up of reserves, conservation areas and government lands; and a further 24% is state controlled forests.

Conservation initiatives of themselves do not however ensure the protection of particular aspects of the environment. The Royal Geographical Society expedition to Madagascar's Manongarivo Special Reserve found that despite its protected status since 1956, families had moved into it during the past 18 years from surrounding deforested areas to such an extent that the habitat is under threat (Thompson et. al., 1989).

In this case tourism became part of the conservation plan to manage the forest sustainably, and to move those living within it away from the destructive "tavy"

(shifting slash-and-burn cultivation). In other cases the very presence of tourists can encourage attempts to trade in endangered species, as is the case with the illegal tortoise trade which has developed in Madagascar.

The role of government is critical to long term ecotourism, not only because an active conservation minded government is the only realistic means of protecting the large areas of relatively untouched nature that ecotourism relies on, but also because it provides the only major counter-balance to the power of the growth oriented anthropocentric, profit directed organisations that enter lucrative business areas. Government action through regulations, licensing arrangements, provision of protective infrastructure (e.g. wilderness walking tracks), and resources to monitor and control protected areas, are all required for long term protection of the natural environment. The willingness of governments to intervene will vary according to local political and economic circumstances. In Tasmania relative wealth and an environmentally sensitive population that is increasingly aware of tourism's contribution to state revenue make Government intervention relatively easy. The Madagascan situation is far more difficult for Government because of population pressure, distrust of government motives for intervening in agricultural practices and other economic pressures. Here the tendency is to go for short term gains through mining and forestry, placing valuable ecological resources under increasing threat.

Compromise—by the Tourist

One of the selling points of environmentally sound business initiatives is the potential “win-win” combination of commercial success and environmental virtue (Porter & van der Linde, 1996; Elkington, 1994). This proposition has created a fierce debate, with others suggesting that current economic and political realities make such “win-win” outcomes virtually unachievable (see Wally & Whitehead, 1996). For tourism, Boo (1990) discusses the degree to which tourism development have the potential to achieve “win-win” outcomes. Manzanec (1995) points out that tourism decisions very often depend on compromise on the part of travellers, and the need for them to realise that they cannot, for example, maximise comfort and enjoyment of unspoilt nature simultaneously. As Wight (1993) comments:

too often, in ecotourism, examples are found of luxurious accommodation transplanted into inappropriate environments in order to satisfy actual or perceived demand.

Another key compromise is between the needs of tourists and the needs of local populations. There is a danger that, if tourists are significant enough in terms of numbers (in Tasmania annual visitors outnumber the local population) or in economic influence (as in Madagascar), the development of tourism business can reduce residents' quality of life despite boosting the local economy. This is particularly a problem when the tourism trade is relatively seasonal, as is the case in Tasmania.

In tourism, "freedom of choice" is presented as an essential element of the tourism product (Smith, 1994), but unless the environment, other tourists and local inhabitants are insulated from any negative collective consequences of individual tourist choices, then the destination as a whole will degrade. In ecotourism, marketers will have to balance the needs and welfare of tourists with those of the ecosystem and those who reside within it. The only way this will work is if the industry repositions the customer not as a monarch, but as one of several important stakeholders, and many travel companies are trying to stress the individual responsibilities of tourists within a destination.

Culture

A criticism that can be leveled at ecotourism is that it leads to an emphasis on the conservation of the local physical environment which leads to a neglect of the cultural and economic needs of the local population. This is most obvious in the context of less industrialised countries like Madagascar where there have been accusations that ecotourism represents a form of cultural imperialism in which the links between the environment and the local indigenous peoples tends to be ignored (Hall, 1995). This leads to the erosion of local culture as it is adapted and packaged to become a tourist attraction, and often to the problems associated with the "demonstration effects of wealth among tourists on local population" (Fletcher & Snee, 1989).

Consumer Appeal

The emergence of a new type of nature-orientated tourist, and a general increase in consumer sensitivity to environmental issues provides many new segmentation, differentiation, product development and promotional opportunities (Durst & Ingram, 1988). However, a clear understanding of the complexities of tourism products and the consumer's decision making process is something which has been viewed as lacking in tourism management generally (Manzanec, 1995). If this is the case for "mainstream" tourism, it is likely to apply to an even greater degree to ecotourism products.

So how can the industry better understand "the ecotourist" and how they differ from other forms of tourist? A first step is to resist the temptation to generalise. As Wight (1993) comments "there is no specific and definable 'ecotourist'". There are, however, general observable trends among travellers in relation to the environment and the desire to "get away from it all" and from crowds of tourists in particular. Hui (1990) found that the majority of Australian travellers and holidaymakers were "anti-tourist" in outlook, preferring small hotels and guest houses to large hotel chains; seeking out areas of natural beauty and culture away from "tourists"; and relating positively to concepts such as "ecotourism" and "green" issues.

Models are emerging which attempt to segment tourists in relation to the environment, and to characterise particular types of ecotourists (Hvenegaard, 1994). Bases used for segmentation include the means by which tourists reach ecotourism resources; whether they are specialists or generalists in their environmental interests; and the degree of physical effort or discomfort they will accept.

The most common basis for segmentation is the motivation that attracts a tourist to an ecotourism destination. Wight (1993), for example, draws a distinction between nature tourism, adventure tourism and cultural tourism. Although Tasmania fits comfortably into this model, with its emphasis on scenic beauty and adventure tourism, Madagascar does not. In Madagascar the unique environment has created opportunities to benefit from the growth in "scientific tourism". Llyina & Mieczkowski (1992) cite the success of scholarly and popular-scientific expeditions and tourist participation in

archaeological excavations as evidence of a growth in “knowledge-orientated tourism” which they see as overlapping other forms of ecotourism. Attempting to tap this segment will clearly place very different demands upon the tourist marketing authorities and the tourism infrastructure of the region, such as the need to recruit scholars to act as hosts or guides.

A key to successful ecotourism marketing is for the marketer to empathise with the target audience and to try to relate to the natural environment through their eyes. One way to do this might be to reconfigure Wight’s model of potential ecotourism motivations in a way that would better encompass the style of ecotourism emerging in places like Madagascar, to view ecotourism appeal as split between the “head, the heart and the body”. Ecotourism’s mental appeal is typified by the development of educational and scientific ecotourism in places like Madagascar. Ceballos-Lascurain (1988) sees learning as a key component of ecotourism, which involves:

travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural aspects found in these areas.

By contrast, ecotourism of the heart reflects Urry’s concept of romantic ecotourism in which the ability to be “close to nature” is paramount. For the body, ecotourism involves not just relating to the environment, but interacting with it, rising to the physical challenges provided by kayaking, caving, climbing and bushwalking. Here the romantic appeal is active and the physical challenge of activities is part of it. So while the visitor to the Tasmanian wilderness might relate more to nature as an adventure, a challenge and a spectacle, the Madagascan tourist may be attracted to its environment viewed as a treasure, a curiosity and as a place of research and learning.

CONCLUSIONS

In Tasmania and Madagascar the ecological, economic and political contexts in which ecotourism is evolving are very different. However, there are many commonalities in terms of the challenges that are faced by those who must plan, market, operate and police ecotourism ventures; and in terms of the elements that distinguish ecotourism

ventures apart from other forms of tourism. The environment is vital in any form of tourism experience, even if it is just acts as a backdrop to a conventional “sun, sea and sand” vacation. In ecotourism, the environment attracts and engages the tourist much more directly. Ecotourism is (among other things) a first hand and direct experience of the natural environment, with expectations for education and/or appreciation and which has a high cognitive and affective experiential dimension.

Many tourists have nature brought before them and shown to them. This could involve tourists on bus tours stopping at points of natural interest, or flying over wilderness areas to experience the environment as a panorama. Such indirect involvement can still have a romantic appeal providing there are not crowds of people viewing the same point of interest (for this hides nature and produces the same stresses that people on holiday are presumably avoiding) and so long as the natural world remains really “natural” from the vantage point of the tourist. Direct interaction involves much more immediate and personal use of the natural world, through activities such as bushwalking or trekking. Here the head, the heart and the body may all be involved in a much more intense experience, which would be exemplified by holidays in which the tourist contributes directly to conservation efforts. Ecotourism is characterised by either a strong focus on the environment as an attraction, or by a very direct involvement between the tourist and the environment. In its “purer” forms, ecotourism combines the two, and in an ideal world it is also ecologically and perceptually sustainable. Ecologically in terms of ecosystem integrity, and perceptually in the (related) sense of the capacity of the environment to offer tourism experiences that satisfies the ecotourist.

Characterising tourism according to the intensity of the focus on the environment and the directness of the involvement with the environment, allows us to construct a framework to differentiate between different environmentally-orientated forms of tourism.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

If our understanding of ecotourism is helped by analysing the nature of the attraction and interaction between specific environments and tourists, understanding the degree of sustainability of ecotourism involves analysing its socio-environmental impacts. The challenges of retaining and managing ecological resources whilst operating tourism enterprises grow, rather than diminish, over time. The global middle class is increasingly turning to ecotourism, searching for natural experiences to balance the stresses of urban life. Using improved transport infrastructure they are better able to gain access to previously hard to visit islands. As eco-systems become more used, the difficulty of retaining the feeling of naturalness and romantic appeal that is fundamental to ecotourism grows. This places ever greater pressure on policy makers, accentuated by competing demands for the same ecological resource.

In Madagascar the competing demands from mining, farming and power schemes combined with the urgency of their economic problems, makes developing sustainably managed ecotourism particularly difficult. Tasmania, despite larger visitor numbers and similar pressure from mining interests, faces a more manageable task, in the short term at least. Although policy makers and practitioners must deal with the complexity of the management challenges involved, and the general pressure on ecological resources; much of the State is reserved and protective infrastructure is sufficiently well developed to make the challenge more manageable.

The romantic semi-spiritual appeal of ecological resources is the basis of the industry success and this is perceptually fragile. At the same time there are indicators in both Madagascar and Tasmania that the basis of this romantic appeal is changing. In Tasmania, for example, there has been a continual increase in the number of accessible walking areas and an evident growth in demand for 'pure' experiences (whether in rafting, caving or walking), and a consequent increase in the number and variety of commercially offered experiences. Ecotourism is, in this respect, very similar to the quick changing fashion industry—new offerings are required to satisfy the taste of consumers eager for new products. The romantic appeal of ecotourism is nevertheless personal and it is greatly diminished by increases in numbers of like minded tourists. The integrity of the natural world diminishes quickly as numbers grow, particularly if

infrastructure such as walkways and huts are installed without due regard for the “spirit of place” existing in particular locations. The resource will still slowly wither regardless of the percentage of land set aside as controlled wilderness or semi-wilderness, unless tourism development is made ecologically and perceptually sustainable rather than simply contained.

In the longer term for both islands, and other areas interested in harnessing the growth in demand for ecotourism as a driver of economic growth, some fundamental changes will be needed to allow ecotourism to be developed in a sustainable way. These will include:

- the establishment and enforcement of political and cultural controls over exploitation of the natural world because this is the only way to preserve the resource that the industry relies on. The total impact of many incremental changes to the integrity of nature is profound change that robs both nature and the ecotourism industry. The temptation to unhesitatingly adhere to the dictates of ‘fashion’ in destinations and offerings should be resisted until tested against the requirements of ecological and perceptual sustainability.
- a move away from decision making time-frames which reflect short-term political or investment expediencies.
- the emergence of a new style of more eco-centric ecotourism which will emphasise cooperation between different stakeholders, and in which the “precautionary principle” will operate since it makes long term commercial sense for the ecotourism industry.
- choices being made about what style and quantity of ecotourism should exist within particular destinations. Attempts to combine adventure tourism, scientific tourism, and nature tourism in one destination are likely to overstretch the carrying capacity of its environment.
- the promotion of compromise among tourists in terms of the level of comfort and infrastructure they are willing to accept. Butler (1980) proposed a model of destination evolution in which there is a central relationship between visitor numbers and infrastructure relevant to the ecotourism challenge of perceptual sustainability. Improved infrastructure attracts more tourists, which encourages the improvement of

infrastructure until carrying capacity is exceeded leading to social, environmental and economic problems, then to stagnation and decline. Perhaps by increasing the ecotourist's sense of involvement with the destination they can be encouraged to accept a level of comfort which is less than that offered by conventional hotels and tours, but which is more environmentally sustainable.

Neither Madagascar nor Tasmania is yet close to this model but both will need to move towards it if the industry is to retain its appeal in these regions over the long term.

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