

## **RESEARCH PROBE: CRITICAL DEBATES IN TOURISM**

### **Nature-Based Tourism in Breadth and Depth**

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Revisiting Fennell's (2000) taxonomy of natural resource-based tourism after a decade, we can see that whilst his conclusions remain valid and his illustrations illuminating, recent research has added both greater breadth and greater depth.

In retrospect, three of the seven types of tourism in his two figures, namely whitewater rafting, mountaineering and jet boating, would now be treated as adventure tourism (Buckley, 2010a). Two, namely hunting and fishing, would be considered as consumptive nature-based tourism. Even catch-and-release fishing kills some of the fish caught, so it is consumptive; and if ecotourism is considered to include an ethical dimension, as argued by Fennell (2003), then catch-and-release also fails the ethical test. The remaining two categories are listed only as 'hard-path' and 'soft-path' ecotourism, with the terms taken, perhaps, from American outdoor recreation vernacular.

There have been many analyses of the distinctions between ecotourism and related terms (Buckley, 2009). Some terms, such as nature-based tourism, are defined by features of the product or setting. Others, such as responsible tourism, are defined by measures taken to improve either social or environmental outcomes. Several authors, including Fennell (2003), have also proposed hybrid terms which recognise that commercial tourism products as actually sold in the retail market do not necessarily fall neatly into single analytical categories.

In 2012, therefore, the increasing breadth of terminology in the broad outdoor tourism sector is well-known to tourism researchers, but we can still see how the seven types examined by Fennell (2000) fit into this modern taxonomy of outdoor tourism.

More interesting at present, perhaps, is to examine how our understanding of nature-based tourism has grown in depth, over the past decade. To address this issue we draw on a recent review by Coghlan and Buckley (2012).

Nature-based tourism includes all forms of tourism where relatively undisturbed natural environments form the primary attraction or setting (Buckley 2009; Newsome *et al.* 2002). It can include consumptive and adventurous as well as non-consumptive contemplative activities, which in turn can include ecotourism (Buckley, 2009; Fennell 2003; Weaver 2008) and conservation tourism (Buckley, 2010b). It is a significant component of the global tourism industry, with estimates of worldwide economic scale ranging from hundreds of billions up to one trillion dollars annually (Buckley, 2009). It is also a very diverse sector, and Coghlan and Buckley (2012) argue that we should recognise the diversity and variety amongst both the products supplied, and in the customers who demand and buy them.

Individual nature-based tourists commonly have widely differing origins, interests, motivations and behaviours (Mehmetoglu, 2007; Silverberg *et al.*, 1996; Strasdas 2006). Vespestad and Lindberg (2010) argue that nature-based tourism experiences can be divided into four categories: a search for self, a form of entertainment, a state of being and a form of social affiliation. Taking a somewhat different approach, Arnegger *et al.* (2010) use a matrix of travel service arrangements vs. travel motivations in order to characterise tourists. They categorised service arrangements as standardised, customised, *a la carte* or independent, and travel motivations as sports and adventure, hedonism, nature experience and nature protection. This approach leads to a 'pick and mix' view (Coghlan & Buckley, 2012), under which tourists can select different levels of engagement with nature which on different tours.

Human relationships with natural environments change over time and differ between countries and demographic groups. In the West, nature has a relatively short history as a tourist attraction (Buckley, 2000; Meyer-Arendt, 2004). It has been promoted both as a development opportunity in rural or remote areas (Rinne & Saastamoinen, 2005), and as an alternative to mass tourism (Fennell, 2003). Interest in nature-based tourism may also reflect growth in environmental activism (Weaver, 2008); and a so-called post-Fordist trend towards individual choice and flexibility (Saarinen, 2005).

Nature-based tourists of Caucasian ethnic origin, from Anglophone Western nations, are not necessarily representative of those from other continents, countries, linguistic traditions and ethnicities, whether Western (Gössling & Hultman, 2006; Lopez *et al.*, 2005; Priskin & Sarrasin, 2010) or Eastern (Buckley *et al.*, 2008; Ma *et al.*, 2009; Su *et al.*, 2007). There has been little research to date on domestic nature-based tourists and their preferences in the BRIC nations. These nations, however, will be critical to the continuing development of nature-based tourism worldwide.

If nature-based tourism is considered in the context of the 'experience economy', then the critical issue arises that the tour operators who provide, choreograph and manage their client experiences cannot control nature in the same way as other components of their products. Nature is a powerful attraction on which operators can capitalise, but an uncertain one, so tour operators focus instead on service aspects more amenable to control (Tonge & Moore, 2007). These can include emotional components (Bigne *et al.*, 2005; Meyer-Arendt, 2004; Zins, 2002), ranging from contemplative quasi-religious experiences (Heintzman, 2010; Vespstad & Lindberg, 2010), to adrenalin-inducing performative experiences (Cater & Cloke, 2007). These can temporarily displace or outweigh anxieties which clients suffer in their everyday lives.

Individual nature-based tourism experiences thus depend on individual perceptions or constructions of nature (Coghlan & Buckley, 2012); though with no guarantee that such experiences will be transformative (Budeanu, 2007; Lee & Moscardo, 2005; Powell *et al.*, 2009). This diversity in individual constructions of nature also makes the management of visitor behaviour, impacts and satisfaction particularly complex and difficult (Buckley, 2009; Fletcher & Fletcher, 2003; McCool, 2009; Manning, 2011).

Looking to the future, Coghlan and Buckley (2012) call for continuing international comparative research on: the factors that influence the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of nature-based tourists; the degree to which these factors are controllable either by land managers or by tour operators; and the ways in which these may influence individual behaviour and impacts. That is, they argue for a research program in

nature-based tourism and its management, which focuses at least as much on the social as the natural sciences.

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