

“The Environment is Where We All Meet:” Successful Sustainable Tourism Initiatives in the United States

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Abstract

Today, in the era of conservation and technology, more and more initiatives are being undertaken to integrate sustainability with tourism activities, promote leisure, and the fun-loving lifestyle of people while ensuring that they are not harmful to the environment. This paper reviews the best practices of notable tourist spots in the United States, championing their strengths and weaknesses in achieving their respective goals. The five environmentally-friendly and sustainable practices that were reviewed showed a great representation of the great possibilities for the tourism industry in the world to employ the basic principles attached to them. The results also indicated that the current understanding of ecotourism is that it is solely based on the reaction or decision of certain groups of people and not the whole community. Whether or not the people give their best to support ecotourism, it is inevitable that there are places that would suffice to offer this kind of sustainable offering to those who are imaginative and adventurous enough to explore them.

Key Words: Sustainability, Environment, Tourism, Responsible Behaviour, Conservation

1. Introduction

Among the legacies of the Johnson administration was to establish numerous laws that gave importance to the environment, especially to integrate its beauty in the consciousness of the American people providing further enhancements to the National Parks and the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, to name a few. These were said to be influenced by the works of the President's wife, Lady Bird Johnson (1967), who famously remarked, "The environment is where we all meet, where we all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share. It is not only a mirror of ourselves, but a focusing lens on what we can become."

Today, in the era of conservation and technology, more and more initiatives are being undertaken to integrate sustainability with tourism activities, promote leisure, and the fun-loving lifestyle of people while ensuring that they are not harmful to the environment. For years, numerous tourist spots in the United States have been employing sustainable practices to uphold this ideology and help save the environment. At the same time, people enjoy the scenes and activities that each place has to give. This paper reviews the best practices of notable tourist spots in the country, championing their strengths and weaknesses in achieving their respective goals.

2. Objectives

This study is focused on providing insights on the best practices of sustainable tourism activities in the United States, as identified by the US Department of State (2009) and Dr. Rachel Dodds of Sustaining Tourism initiative website (n.d.). It further explores available research data found among Scopus-indexed journals and primary sources available online.

Specifically, it will compare information about these best practices and conclude if the ecotourism industry in the country has been successful or future sustainable tourism practices are favorable to the state or territory where they belong. It will also feature the issues associated with each location, providing insights and possible solutions that will lessen the burden of the cities and local governments that aim to promote this type of tourism.

This study is limited only to sustainable tourism activities noted in the United States and those projects that have already been running or commenced by their developers or managers. On a broader scale, it offers to promote the idea of sustainable development, to provide the benefits that could be gained from its perspective, and allowing more understanding of its basics, especially on its role in keeping the environment safe and preventing harmful human practices from proliferating in tourism spots around the world.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Whale Watch Operators Association–Northwest (WWOA-NW) – San Juan Islands, State of Washington

Whale watching is one of the previously considered activities to be harmful to nature, especially to the endangered whale species that have suffered much throughout human history from excessive whaling in the past to inappropriate approaches in tourism activities. To counter this negative notion about whale watching, the WWOA-NW established some rules to partner tourism agents and the governments of British Columbia in Canada and Washington in the Pacific North West waters of Juan de Fuca, Haro and Georgia Straights, Puget Sound, and the San Juan Islands (Carlson, 2008).

Some of the points of this strategy are to provide specific whale watching techniques, including banning all approach in-boat viewing, providing regulations for parallel swim viewing, and stating strict guidelines on what things must not be done while doing the activity. More than just being strict in the guidelines, the rules have allowed for better environmental education, specifically on conserving the whales in the area (Andersen & Miller, 2006). It has also allowed scientists to observe distribution patterns for some whale species, further adding to the body of knowledge about their behavior (Hauser, VanBlaricom, Holmes & Osbornes, 2006). While this initiative was started as a voluntary approach, it has evolved into a regulatory authority in enforcing sustainable whale watching tourism.

3.2 Sustainable City – San Francisco, State of California

In 1997, the City of San Francisco introduced a 5-year Sustainability Plan to become a Sustainable City. This vision was renewed in 2009 and included initiatives that focus on the welfare of Air Quality, Biodiversity, Energy, Climate Change and Ozone Depletion, Parks, Open Spaces, and Streetscapes, among others.

The city government hoped that this would place San Francisco among the most environmentally-friendly cities globally, mainly through the use of renewable sources of energy and proper waste management policies. Furthermore, it emphasizes the concepts of Environment, Equity, and Economy, which highlights the interest of providing mutual benefits to all citizens of the area.

Fortunately, this initiative impacted the city's overall performance, giving it the title of North America's greenest city, besting other players like New York and Vancouver (Diamond, 2013). Yet among the challenges faced by this kind of initiative is to unite the city government's visions towards their established idea of growth and the implications that become sustainable incurs (Martin, Evans & Karvonen, 2018). This has often led to numerous pitfalls, especially in attaining ideal projects due to the lack of communication between departments and parties (Flores, 2010). The challenge is to overcome barriers in communication, therefore, to implement this plan successfully.

3.3 Travel Green Wisconsin – State of Wisconsin

This initiative is another territorial effort to promote environmentally-friendly activities but at a state-level where the departments assigned provide certifications to qualified businesses that practice green efforts. It is touted as the first state-sponsored sustainable travel green certification to reduce the environmental impact of tourism activities ("Travel Green", n.d.). It started in 2006 to promote green practices through their designated areas of operation such as Communication and Education (Customers, Employees, Public),

Waste Reduction, Reuse, and Recycling, Energy Efficiency, Conservation, and Management, and Water Conservation and Wastewater Management, among others.

Besides championing business practices that will least affect the environment, it also highlights nature as the backdrop of the tourism industry in the state encouraging hotels and restaurants to be more mindful of their locations and help protect flora and fauna areas (Higgins, 2006).

The program has seen prominence, especially in golf tourism, as the organizations operating on these golf courses often employ the program's initiatives (Manion, Knight, Sheets & O'Reilly, 2014). Such efforts enhance the tourism industry in the area and make it more geared towards a sustainable future. The program also allows for improved integrated rural tourism, which has gained traction due to these green ideas (Barcus, 2013).

3.4 Wetlands and Waterways Program – State of Maryland

This state-level initiative is more targeted towards specific types of environments as compared to the broad programs of other areas. As the name suggests, it focuses more on the wetlands and waterways of the state of Maryland. Its specific arm is to enforce regulations to prevent the further degradations of the said natural resources due to the draining, dredging, and filling of tidal and nontidal wetlands and the nontidal wetland buffer and waterways for various purposes ("Wetlands and Waterways", n.d.). Thus, in the process, it also protects the wildlife in these areas and also the living conditions of residents that call the surrounding areas home.

In doing so, it features these wetlands as probable tourist destinations, a rising trend not only in the country but in other places around the world. The natural resources in Maryland have accounted for the non-market services amounting to the annual economic value of \$8 billion, with coastal wetlands having the highest average value (Campbell, Marks & Conn, 2020). While these areas are not up for reclamation or other developmental projects, they have the greatest potential of becoming suitable as untapped opportunities for more tourism projects for the state.

3.5 Sustainable Travel and Ecotourism – Las Vegas, State of Nevada

Las Vegas may not be the most identifiable city to be related to sustainability. Still, its recent thrust includes itself among the cities with the best practices in being environmentally-friendly in the United States and worldwide. Its reputation for being an epitome of overconsumption may shy away from tourists who prefer environmentally-friendly places. Initiatives from the government and business owners have been radical and have brought promising results.

Newer hotels in the area attest to providing more sustainable practices, especially in electricity usage, with more auto-off technologies being rolled in for better energy-saving ("Sustainable Travel & Ecotourism in Las Vegas", n.d.). Furthermore, the city's walking strip has been geared with energy-efficient lights with an encouraging setting to walk for tours in the city. Even the risks of road accidents have been eradicated using practical means to promote walking over vehicles in the city (Clark et al., 2019). By and by, these efforts are collective in their aim to promote sustainability.

It is interesting to note that this development level in Las Vegas is congruent with the world standards in terms of sustainable practices (Bricker & Schultz, 2011). This shows that even small efforts could become great things in the ecotourism arena.

4. Findings

The five environmentally-friendly and sustainable practices that were reviewed above showed a great representation of the great possibilities for the tourism industry in the world to employ the basic principles attached to them. One problem posed towards those organized tourism programs is that there is no satiation

in how it is being marketed to people, which could cause overconsumption and exploitation of natural resources (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). Therefore, a shift towards sustainable approaches would protect the environment and protect the industry itself as this will retain the beauty of the tourist spots or the attractions.

While there is a possibility of maximizing the natural resources, it could also go south if there are no specific control measures to limit these resources' use. It is still paramount for authorities and business owners to take the industry with measures. Aside from protecting the resources from possible destructions, this will even provide better opportunities equated to economic gain to the territory in which that attraction is located.

As mentioned, the most probable rival of continued sustainable development is the economic and standard development prioritized by some governments. There is the so-called water-energy-food nexus that exists in tourism industries as the influx of people to a certain location would automatically result in added demand for the said resources (Pan et al., 2018). The connection between green tourism and green economy has been indicated, which means extended success to the whole state or country and not just be limited to the tourism attraction alone.

Unfortunately, it was mentioned that difficulties in communication and coordination, as exemplified in San Francisco, can be a way to grow slowly or even fail. To counter this, it would be imperative to create a special team or group that will handle the initiative's communications.

Another point to consider is that the current understanding of ecotourism is that it is solely based on the reaction or decision of certain groups of people to further the projects. It is thought that if better exertion of efforts for pushing ecotourism would ultimately result in better results or implementation. Suggestively, this notion should be eradicated, and the direct connection of human decisions to the fate of green tourism activities should be rethought or reconsidered (Hall, 2019). Using the examples by the programs would, therefore, become effective management.

Akin to these practices are the patterns and trends found for 25 years, especially with the conservative approach to sustainable tourism practices (Ruhanen, Weiler, Moyle & McLennan, 2015). Among the methods used to be repeatedly used in finding modern solutions are visitor management, protected areas, and using case studies to learn from best practices from other areas for adoption to a locality.

In summary, the industry of environmentally-friendly and sustainable tourism is alive and kicking, able to withstand the pressures of the new technologies available in the world today. Whether or not the people give their best to support ecotourism, it is inevitable that there are places that would suffice to offer this kind of sustainable offering to those who are imaginative and adventurous enough to explore them.

As such, it is evident that the successes of these best practices are reproducible in other places whether in either of the coasts or within the farmlands and deserts. The important thing is that the goal of having an environmentally-friendly approach is highlighted in whatever cause it may be.

5. Conclusions

In compiling this research paper many approaches to sustainable tourism have been digested and some places and leaderships that offered feasible and commendable approaches have been emphasized. Nowadays, saving the environment is as natural as breathing to many people on earth thanks to its continued degradation mainly due to human intervention. Sustainable tourism is poised not just to save nature and the environment; it is relevant to save the tourism industry as well.

With the right purposes, anybody can achieve the achievements of the noted organizations. From simply loving and saving the populations of whales in Washington to encouraging the healthier alternative to driving in Las Vegas, efforts could be big or small. These initiatives are not merely done just to fulfill the demand for these types of attractions but above all, to contribute to the need of the planet. In these uncertain times, ecotourism is a great way to pay back the provisions from the Earth.

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