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Trends in ocean and coastal tourism: the end of the last frontier?

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Abstract

Marine and coastal tourism is one of the fastest growing areas within the world's largest industry. Yet despite increased awareness of the economic and environmental significance of marine and coastal tourism it is only in recent years that a substantial body of research has emerged. This article provides a review of some of the coastal and marine tourism literature which focuses, in particular, on the environmental impacts of tourism. The article then notes the manner within which tourism is a component of integrated approaches towards coastal and marine management and some of the strategies that are utilised to manage tourism in a sustainable fashion. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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Ocean and coastal tourism is widely regarded as one of the fastest growing areas of contemporary tourism [1–4]. While tourism development has been spatially focussed on the beach for much of the past 50 years, as witnessed for example, in the slogan of the four 's' of tourism—sun, sand, surf and sex—the ocean and the marine environment as a whole has become one of the new frontiers and fastest growing areas of the world's tourism industry [5]. The exact numbers of marine tourists remains unknown. Nevertheless, the selling of 'sun, sand and surf experiences', the development of beach resorts and the increasing popularity of marine tourism (e.g. fishing, scuba diving, windsurfing, and yachting) has all placed increased pressure on

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the coast, an area for which use may already be highly concentrated in terms of agriculture, human settlements, fishing and industrial location [6–8]. However, because of the highly dynamic nature of the coastal environment any development which interferes with the natural coastal system may have severe consequences for the long-term stability of the environment [9]. Indeed, the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recognised:

Of all the activities that take place in coastal zones and the near-shore coastal ocean, none is increasing in both volume and diversity more than coastal tourism and recreation. Both the dynamic nature of this sector and its magnitude demand that it be actively taken into account in government plans, policies, and programs related to the coasts and ocean. Indeed, virtually all coastal and ocean issue areas affect coastal tourism and recreation either directly or indirectly. Clean water, healthy coastal habitats, and a safe, secure, and enjoyable environment are clearly fundamental to successful coastal tourism. Similarly, bountiful living marine resources (fish, shellfish, wetlands, coral reefs, etc.) are of critical importance to most recreational experiences. Security from risks associated with natural coastal hazards such as storms, hurricanes, tsunamis, and the like is a requisite for coastal tourism to be sustainable over the long term [10].

The purpose of the present article is to provide an overview of some of the key issues facing ocean and coastal tourism as well as highlight the substantial growth in literature on the subject from both academic and industry sources. The primary focus of research has been on the environmental and sustainable dimensions of ocean and coastal tourism. However, as the latter section of the article discusses, there is a clear need to gain a better understanding of the institutional and policy dimensions of integrated coastal and marine management in order to better incorporate the significance of tourism as a component of coastal and ocean development.

1. Defining marine and coastal tourism

The concept of coastal tourism embraces the full range of tourism, leisure, and recreationally oriented activities that take place in the coastal zone and the offshore coastal waters. These include coastal tourism development (accommodation, restaurants, food industry, and second homes), and the infrastructure supporting coastal development (e.g. retail businesses, marinas, and activity suppliers). Also included are tourism activities such as recreational boating, coast- and marine-based ecotourism, cruises, swimming, recreational fishing, snorkeling and diving [5,6]. Marine tourism is closely related to the concept of coastal tourism but also includes ocean-based tourism such as deep-sea fishing and yacht cruising. Orams [4] defines marine tourism as including ‘those recreational activities that involve travel away from one’s place of residence and which have as their host or focus the marine environment (where the marine environment is defined as those waters which are saline and tide-affected)’. Such a definition is significant for in addition to its

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