

# TOURISM, CLIMATE CHANGE-A FRAMEWORK FROM BUDDHISM

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## Theme and Field: Tourism and Practice

### ABSTRACT

Tourism one of the largest and most successful industries in the world is facing an uncertain future. There are the threats of oil and other shortages, high costs and above all the impact of climate change. What is the future, if any, for the industry?

The capitalist model has led to excessive growth and consumption, damaging the environment and the sustainability of the tourism product. It has not been holistic nor delivered happiness. A framework based on Buddhism would be a radical change but could help in responding to climate change and provide a more meaningful happiness.

## TOURISM, CLIMATE CHANGE-A FRAMEWORK FROM BUDDHISM

### CONTEMPORARY TOURISM

Contemporary tourism follows the Western capitalist model based on unceasing growth, competition, development and a battle for profits. Tourism could be the largest industry in the world in terms of employment and clients. Turnover and capital investment is also high. Since the end of World War Two tourism, unlike many other industries, has seen continuous growth. This is despite economic down turns, oil shocks, climate disasters, military coups and 9/11. There has been a continual growing demand for the tourism product which has been met by a responsive innovative industry. Older traditional seaside holidays towns in Northern Europe and North America may have declined but new activities and resorts, often in developing countries have more than stepped into the gap. Much of this has been based on holidays following the sun, sea and beach demands. New technology has also been utilized by the industry ranging from jumbo jets of the 1970s to IT today. New tourism markets of China and India are growth demand and supply areas. Many citizens in developed countries now see holidays as a human right which further boosts the industry.

INTERNATIOANL TOURIST ARRIVALS	
1950	25 million
2005	806 million
2007	903 million up 6.6% on 2006
2020	1.6 billion forecast
Top Four Countries for Arrivals 2007	
France, Spain, United States, China	
Thailand is 19 in the list.	

There have been huge economic benefits to many countries from tourism but some developing countries have become too dependent upon this volatile industry. Tourism has been important in providing foreign currency income, private capital and management expertise. It has boosted employment especially in poorer regions and has been a general economic stimulant. Incoming tourist visitors have also helped to balance the tourism account deficit caused by outgoing tourists. Tourism development has been supported by governments, the World Bank, IMF and the United Nations especially the UN World Tourism Organization. Tourism is a huge, successful economic activity. International tourism receipts in 2007 were US\$856 billion up 5.63 per cent on 2006, with the top four countries being United States, Spain, France and China. Furthermore tourism is also a significant sociological phenomenon touching all countries and reflecting the needs and cultures of the people. Totalitarian communist regimes as well as liberal democratic countries participate. It overrides political differences and ideologies yet basically operates in the capitalist mode. Tourists everywhere want to have a good time and to find happiness, and their hosts are after an economic return, a livelihood. These objectives are reasonable but do they go far enough especially in the era of climate change?

## **TOURISM AND CAPITALISM**

The capitalist model has had considerable advantages for the tourism industry but it also has negative aspects. Unceasing growth and the obsessive focus on profit to the exclusion of other factors have had destructive impacts in many sectors including the natural environment, localities and communities. Unrelenting growth has been mindless growth, growth at almost any cost.

There has been economic development but often not people development. It has led to greed, self-interest, envy and inequalities; the survival only of the fittest, seeking material goods and wealth. There has been a desire for more for the individual and industry not for the community, for society, the common good or national interest. National identity has been devalued by tourism marketing. Market forces can be a barrier to human development, mental and spiritual, and to the holistic health of the people. The capitalist profit oriented perspective is narrow and short term and it often neglects the long term, sustainable development and sustainable tourism. Tourism is a vulnerable volatile industry, liable to crisis and states should not become too dependent upon it.

Tourists can be impoverished if the tourism experience allows or encourages and panders to destructive personal tendencies or desires such as drugs, over indulgence in alcohol, gambling, unsafe sex and child sex tourism. One reason tourism is so popular is that it allows people to indulge their desires including some behaviour which may be unacceptable in their home countries. Bad experiences may reinforce racial and other prejudices and create resentment and envy in tourist and hosts. If tourists leave home with a closed mind it is unlikely that their travel experience will make them more open. Alienation and anomie at home could be made worse by tourism, which can also help people to lose their sensitivity to people, places and kindness. Their potentiality for growth and creativity and awareness of life beyond the physical and material can be lost. At the end of their trip, tourists can be left feeling unsatisfied, unhappy and impoverished.

Tourism is about power, it is dependent upon the market but also upon economic and political power. The industry and governments work together to expand tourism often with insufficient attention to social and environmental costs. The morality of the development is rarely questioned, economic goals dominate. Local people have little power and can rarely stand against tourism and political interest following the dominant capitalist growth ideology. Legal and administrative checks and balances are largely ineffective against the financial power, knowledge and political influence of the industry.

Tourism growth can be seen as an example of the success of the capitalist model. Thailand has been cited as a successful model for tourism development for developing countries. Since the 1960s tourism has brought about a transformation of places such as Pattaya, Phuket and Koh Samui. The National Plan

for Tourism Development as early as 1976 warned against excessive development. It recommended for example that Koh Samui be kept for local and domestic tourists only, with modest and moderately priced hotels (NESDB). More recently tourism development has hit the northern hill town of Pai and the southern island of Chang which used to be the perfect places for nature lovers and backpackers. There have been large economic rewards for a few but how much for local people and local communities? The natural environment has suffered severe degradation. What lessons have not been learnt since the massive tsunami in 2004 devastated southern Thailand? It appears that growth, materialism, consumerism, hedonism and globalization are the predominant elements not Buddhism principles. Economic results are easy to evaluate but not the cost to the local people and community, or to the culture, heritage, spirituality and local and national identity. Similar issues are important for many countries where tourism has boomed including Spain, Mexico and the Maldives.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

There are many challenges facing tourism including the growing shortage of scarce resource such as oil, fresh water and food, and increasing costs. Today above all the challenge is climate change, which is affecting regions around world ( Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). There is melting of the ice caps especially in the North Pole Polar Region. Changing weather patterns, rising ocean levels and higher temperature can be observed. Another major problem is the increasing ferocity and unpredictability of the climate as seen in storms, wind, typhoons, cyclones, rain, floods and drought. Factors, which have been the basic for the tourism product and its success in many regions, may not survive. Already, high temperatures have led to a decline in the snow fields and snow tourism in the Alps region of Western Europe. Excessively high temperatures could cut tourism numbers to Spain, North Africa and the Mediterranean. Aridity and desertification will also increase with a shortage of rain and water. Low rainfall means fewer or no golf course and other activities. Higher sea levels will impact on many regions including the Pacific islands and the Maldives. Fresh water supplies could be contaminated or disappeared. Many world cities standing on the water could be impacted such as London, New York and Venice. Low lying regions and cities could be flooded such as Bangladesh and Bangkok. Coral reefs popular tourism attractions are particularly sensitive to rise in ocean temperatures and there are questions about their survival. The Australian tourism icon and a World Heritage Site, the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland is already showing signs of decline and death (Hall and Higham). These threats to tourism were recognised in 2003 when the United Nations, World Tourism organization (UNWTO) held its first international conference on tourism and climate change.

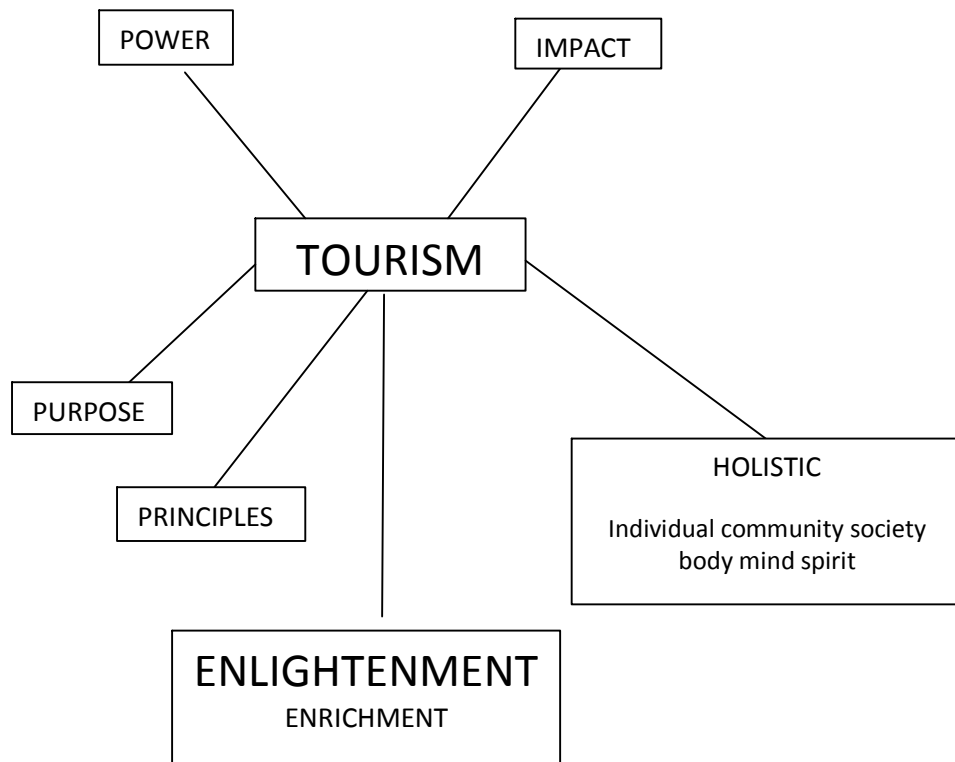
Transport, one sector of the tourism industry has been hit. In 2004 43 per cent of tourists arrived by air and 44 per cent by road. The high cost of fuel has led to reductions in the number of airlines and flights. Increasing carbon emission charges, taxes and restrictions could also severely affect airlines and especially their long-haul flights. Many long-haul trips are often to the planet's poorer regions (UNWTO 2007). Regions such as the Caribbean, SE Asia and India could lose many of their international tourists. Domestic tourism has been damaged by curtailment of flights and the restrictive use of cars for holidays. Cruise ship tourism could also be heavily impacted.

## **A TOURISM FRAMEWORK**

The capitalist framework is a major cause of the problems facing tourism today. It is doubtful if it can meet the challenges of climate change for the future (Yeoman). A radical change is needed which could be based on a framework following Buddhism. To be practical the reality and importance of power in tourism would have to be recognised. Reality also goes beyond official reports and economic statistics into the actual impact of tourism on people and the environment. First a framework would make clear

what in the purpose. Secondly, that tourism needs to be understood in a holistic way. Thirdly it is based and managed on the basis of principles.

### A TOURISM FRAMEWORK



### Purpose

The purpose would not be unrelenting growth or only profit. Nor would it be solely to have a good time based on physical pleasure. Happiness would be more than hedonism; a full-moon party or a binge night out, it would not just be sun, sea, sand and sex (SSS and S). The craving for the things of the body for physical pleasure would not be dominant. There would not be the excesses of contemporary tourism and tourist, including massive development, huge resorts or individual lack of self-control and respect. Purpose would pursue a higher quality of life which is not based on consumption using excessive resources. Consumption will be based on what is needed for self-sufficiency. Not too little, not too much, it would be a middle way. The purpose will also include the rights of the hosts, the workers in the industry and local communities. They therefore can enjoy a higher quality of life, growth in knowledge, spiritual, intellectual, and physical, moving towards greater enlightenment.

Following the framework and Buddhist economics the industry and governments would need to be clear about their purpose. Their marketing efforts would reflect the purpose and not pander to, nor stimulate the artificial wants and desires of potential visitors. Marketing could recognize the wish to escape the home country situation and the desire to have a good time and relax. A good time however would be much more than physical relaxation and would include a sense of wellbeing and peace of mind. Holidays allow freedom to escape from self, for contemplation on the other things of life, the meaning and purpose of life, and the non-materialistic, and what is important and not so important. There will be relaxation, enjoyment, getting rid of frustration, anger and envy. The purpose would be self-fulfilment in mind and spirit but also body. Tourism would be a form of wellness, holistic, a form of enlightenment,

of understanding, an empathy with that which is beyond. This is the opposite to the materialism of contemporary tourism with its philosophy of happiness based on excessive consumption, which suggests that you can enjoy anything and as much as you want. A highly individualistic view of life is encouraged, saying you deserve your indulgence. Cruise ship tourism for example reflects this philosophy and their Entertainment Directors praise the consumption, suggesting it is 'cool', even a sign that you are superior. The morality of this philosophy is highlighted when the excessive consumption and waste of often expensive food for example, can take place as the ship cruise through the waters of countries suffering high levels of poverty and malnutrition. Buddhism would not support this kind of consumption based on wealth and indulgence. It also recognises the wrong use of economic wealth can be a barrier to spiritual wealth and enlightenment.

Following Buddhism economics the right tourism would follow the right livelihood, not chasing self-indulgence or being obsessed with physical pleasures (Puntasen 2006). The purpose in tourism would be to seek for well-being, harmony within self and with the external world, to follow a middle way not excesses, to follow virtue not harmful tourism activities. Too often tourism acts as an 'opiate of the masses', which can make people more captive of economic and political interests. Tourism can also be used to escape reality, maybe into fantasy. Modern day theme parks can serve the same purpose. The framework suggests that tourism should have opposite purposes. It should help towards reality, acceptance of self, and towards holistic development and harmony of individual and community; following virtue and towards reaching enlightenment.

### **Holistic**

Contemporary tourism following the capitalist model is not holistic tourism; it is narrowly about economic factors. Some niche-tourism market operators are marketing wellness, and health tourism but it is still about making money (Novelli). A holistic approach is concerned about the material aspects, money, physical wellbeing, but it also aims at the mind and spirit. The lively debate among economists in recent years about the meaning and value of happiness reflects the need to give greater attention to the holistic nature of life, progress and tourism (Layard). What does Buddhism teach us about these subjects? Holistic tourism covers body, mind and spirit. It also includes the individual, community and society, visitor and host. Holistic tourism will involve enjoyment and development of the whole person. It will include the enjoyment of nature but also of the culture and heritage of the people. The term spirit can be used in different ways, here it is taken to be that which is beyond the body and mind (Elliott 2005). Tourism can help to development the whole of the individual. Young people, backpackers, and seniors, can experience the holistic nature of the tourism trip. New places, people and encounters can enrich the traveller and also the hosts. Villages and communities can be helped, local produce and restaurants and customs enjoyed. It is an authentic encounter and maybe challenging and so stimulating growth. The experience of nature and natural beauty, mountains, forests, beaches can all help. This shows the importance of national parks in the urbanized world. Theme parks, in their artificiality, gloss and staged stimulated excitement or adventure are no substitute for the outdoor direct experience of nature. The latter can give a deep sense of wellbeing, of being one with self and the 'other', which can be termed spiritual.

Tourism and travel should bring about a right understanding of the holistic nature of life, not least of the non-materialistic in today's materialistic society. It should stimulate us to go beyond the physical and superficial. India is a government which recognises holistic tourism of which one goal is spirituality. The National Tourism Plan aims for tourism

“... in which the tourist is physically refreshed, mentally rejuvenated, culturally enriched and spiritually elevated. “

Ministry of Tourism and Culture, February 8, 2004

It is a responsibility of government and national tourism offices to take the lead and guide and help in the growth and education for holistic tourism. Too often they are only concerned about growth and globalized marketing and they neglect the essential holistic product. The whole of the public sector should be engaged in this responsibility, the education system, schools and colleges, museums and cultural heritage and national identity bodies (Krippendorf). Because of the nature of tourism and our materialistic consumerist dominated society it is not easy to get a holistic perspective of life. Travel and tourism can inject the experience and stimulus into the individual and community to lead into the holistic life style. This education comes from actual practical experience, and encounters and living in the world, but also being aware of what lies beyond. The experience of nature, agriculture communities, the seasons, the spiritual communities-Buddhist temples, Indian ashrams, pilgrimages can all help. This is not the tightly controlled groups of mass tourism but the individual and independent travellers, with the open searching mind and spirit. This same spirit must also inspire host-communities and the tourism industry if tourism is to be a holistic experience for all (Nussbaum and Sen).

## **Principles**

A successful practical tourism will follow certain principles based on Buddhist teaching including the Eight-fold path. There will be a recognition and respect for the whole of nature and human beings. Tourism will not damage or destroy the natural environment, individuals, or communities but it will be a sustainable tourism for a sustainable environment. The culture, heritage and resources will be respected and protected. Respect for, and the protection of the natural environment and life is tourism based on principles but it is also successful tourism as can be seen in a country such as New Zealand with its “100 per cent pure”, green tourism policy. An ideal would be the self-sufficient enterprise owned and managed by and for the benefit of local people and their guests. There would not be the over exploitation of resources nor great luxury or excess. Mass tourism would not fit into this category, but small groups, individual travellers, backpackers, health, wellness, religious and spiritual tourism would (Schumacher).

The rights of the individual and nature will be recognized and will not be abused which will help to protect the planet in the era of climate change. To see travel and holidays as a basic human right is acceptable if it helps towards the holistic development of the individual and towards peace of mind and enlightenment. All should have the opportunities of holistic development, in this sense there should be equality. Equality includes respect for all people and lack of discrimination. Governments have a role to ensure these principles are respected, as they have a role to help in teaching, and in aiding the poor and those in need. Tourism should aid the poor and assist guests and workers towards what is good. The industry should be based on ethical corporate social responsibility (Smith and Duffy).

Honesty and truth will be principles in the industry not least in marketing the product. There will be good service and value for money provided and the welfare of workers will be protected. Happy workers will provide a happy environment and make for satisfied guests, who will more likely to make return visits.

## **THE WAY AHEAD**

The way ahead for tourism is not clear. There are so many unpredictable factors. What is clear is “raw capitalism is dead”, according to Henry Paulson, Secretary to the US. Treasury, September 2008. The capitalist model has been part of the problem not the solution. It is not the answer to climate change. Contemporary capitalism and tourism are not holistic, but focused on narrow economic objectives.

Buddhism economics can help in the way ahead, in its holistic nature, self sufficiency, sustainability and vision of enlightenment (Puntasen 2003). Governments and the industry have the responsibility and

power to decide the purpose of tourism (Elliott 1997). This purpose must be holistic and follow principles not individual desires or greed. Climate change is extremely complex but governments and industry must undertake the research, provide the resources, decide priorities, plan and implement what is necessary for the way ahead.

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