

POLLUTION BY TOURISM

More than 30 years before the era of cheap flights, **EDWARD GOLDSMITH**, in an *Ecologist* editorial in February 1974, lamented the devastating impacts of mass tourism

In 1971, 181 million tourists visited another country, seven per cent more than the year before. Foreign travel has become the prerogative of the masses. But is it doing anyone any good, and at what cost to the environment? In the past, the traveller set off intrepidly, armed with a flower press and sketch-book, recording the curiosities of uncharted lands. Today the tourist is packed off in a batch to a resort, purpose-built to accommodate and amuse. As Baldwin points out in *Travel Agent*, 'there is little to differentiate between a high-rise hotel in Ibiza and one in Oahu... the swimming pools, sleek coffee shops, souvenir stands, even people... all bear the same jet-age patina.' Will tourists see anything that will add to their knowledge of the world, of the people who inhabit it or the societies and cultural forms they have developed?

The answer is no. A cursory look at the advertising material indicates that what the tourist is looking for is nothing other than the four S's – sun, sea, sand and sex. All four can be provided remarkably cheaply – which is why tourism is a multimillion dollar business.

But does the price paid represent the true cost? What about the effect of mass travel on health? The common cold is for us an inconvenient but mild complaint, but to those, such as the Inuit, who have not encountered it before, it can be lethal. Similarly, when we travel, we ourselves run the risk of contracting ailments ranging from diarrhoea and tiredness to typhoid, malaria, cholera and dysentery.

Mass tourism is having a devastating effect on local peoples – not surprisingly, in view of the size of the invasion. According to the Madrid newspaper *ABC*, even last year's [1973] tourists turned large parts of the country into "an alien land where foreign languages are spoken, foreign currency is accepted and Spaniards discriminated against. In 1001 small and big things one can detect the presence of a new imperialism – tourism."

With the coming of mass tourism, land

values increase, often so steeply that local people find themselves unable to buy a house. At the same time, local employment patterns change. The tourist boom draws labour from the land, usually – as in St. Lucia and the Seychelles – with disastrous consequences for agriculture, since the height of the tourist season coincides with the harvest and fruit-picking time. Similarly, in North Africa, as Julian Pettifer puts it, "the Bedouin have left their flocks to shepherd the tourists, and the ship of the desert has become a tourist boat."

Most depressing of all is the effect of mass tourism on local cultural patterns, which are distorted and displayed for touristic purposes. James Mitchell, Premier of St. Vincent, said, "The tourist dollar is not worth the devastation of my people. A country where the people have lost their soul is no longer a country."

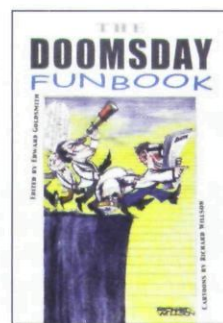
In Mexico, the choice is very much between the tourist dollar and the Mexican soul. Sixty per cent of the tourist revenue comes from the 90 million US citizens spending a total of \$600 million each year in the red-light districts of Tijuana, Ciudad and Juarez. These towns are visually unattractive, and now act as magnets for crime, as well as, of course, prostitution.

Eloquent comment on mass tourism comes from Greece, where in 1971 the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church published a new prayer. "Lord Jesus, son of God," it reads, "have mercy on the cities, the islands and the villages of our Orthodox fatherland, as well as the Holy Monasteries, which are scourged by worldly touristic ways, and protect our brethren who are sorely tried by the modernistic spirit of these contemporary Western invaders."

It is unnecessary to dwell at length on the ruinous effect of mass tourism on the physical environment. Practically no accessible area of great natural beauty is exempt. Already a large part of the Costa del Sol, the south of France and

the Italian Riviera has been mutilated beyond redemption. The ravages of tourism are particularly evident in Hawaii, a once-beautiful island now disfigured by countless skyscrapers. Six-lane motorways cater for over 300,000 cars and, during the season, a jet with a cargo of tourists arrives every 10 minutes. The pilot, as Wehrheim points out ('Paradise lost', *The Ecologist*, Vol. 1, No. 10, April 1971), "need not check his instruments or consult his navigator to know when his plane is nearing its destination. He can spot the murky grey-brown pall that hangs over the city while still miles out to sea."

The damage caused by tourism is becoming apparent to even the blindest among us. But for how much longer will people go on spending their holidays in this saddening manner? The decision, however, may be taken out of their hands. Mass tourism is likely to be one of the first victims of the energy crisis, which will be very good news for the environment, local peoples at popular destinations and their cultural patterns, and probably not really such bad news for would-be tourists.



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