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Indigenous Tourism

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Indigenous tourism has been defined as tourism activity directed by indigenous people or in which the culture of the indigenous people is the primary attraction. Models of indigenous tourism in which indigenous people are directly engaged in managing the activity or site emerged as a response to indigenous communities being treated as passive objects of mass tourism. The presence of indigenous communities in all stages of the implementation of the tourism operation is seen as the ideal scenario for indigenous tourism. Indigenous tourism, when included in government policies that provide technical assistance for its growth, can be a key element in achieving development goals.

Indigenous tourism is not intended to replace productive activities present in communities such as agriculture, livestock, or handicrafts. Rather, it is intended to achieve other objectives of communities and subsequently strengthen the local supply chain. It is not just a tourist activity, but a territorial management model. Under this model each community tourism operator may choose to bid from a vast list of activities, choosing those activities it can perform according to its natural and cultural resources.

In order to achieve the optimal development of this form of tourism, clear policies and firm principles are needed. A set of quality standards helps maintain a harmonious and sustainable development of tourism. Indigenous tourism invites a supportive exchange, environmental care, and economic management to generate new wealth in the host communities. One of the main goals of indigenous tourism is the generation and redistribution of new revenues in host communities, to improve aspects such as education, health, and infrastructure.

Description of Concept

Indigenous tourism has had a great impact over the past 20 years, during which time many countries have seen the emergence of tourism development proposals organized by indigenous groups. These groups wanted to be active participants in the different stages of implementation of tourism in their territories. As stated in several global declarations about the development of tourism, the role of local indigenous communities is a key factor. In many countries on every continent of the world, there are several companies and networks specializing in indigenous tourism.

There is no single business model for managing indigenous tourism. A variety of forms of ownership and management of indigenous tourism enterprises include a model involving management by indigenous people in planning, implementation, monitoring, and feedback throughout the development of the tourism product and a model in which the indigenous community makes a full concession of tourism management to another company that pays rents and royalties to the community.

Indigenous communities have developed different models of territorial management, giving them the freedom to implement a wide range of tourist activities to offer to visitors. Among these activities are sports, adventure, religious, mystical, cultural, ecotourism, agritourism, volunteering, fishing, experiential, and educational.

Each community can choose those travel services that suit its decisions to implement a tourism initiative. Thus, although several communities offer complete packages that include accommodation, food, transport and scheduled activities, other communities just offer restaurants, a day trip excluding accommodation, or a specific recreational activity, such as a

visit to a cultural or natural attraction or to a gambling casino established at an indigenous community.

An indigenous tourism management model where the indigenous community maintains control involves strong principles and policies to maintain a harmonious and sustainable development of tourism, avoiding impacts on the indigenous culture. It is a good option for a traveler who is interested in a supportive cultural exchange. The ideal visitor is someone who has strong beliefs about the need to respect and repair the environment and, at the same time, is willing to make an economic contribution to generate new wealth in the communities visited, since one of the main purposes of this model is to generate and distribute new economic income into the host communities.

Trends

There are two fundamental trends in indigenous tourism. The first is its expansion in various territories worldwide, and the second is the diversification of its offer. On the first point, several academic studies have collected data on the development of indigenous tourism and its major impacts in several countries such as Namibia, Nigeria, Madagascar, Kenya, Uganda, New Zealand, Australia, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, United States, Canada, Mexico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Venezuela, and Cambodia.

Initially the primary offering of indigenous tourism was ecotourism, possibly because most indigenous tourism ventures were established in territory adjacent to protected nature reserves. It has since diversified into a variety of offers covering different travel motivations. Tours generally involve small groups of visitors, allowing real interaction between visitors and the community while protecting the resources of the host communities.

Types of Travelers

Guests of indigenous tourism ventures are mainly people who like contact with the local culture and relationships with the natural environment. In addition, many visitors are looking for ways to contribute to local development, either economically by purchasing the tours organized by communities or through volunteer work to help solve the many needs that exist in these areas. Specifically, there are five types of tourists who take part in indigenous tourism:

1. Tourists looking for a deep knowledge of the culture and their relationships with their environments. These persons are often researchers, students, or highly interested in the culture of the indigenous community. Their main motivation is to increase their knowledge of the indigenous community visited. They require a basic quality of tourist services offered by the community and often will have long-term stays.
2. Tourists who have a passion to know and enjoy the natural environment. They contact indigenous communities near these areas, to visit these places with community guides. Similar to the previous group, these visitors require services that meet basic quality conditions. Usually, they are researchers, students, and/or nature lovers. Their main motivation is to understand and learn about natural sanctuaries. The average stay is about 1 week long.
3. Tourists who are not solely traveling to a destination for an indigenous tourism initiative, and whose interest in the local lifestyle and culture is more superficial. These tourists might take part in indigenous tourism activities for several days as part of a longer trip. These tourists are

more demanding about the quality of tourism services offered by the community. Their motivations of travelling are very diverse and they usually take part in different activities in the communities they visit, such as ecotourism, adventure tourism, agritourism, mystical tourism, cultural tourism, and gastronomic tourism. It is the group that brings in the biggest amount of tourists to indigenous tourism experiences.

4. Tourists participating in an indigenous tourism venture only briefly and who are generally traveling to a place populated by indigenous people for a specific reason such as a hike on a trail, tasting traditional food, handicraft shopping, or an activity related to adventure tourism. These are groups that have extensive routes, so visiting indigenous tourism businesses is just one more stop on the tour. This visitor stays just a few hours in the community and, if an overnight stay is on the program, mostly it will be for just one night. Expectations of service quality are high.

5. Day visitors and domestic tourists, who despite the proximity to and ethnic affinity with indigenous communities, are not a relevant market group. In the best case, this group of visitors makes day trips, especially in groups scheduled at schools and educational institutions, reaching indigenous communities to learn about the local culture, while on excursions that generally will not exceed one day.

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See also [Alternative Tourism](#); [Anthropology of Tourism](#); [Cultural Tourism](#); [Ecotourism](#); [Sociocultural Issues Related to Tourism](#); [Sociology of Leisure Travel](#); [Sustainable Tourism](#)

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