

“Much appeal but little value”. Is this an apt description of tourism in the modern world?

By Ng Wei Ying (15S36)

In a world where globalisation is an increasing phenomenon, one of the much talked about benefits of globalisation is the increase in business for the tourism industry. Tourism basically refers to the travelling of people to other countries, for purposes such as sole entertainment to even carrying out meaningful events such as volunteering and helping the locals there today. Tourism has evolved to be of many forms, such as the common commercialised tourism, to meaningful volunteerism and also including negative forms such as sex tourism. Tourism is considered to be of great appeal, and is attractive to the masses as people get to experience another way of life in a whole new environment. However, tourism has also been criticised for having no value, defined as people not getting to learn more about themselves on the world around them, and fulfills no purpose at all. I agree that tourism today indeed has much appeal but little value.

In the modern world today, tourism exists to just provide entertainment, and tourists often do not make an effort to learn more about the world around them. To these people, tourism is just about another shopping trip to buy more of the countries' material goods. This is largely evident in commercial tourism, where tour agencies promote trips that usually end up taking people to shopping malls or designated shops for people to buy luxury goods and for the tour agencies to earn a commission. As such, tourists who travel on group tours do not get to learn more about the world, and they do not travel with the purpose of knowing more about the culture or heritage in the place. For example, rich Chinese tourists make up an increasingly large part of the consumer demand for luxurious goods. They are known to spend their excess cash on shopping when they are overseas. China tourists travel to Europe just to buy cheaper luxury goods there such as Prada, Louis Vuitton, Chanel and so on, due to the weakening Euro and the strengthening Chinese Yuan. This proves that tourism is of little value, and just serves as an alternative way to spend money. This is also evident in people who travel for work, to close business deals or meet with clients. These business travellers usually spend most of their time in their hotels resting or interacting with their business partners. They rarely step out of the hotel to learn more about the environment around them. Hence, this shows that tourism is very attractive to tourists, but they contain little value in that their only take away is material goods.

Moreover, tourism often exists to promote and reinforce negative stereotypes of people in Third World or developing countries. This does not give value to the purpose of tourism, as it serves to allow people to form even deeper prejudices of people in different cultures and discriminate against them further, not helping them to understand and accept these people into their society. For example, Thailand is a widely popular tourist destination, but it is more than often than not also infamous for its sex tourism. Children as young as 12 years old are forced into the sex industry to cater to the needs and wants of these pedophiles, and this does no good for their lives, where they spend the rest of their lives entrapped in the poverty cycle and unable to break out of it. In short, the sex tourism industry destroys countless young lives and their futures. This degrades the value of such tourism even further, and while it is appalling to those who travel overseas to seek such “pleasures”, it is clearly evident that it provides less than no value to both tourist and the sex workers. Another negative stereotype reinforced is that

of poorism. This occurs where people travel to slums in the country just for the sake of gawking at the slum dwellers living in poverty and unsanitary conditions . Despite knowing of the circumstances and living environment of these people, there is no value derived from tourism as it only serves to remind tourists that “these people are poor”, and tourists do not act on this to provide them with any help. Thus, tourism only serves to reinforce the existing biased and generalisations that people have, and certainly does not help to making people understand and accept one another.

That being said, just like how there are two sides to a coin, tourism can also have appeal and provide value at the same time. Tourism, by allowing the travel of humans across geographical boundaries, lets travellers experience the exotic places that they visit, and at the same time learn more about themselves and their own personality, thus achieving a new level of self-discovery. With the increasing proliferation of the world wide web and social media platforms arounds us, it is not difficult to know about their different culture and heritage practices of people in other countries, and know about their way of life. This can be done through watching videos, seeing pictures and reading up on Google. However, knowing is not the same as being physically there, and experiencing the entire process itself. Tourism allows people to travel to new places and allow them to personally feel and experience, thus reaching a new level of understanding about the place. For example, many people travel down to watch the annual Rolling Cheese Festival in the United Kingdom, where rolling of a block of cheese down a hill is used to pray for good harvest in the next year. This allows people to personally understand the mood and atmosphere in that place, and understand how the festival itself can serve as a binding factor for the entire community to bond, inherently becoming part of the cultural identity of these group of people. Other examples include experiencing the mood and atmosphere of the annual bull-fighting events in Spain, and religious festivals in Singapore that tourists would stop and to experience. As such, tourism allows people to gain an understanding of the environment around them, and to reflect more about themselves in the process. This is especially so for the travellers.

Tourism can be of value and appeal at the same time, as they allow people to contribute back to society while in the midst of travelling. Volunteerism is an increasingly common trend in the past few years, where people travel to different countries, and at the same time volunteer in the community, which allows them to give back to society while travelling. Such activity is increasingly advocated, for as it allows people to do good and continuously gives value to tourism as tourists do something meaningful in their trip. For example, tourists can travel to Third World or developing countries and offer to help villagers build roads, or educate the children there in various subjects and topics. This not only allows them to interact with the locals there during their period of stay, but also allows them to live there and experience truly the way locals live their lives, by sleeping, eating and sharing a common space of living with the locals. This allows them to truly experience their life there and integrate themselves into the culture, thus allowing them to gain value out of it. They learn more about how they want to help people, and also gain the experience of living in the countries. Accustomed to the group tours in commercial tourism, volunteerism provides a better opportunity for travellers to better understand themselves, the world around them and also do meaningful events at the same time by helping people. This shows that tourism is of as much of appeal as it is of value.

In conclusion, tourism can be of much be of much appeal, but not necessarily of value. This is because in the stressful and face-paced world today, tourism still serves mainly as a method of providing

people with mere entertainment. As people are too busy with their own lives, they often do not have the capacity to think of helping others, much less when travelling. Tourism is only a tool for people to interact with their surrounding world, and it mainly depends on how people choose to use the tool to either gain value or just merely entertainment. Unfortunately, it is mostly the latter in today's world.

Comments:

You've brought up a relevant and insightful argument. Consider featuring your counter arguments before the supporting arguments for a more impactful finish. Nevertheless, well done!