

Recognizing Anthropocentrism in the Development of the Geotourism Concept

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According to the National Geographic Society definition, geotourism is “tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place” and includes both components of the physical and human geography of that place. The society makes the connection between this emerging form of tourism and its much-debated “ecotourism cousin” in that conservation should be a goal but that this should be more than just environmental conservation. This appears to be an important point in the geotourism concept. Although its conceptual cousin has a distinct human component in the form of local involvement, one of the problems of ecotourism has been the attempt to separate human interests from issues of environmental conservation.

Environmental theorists have long debated the motivations behind pro Environmental behavior. The debate has often focused on the distinction between ecocentrism - the position that the environment should be protected because it has value in its own right that transcends human interests - and anthropocentrism - the position that the environment should be protected because it holds some sort of value for humans. Although ecocentrism is often considered to be the ideologically stronger position, anthropocentrism has been far more effective in public and policy debates because it is more easily understood by the general population.

This paper uses examples from soft eco- and nature-based tourism activities in the Caribbean region. In particular, this paper argues that the products that are most successful in engaging tourists are the ones that recognize the anthropocentric position and encouraging tourists to understand the potential human value of the environment they visit. Tourists participating in these activities are typically sun, sea and sand tourists on an excursion. The science of the local flora and fauna mean little to them. However, they are better able to relate to and understand explanations of the uses, history and folklore of that place. The blend of human and physical is a distinct potential of the geotourism concept and should be given careful consideration as geotourism continues to develop into a prominent tourism product.

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