

MARINE INDUSTRIES: PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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THE ROLE OF THE TRAVEL-TOURISM INDUSTRY  
IN  
INTERNATIONAL MARINE RECREATION DEVELOPMENT

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Fragmented, decentralized, diffuse and intensely competitive, the travel-tourism industry has only just begun to shape an international marine dimension to its traditional packaging and marketing of a ticket, room and board, a bar, a beach, a tour and entertainment. Taken as a group, the airlines, hotel chains, travel agents, tour operators, credit card companies, even cruise ship operators have, as yet, avoided defining for themselves, singly or collectively, any significant international role in marine recreation facilities and program development. Island governments and some coastal states have, by way of contrast clearly led the way in this regard.

As always, there are exceptions like Lars Eric Lindblad's exotic excursions for the elite, an occasional scuba diving holiday packaged, by an airline, Caribbean Sailing Yacht's well promoted bare boat charter fleet in the West Indies, and the traditional small scale sports-fishing, crewed charter boat or scuba diving operation. But exceptions defineth neither rule nor role, which is my mission today. We should therefore, deal directly with the questions of what types of facilities need to be developed where, for what activities and programs by whom and for whom. Further, the facilities and programs need to be marketed in such a way as to satisfy certain demands under presumed conditions of safety, quality control and profitability. This is a large order for a short paper and selectivity must be the order of the day.

Since the marine environment lends itself to recreational exploitation in a variety of ways - snorkeling, swimming, surfing, diving, sailing, exploring, shelling, fishing and through photography, observation and aesthetic enjoyment of the presence and sound of the sea and its fauna - there is no simple solution to the facilities problem. However, a preoccupation with the development of marinas or boats, or seaquariums, or water sports centers by government or private industry should not induce us to overlook the most important facility of all - the ocean environment itself, principally coastal, which, if not properly managed, will rapidly degenerate into an unsatisfactory setting for any marine recreational activity.

For this reason, the recent world-wide expansion of the marine park and preserve, concept over the past decade, ably documented by Randall (1969) and Wallis (1971) offers some small hope for the future of marine recreation. However, the impetus of this phenomenon has come from governments, conservation organizations and individuals like Mr. Tuyosi Tamura of Japan, John Pennekamp of Florida, Dr. Harold Coolidge of IUCN and other far sighted individuals, not from the travel-tourism industry.

Here, in fact, we have taking shape one aspect of industry's potential role in the development of marine recreation as a protagonist for both pollution control through improved coastal zone management and marine park development. But as noted earlier, the disorganized unstructured nature of the tourism-travel industry mitigates against concerted action, against cooperative efforts and joint ventures with government. Furthermore, a word of caution is needed here for the designation and establishment of a marine park is no guarantee that a quality marine environment, viable, diverse and healthy, will be maintained, as the Florida experience with Key Largo demonstrates all too well.

Lacking adequate user-impact and loading guidelines, one can, by the act of establishing a marine park, focus excessive human activity on the very zone to be protected, thereby, introducing stress factors in excess of the ecosystem's regenerative capacity. The cautionary guidelines of Dr. Carleton Ray, presented at the Second World Conference on National Parks in a paper entitled "An Ecosystems Approach to Marine Parks and Preserves", are

very much to the point. We have a lot to learn about marine park management and the industry that benefits most, travel-tourism, has done very little to help.

Moving now, to another sphere, one can raise an eyebrow at the shallowness of the travel-tourism industry's approach to interpreting and exploiting the marine environment and its sometimes careless disregard of common conservation principles. The promotion of spear fishing tournaments, the encouragement of indiscriminate collecting of shells and coral specimens, the careless disregard of the waste disposal problems of bare boat charter fleets, the destruction of inshore coral reef systems by ill-advised, excessive dredging of sand for beach improvement and marina construction and the discharge of raw sewage and water by cruise ships are all by products of the careless technology of tourism and its marketing practices.

In this context, we can perceive an additional desirable role for the industry, linking its collective self-interest in a quality marine environment with local regional and international conservation organizations and programs. It is encouraging to note the recent establishment of a new international non-profit organization called Travel Industry for the Environment or TIE, blending government agencies, conservation groups and travel-tourism representatives into an action oriented cooperative venture. It is a positive move which offers considerable promise, for if TIE can succeed in articulating the

mutuality of interests of all its members, especially in the matter of the marine recreational environments, perhaps drift towards environmental mediocrity in prime marine recreational sites can be halted and even reversed.

In a related and encouraging way, a few industry representatives are beginning to think in terms of carrying capacity and optimum loading in development planning rather than bristling at the mention of such alien planning concepts. Even the environmental impact of tourism itself is a matter of more frequent industry concern, especially among the airlines who operate subsidiary hotel chains and realize an undesirable or deteriorating destinations environment will negatively affect both aspects of its business.

To return for a moment to the problem of defining the travel-tourism industry's potential role in marine recreation development, one can detect a genuine reluctance, perhaps even an inability to interpret for the tourist-traveler, biological, ecological and historical features of the environments they are marketing. Thus we have thousands of divers who do not know a wrasse from a hole in the reef.

Recent experimental non-credit courses in marine biology and marine archaeology developed by the Island Resources Foundation and built into regular resort diving training classes have proved immensely popular and suggest an untapped interest on the part of the tourist-diver. Undoubtedly, there are other areas where the industry could enhance the traveler-tourist's appreciation of the marine environment, thereby helping to protect it.

In summary, one can conclude that the travel-tourism industry has yet to properly define both its promotional and protective role in marine recreation development. There are indications, however, that some sectors of the industry are sufficiently concerned about the future to abandon traditional exploitive patterns of operations and apply ecological and resource management principles in subsequent development activity.