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The Role of Human Entertainment and Tourism in Ecological Conservation

United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA)

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Introduction

As humans, it is in our nature to entertain and please ourselves as much as we can. We travel the world as tourists, attend festivals, play sports, and produce thousands of films, just to name a few. All these different methods of entertainment, enjoyable as they are, have different effects on the environment and our ecological state. Some can be beneficial for the environment, while most prove to be detrimental. Wildlife safaris for example benefit the environment as they educate people and most of their revenue goes towards protecting nature while the experience causes barely if any damage to nature. Large tourist beach resorts, however, have a detrimental effect on the environment due to destruction of the area and pollution of the air.

In a world where our environmental state is quickly worsening due to climate change and global tourism is growing rapidly, it is becoming increasingly more important to find a balance in between our pleasure and the protection of our home. That is why this committee is tasked with debating and working together to come up with finding effective and environmentally friendly solutions to this issue and setting clear guidelines for human entertainment to not damage our environment any more than necessary.

In this research report you will read about the growth of tourism and the various methods of human entertainment and about its current state, the impacts of entertainment and tourism on ecosystems all around the world, the major parties involved and some possible solutions to this issue.

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Definition of key terms

Ecological conservation

The preservation and protection of natural environments and resources through sustainable practices and management studies.

Human Entertainment

Activities and experiences with the goal of engaging, amusing and providing pleasure to people. It ranges from playing sports, to movie productions and is vital for a human's mental state.

Tourism

A social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes.

Mass Tourism

Mass tourism is the form of tourism where a very large group of people (tourists) visit the same place at the very same time.

Cruise Tourism

Cruise tourism is a form of leisure travel where a large passenger cruise ship travels to various destinations. This ship offers passengers food, entertainment and luxury, and is a very desirable travel option for tourists.

Ecotourism

Ecotourism is the form of tourism where the main goal is the observation and appreciation of nature, containing educational features, generally organized by special tour guides for small groups, all while trying to ensure a minimization of negative impacts on the natural environment.

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General Overview

Tourism and therefore travel are one of the largest contributors to the total emission of greenhouse gasses, contributing 6,5%. We can only expect this number to increase, since over the years the number of flights worldwide have been increasing, with an astounding 40 million flights forecasted for 2025. Global tourism is also highly expected to grow in the upcoming years, with a growth rate of 3,5% annually being forecasted by the World Tourism and Travel Council. However, there are also key factors which could lead to tourism having a less detrimental effect on the climate. Awareness of sustainable tourism has grown significantly, with 80% of global travelers believing sustainable travel was important in 2024. Furthermore, 46% of travelers gave priority to sustainability when travelling. This change in awareness can also be noticed in the global tourism industry, as more companies have begun implementing sustainable initiatives and guidelines. Taking all this into account, it is expected that tourism and travel continue to have a strong effect on our ecological state but that doesn't mean that it cannot be combatted and made more climate friendly.

To set our sights on making tourism and human entertainment more ecological, it is important to understand and acknowledge the different types of tourism and entertainment that strongly impact our climate.

Human entertainment

If we're talking about human entertainment, the types that have the biggest negative impact on the climate are the large scale, in-person events, including the travel required to go to these events. Among these events, the biggest types or sports events, concerts and theme parks. One example of such an event was the Qatar World Cup 2022 where Messi and his Argentina national team triumphed, producing 3,6 million tons of CO_2 emissions to organize the entire event. Another example if Taylor Swift's Eras Tour. Her private jet alone emitted an estimate of 511 thousand kg of CO_2. These big events are so environmentally unfriendly due to the amount of travel required both from the organizers and audience plus the amount of energy needed to set up the event itself. Other types of entertainment, such as digital streaming, take up less energy but can still add up to a significant number when billions of people are doing it at the same time. This issue can't really be combatted, unlike large scale events, which with innovative ideas and sustainable efforts can shift into a less environmental destructive form of entertainment.

Mass tourism

Looking at tourism, which could also be considered a form of human entertainment, the three most impactful types are mass tourism, cruise tourism and ecotourism. Mass tourism is the form

of tourism where a very large group of people (tourists) visit the same place at the very same time. This can include many examples, skiing on the Swiss Alps, traveling to Disney World, all over the world mass tourism occurs. One of the strongest examples of this type of tourism is the Spanish city of Barcelona. To put it into perspective, Barcelona has around 1.6 million local inhabitants, while 32 million people choose it as a holiday. The city is well known across the globe as an amazing tourist location, with cultural sites such as La Sagrada Familia, La Casa Mila, amazing landscapes, a great climate, and of course, the incredible FC Barcelona football team, attracting millions of fans each year. What makes Barcelona even more plausible to tourists, is that Barcelona has the biggest port of the Mediterranean. With this mix of cultural value and touristic attractions, it doesn't come as a surprise that Barcelona is one of the most sought-after cities for tourists in the world. This has the effect that, due to all the touristic activity, the CO2 emissions and energy that is used in the city has detrimental effects on the climate. From cruise ships arriving at the port every day, with 803 calls in 2023, to other forms of travel such as travel by airplane to get to the city, but also the large number of cars and busses being used, and the energy needed to keep the city up to standards for all the tourists and locals there, the tourism there has a deep impact on our ecological state. And this is without mentioning the biggest issue of Barcelona. Anyone who has ever visited Barcelona (like me), will know that there are some moments, especially on the famous La Rambla pedestrian street, where you can barely move. This overcrowding of the city also has effects on the climate, and the city's culture, as this large sum of people destroys the buildings and environment around them.

Cruise tourism

Another very impactful form of tourism is cruise tourism. Cruise tourism is a form of leisure travel where a large passenger cruise ship travels to various destinations. This ship offers passengers food, entertainment and luxury, and is a very desirable travel option for tourists. This form of tourism has been growing vastly in past years, with Cruise Lines International Association (CLIN) projecting 37.7 million passengers in 2025 and 82% of travelers wanting to cruise again and 68% of international travelers considering taking their first cruise. This rise of cruise tourism also has a huge benefit for the economy, with more than 168 billion dollars in the global cruise tourism industry and 1.6 million jobs being supported by it. The question is, however, if this economic benefit can make up for the huge ecological disadvantages cruise tourism brings with it. There are four big negatives of cruises, water pollution, air pollution, noise pollution and solid waste generated.

The US Environmental Protection Agency has estimated that a large passenger cruise ship generates 176.400 gallons of sewage a week. Over a year, this amount of sewage is equivalent to 1515 Olympic-sized swimming pools. You'd think this problem of water pollution would've been solved now that most vessels include a treatment plant that removes pollutants from the sewage, however there are still many pollutants, such as heavy metals, nutrients, and non-

biodegradable organic chemicals that remain. Sewage that escapes these ships is categorized into two different types: blackwater and greywater. Blackwater, sewage from toilets, harms algas and other reef plants and depletes oxygen levels. They emit “blooms”, which consume oxygen as they decompose, creating “dead zones” where marine life simply cannot survive. Greywater, sewage from sinks, showers, laundries and kitchens, contains organic residues and oils that disrupt the oxygen exchange. Substances found in cleaning products hinder photosynthesis and metabolism, which at its turn hinders the growth of organisms in the water. Pollution from ships also creates bilge water, which pollutes the environment by producing a visible gel that hurts seabirds and coastal groups through intoxication.

Following another type of pollution, air pollution, a study by Transport and Environment shows that in 2022, 214 cruise ships emitted 509 tons of sulfur oxide and 19.125 tons of nitrogen oxide around European ports. To put this into perspective, European cruise ships emitted over four more sulfur than all European cars combined. These two gasses, sulfur oxide and nitrogen oxide, contribute to the formation of acid rain, intoxicate surface water, harm marine organisms and destroy forests by damaging leaves and soil and depleting forests of their nutrients. Furthermore, noise pollution is an underestimated form of pollution that cruise ships bring with them. A 2019 report from the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species shows that some sounds can be so loud they can displace fish and predators, and some even so loud that they directly kill marine organisms. Noise can also affect communication and orientation, meaning that marine life that depends on sound in the ocean for hunting, finding food or shelter, locating a mate and navigating, can no longer do so.

The final downside for our ecological state is the solid waste that is generated on a cruise. It is estimated that around 50 tons of solid waste are generated during a one-week cruise and that 24% of the solid waste generated by ships all over the world comes from cruise ships. The most problematic type of solid waste is plastic. This is because plastic stays in the water for a very long time and affects marine animals due to them mistaking the plastic for food, or the plastic breaking down into “micro-plastic” and the animals ingesting the plastic by accident. Around 100 million marine animal’s lives are being lost every year due to plastic.

Ecotourism

The last big form of tourism that will be mentioned in this research report, is ecotourism. This type of tourism underlines generally a small group of people led by a experienced guide across a natural environment, with the primary motive of observing and appreciating nature.

Ecotourism is all about bringing together conservation, communities and sustainable travel. In ecotourism, an easy way of understanding its principles, is the four C’s. Conservation, safeguarding the biodiversity and integrity of ecosystems. Community, supporting the basic

rights of locals while enhancing the well-being of communities. Culture, nurturing the education of cultures to its tourists, while promoting respect and understanding. And finally, Commerce, building and growing the local community. Ecotourism has many benefits, but just like the other types of tourism mentioned, it also includes some downsides which can't be ignored.

One of ecotourism's biggest benefits, is the awareness that is spread and the knowledge that is gained, as the programs always include an educational and observational aspect to them. Not only do the ecotourists learn all about the environment and how crucial it is to preserve it, but they also spread this information, meaning that increasingly more people are aware about preserving the climate. Another benefit, is that a lot of the money and resources local areas gain from tourists, are then used for the conservation and improvement of the natural environment. This means that the more money spent on ecotourism, the easier it will be to finance conservation projects. However, ecotourism also has some downsides. Growing numbers of tourists can hinder the freedom of many indigenous and native groups. This can then lead towards native and local groups being forced to relocate, also in order to build hotels or expand ecotourism sites. For example, in East Africa, about 70% of all national parks and game reserves are occupying land that was illegally taken away from an indigenous group called the Maasai, without any financial compensation for these Maasai people. Another very important negative effect is the degradation of ecosystems. Although this is quite counter-intuitive, as ecotourism is specifically designed to counteract environmental damage, it can often be its cause. This is because ecotourism brings tourists to ecosystems where humans would normally never be. Human presence in these areas can then scare off prey and disrupt hunting patterns, damage the habitat and soil, and a higher demand for resources due to the growing number of people there can mean taking away from the ecosystems. Furthermore, the increased amount of travel due to tourists traveling for ecotourism programs is always an important downside to address.

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Major parties involved

The Republic of China

China has been actively integrating ecological safeguarding into its entertainment and tourism industries. There have been government policies in favor of low-carbon and sustainable tourism, especially after its own carbon-neutrality 2060 goal.

For example, looking at the tourism industry, Beijing Daxing International Airport introduced a geothermal heat-pump system, reducing CO_2 emissions by approximately 2,000 tons each year.

Another example, Universal Beijing Resort, only runs on renewable energy sources, solar and wind energy. Smaller tourism enterprises in Tibet or Dali are adopting practices such as harvesting rainwater, disposing of culinary waste, and the use of "low emission" tags on websites of hotels.

Ecotourism is extremely popular. A study done in the giant panda reserves of Sichuan demonstrates how community-based ecotourism (CBET) got households involved in the region to be more committed to conservation.

Several national ecotourism circuits link nature reserves and environment education services. Ecotourism has been a large method of generating incomes for one region (Zhejiang-Anhui-Fujian-Jiangxi) and contributes to improvement in forest coverage.

China is also increasing its national parks and protected sites. Its national park and nature reserve system of "protected areas" is growing larger. It covers many tens of thousands of hectare of wetland and other types of habitat. Many festivals, parks, and tourist attractions are motivated to teaching others about the environment or involve teaching and conservation at the same time.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica is seen as a role model for using tourism and entertainment to help protect the environment. About 25–30% of Costa Rica’s land is protected as national parks, wildlife refuges, or biological reserves, which is one of the highest rates in the world. Tourism, especially ecotourism, is the biggest source of foreign money for the country, helping the economy and local communities, which shows that ecotourism, if applied correctly, can be great for the economy while also being climate friendly. Many visitors come to its rainforests, volcanoes, and coastlines to hike, watch birds, surf, and see biodiversity up close.

This high interest from foreign people has led to strong reasons to keep natural areas safe instead of turning them into farms or cities. The government supports this idea with programs

like Payments for Environmental Services (PES), which pays landowners for taking care of forests and ecosystem services. Attractions focused on entertainment, like zip-line tours through the trees, wildlife photography classes, and eco-lodges, are made to have a small impact on nature while teaching visitors about conservation. Local communities often run small tourism groups or cultural shows that combine traditional knowledge with caring for the environment, making sure that benefits from conservation reach rural areas and indigenous people. Costa Rica's "pura vida" branding connects the national identity to living in harmony with the environment, using media and festivals to promote conservation values to both citizens and tourists.

There are challenges: popular parks can get crowded, and finding a balance between building infrastructure and protecting ecosystems is difficult. Climate change also poses risks to coral reefs, cloud forests, and the diversity of species. However, Costa Rica keeps working to create more marine protected areas, invest in renewable energy for hotels and transport, and improve visitor management strategies. Overall, the country's approach shows that entertainment and tourism, when paired with good governance and community involvement, can be strong tools for protecting biodiversity and encouraging sustainable development.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is among the largest and most significant conservation organizations globally. It facilitates the linkage of human entertainment and tourism and nature conservation. Established in 1961, WWF currently operates in over 100 countries, in partnership with governments, businesses, and local communities. Under tourism, WWF promotes principles of sustainable travel, which bring economic benefits for the population while limiting damage to the environment. It collaborates with tour operators, cruise ships, and destination managers in designing eco-certification schemes and best practices. It does so in order to reduce habitat destruction, over-exploitation of resources, and carbon footprints. WWF is also involved in the development of wildlife-friendly tourism in sensitive ecosystems, such as polar regions, coral reefs, and African savannahs, here visitor experiences finance anti-poaching initiatives, habitat reconstruction, and community development.

Educational entertainment, meanwhile, sees WWF partner with film studios, software firms, and streaming services in integrating conservation themes in documentary films, interactive displays, and virtual safaris. These collaborations employ entertainment media for public awareness and promotion of good behaviors. WWF's Nature Positive Tourism framework, introduced alongside World Travel & Tourism Council and UN Tourism, calls upon enterprises to not only reduce damage but actively rebuild biodiversity. Moreover, WWF assists population-based tourism through supporting community-based ecotourism initiatives in places

such as the Amazon Basin and parts of Southeast Asia, ensuring the inclusion of cultural practices and environmental awareness in tourist experience. Regardless of these initiatives, over-tourism in popular places, consequences of climate change on habitat, and increased accountability from corporate partners remain issues for WWF. Overall, WWF is a key player, using tourism and entertainment to fund conservation, change public opinion, and bring ecological sustainability into the global travel industry.

Timeline of events

1681	Establishment of the Bogd Khan Mountain Protected Area in Mongolia, one of the first examples of protection of natural heritage.
2013 August	UNWTO's Committee on Tourism and Sustainability (CTS) is established during the 96th edition of the Executive Council in Zimbabwe.
2019 September 12th	The Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics is adopted by the UNWTO's General Assembly at its 23rd edition in Saint Petersburg.
2021-2022	COVID-19 pandemic halts the tourism industry, leading to our ecology recovering vastly.
2022 December	The Nature Positive Tourism Partnership is officially launched at the UN Biodiversity Conference in Montreal, uniting major tourism parties WTTC, UN Tourism and the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance in their effort to align with the Global Biodiversity Framework.

2024 November 20th	More than 5o countries sign the UN Declaration on Enhanced Climate Action in Tourism, marking a historical moment as it was the first time tourism was included in the UN Climate Change Conference Action Agenda.

Possible solutions

Clean Cruising

Since cruise tourism has one of the biggest negative impacts on our ecological state, coming up with solutions to make cruising less detrimental for the climate is crucial. And although 100% clean cruising is impossible to achieve, making it cleaner than it is right now definitely is needed. According to the NGO Friends of the Earth, there are various ways of achieving this. This includes setting a zero emissions target by halting investments in LNG (Liguified Natural Gas) and shifting investments towards the zero emissions strategy and research and development of sustainable fuels like green hydrogen. It also mentions that installation of additional monitoring equipment to monitor air emissions as well as the track of discharging black water, grey water and other sewage at the discharge point are also crucial measures when aiming towards clean cruising.

Stronger regulations for ecotourism

Tighter regulations on ecotourism can assist in maintaining tourism and entertainment activities sustainably so that they contribute to ecological conservation rather than damage fragile ecosystems. By establishing firm limits on visitor numbers, upholding waste management regulations, and insisting on new entertainment developments achieving an environment impact assessment, governments can minimize habitat damage and excessive use of resources. Licenses or certifications of eco-lodges, tour guides, and entertainment facilities can assist in ensuring compliance with sustainable practices. Participation of neighborhood communities and scientists in formulating regulations ensures equity and ecological integrity. Properly crafted regulations balance economic gains and safeguarding the environment so that tourism serves as a steady instrument of conserving natural heritage and biodiversity.

Investing in community-based ecotourism and education

Investment in ecotourism and education among local communities benefits both conservation and local employments. By generating jobs through eco-lodges, wildlife tours, or cultural festivals, Indigenous and rural peoples receive income supporting their ecosystems and culture. Such control engenders pride and long-term commitment to preserving the environment.

Alongside education programs for villagers and tourists—on biodiversity, sustainable livelihoods, and culture—such initiatives boost awareness and responsibility. Community-managed initiatives ensure tourism development upholds rural values and environmental thresholds. By empowering the community, ecotourism becomes a collective effort safeguarding nature while celebrating and maintaining culture identities.

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