Chapter 10

Rural Tourism: A South African Township Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism provides an alternative for tourists from traditional sun and sea destinations. For many tourists, rural tourism provides the opportunity to experience authentic socio-cultural experiences of smaller areas in countries. The chapter alludes to different types of rural tourism. The results of two township studies in South Africa provide insights into tourists and resident’s perspective of township tours. The unique nature of rural tourism as well as the opportunities and challenges associated with it, are discussed. The chapter provides perspectives regarding the management of rural destinations to balance social, economic, and environmental costs and benefits of these areas.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry serves as a strong pillar of growth for most healthy economies. Statistics indicate that in 2017, the travel and tourism industry contributed over 7.6 trillion dollars to the global economy (Statista, 2018). To achieve a varied sustainable approach to tourism development, many traditionally sun-sea-sand destinations have diversified into rural tourism.

Tourists add rural tourism to their travel ventures for various reasons. Stremikiene and Bilan (2015) claim that rural tourism is suitable for the following tourists: tourists that are mainly motivated by the desire to escape from routine; that search for unforgettable lifetime experiences and adventures; that wish to learn more about nature; that have the desire for pleasure and recreation, that generally search for beautiful landscapes, that enjoy quiet, low noise and clean environments; and who are in the pursuit of intellectual enrichment.

Property development is not a strong driver of rural tourism. Rural tourism was created largely by recycling and reassessing heritage resources as tourist attractions and accommodation (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). In most cases, rural tourism is developed by rural people on a small, low-cost scale as they are typically new to tourism entrepreneurship (Long & Nguyen, 2018). The development of rural tourism...
tourism can therefore be seen as an effective means to achieve a variety of tourism objectives such as mitigating the problems of seasonality, spreading the social-economic benefit of tourism into various areas, encouraging independent non-organized tourism, attracting different spending markets, promoting cultural instead of just climatic attractions of the destination and satisfying the demand for more environmental tourism (Ateljevic & Page, 2017).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview and a practical example of rural tourism in South Africa, as well as to highlight challenges, opportunities and possible management of rural tourism in general. The results of two studies provide insights into the tourist’s opinion of South African townships as an authentic rural experience, whilst the results of the second study elaborate on how residents experience the socio-cultural impacts of township tours on their overall life satisfaction. The management of rural tourism is then addressed. To reach the objectives of the chapter, the chapter is structured as follows: Firstly, the background and types of rural tourism are provided. Thereafter, geographical, socio-cultural, and financial factors of township tours in South Africa are discussed. The influence of township tours on residents are then eluded to before opportunities and challenges of rural tourism are discussed. The chapter concludes with the management of rural destinations and provides possible solutions and recommendation for future studies.

BACKGROUND

Rural tourism has been described in a multitude of ways. It is defined as all tourism activities that take place in sparsely populated countryside (OECD, 2019). Tourism research, however, recognizes that rural tourism comprises of processes that are more complex than simply placing it geographically in the countryside. Rural tourism is also seen as a kind of tourism that provides visitors to rural areas the opportunity to vacation and/or be involved in agricultural activities. This territorial approach does not correspond to the real demands of rural communities and limits opportunities for sustainable development. Ivolga (2014) provides a more comprehensive definition by stating that rural tourism should be an environmentally oriented tourism product on both the local and international markets. Ivolga (2014) also states that rural tourism can be expected to act as one of the tools of sustainable rural development. Rural tourism is, therefore, activity related to dedicated travel to rural areas which provides tourists with a complex tourism product that can include accommodation, excursion services, entertainment, and meals. Trukhachev (2015) adds to the definition of Ivolga (2014) and states that through this tourism product, the cultural and natural identity of regions is reflected to ensure economic benefits for the host communities, providing alternative sources of income and the development of employment opportunities. Rural tourism development entails the identification of the region’s strengths which are a combination of gastronomy, handicrafts, agriculture, sports, and other activities.

Rural Tourism encompasses a huge range of activities, natural or man-made attractions, transportation, marketing, and information systems. The first type refers to nature-based tourism/ecotourism (sometimes called recreation-based tourism). Within nature-based tourism, tourists prefer to visit natural areas to enjoy the scenery, including animal wildlife, plant life and hiking in remote areas (Lee, 2019). Passive nature-based tourism takes place where observers tend to be strictly spectators of nature such as birdwatching. Active nature-based tourism has however increased over the past years where participants take part in adventure travel activities, which can also include a visit to a historical site in smaller communities or outdoor recreation (Moyle, Scherrer, Weiler, Wilson, Caldicott, & Nielsen, 2017). Mountain
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