Ethical Tour Operators create Ethical Tourists

Word count: 2326

University of Hertfordshire Business School.

Sabie Drake

Abstract: This article examines what behaviours, motivations and desires create ethical tourists. It then applies these tourist types to the tour operator Into Africa to assess whether or not they are an ethical tour operator and how much they affect the tourists and the local host destinations they travel too. This article draws the conclusion that Into Africa attracts ethical tourists but does not create them. They also try to improve the lives of the host destination and minimise negative social and cultural impacts as far as they can.

Key words: Ethical tourism, Responsible, Typologies, Motivations

1. Introduction:

When entering a destination and while participating in tourism, tourists are surrounded by different social and cultural environments. Fan et al (2017) suggests that due to this, tourists cannot avoid interactions with the local, host community. To the local residents in popular destinations, the influxes of tourists could be seen negatively and something that must be endured. Some host destinations are even now resisting tourism altogether, for example Barcelona (Hughes, 2018). To avoid this happening in other destinations, the behaviours and motivations of tourists needs to be examined. Ethical tourism can also be known as responsible tourism. For this article these can be defined as tourists acting responsibly at tourism destinations in various ways by engaging in environmentally friendly practices, showing greater awareness and sensitivity to local customs, traditions and values, or purchasing and utilising the local goods and services (Lee et al., 2017). This article poses the questions as to whether the behaviours and motivations can make some tourists more ethical then others and if this means ethical tour operating helps with this. This article will then also take a look at a tour operator that runs tours in Africa and whether they can be classed as an ethical tour operator and how they act responsibly in the hosts destinations they operate in.

1. Literature review
   1. Tourist typologies

In order to effectively determine whether ethical tour operators are creating ethical tourists we firstly need to establish what type of tourists there are and which ones are deemed to be more ethical.

Cohen (1972) created a typology based on the level of familiarity tourists like to have while on holiday. There are four types: organised mass tourist, individual mass tourist, the explorer and the drifter. The first two types have ‘institutionalized tourist roles’ and the second two types have ‘non-institutionalized tourist roles’. The former group of the mass tourists want familiarisation and security. They tend to keep to themselves, which does not disrupt the hosts daily lives but this can also result in the local hosts losing money as the tourist stick to the resort which are owned by foreign investors (Sharpley, 2018). The latter category are tourists who tend to travel off of the beaten track and try to minimise their impacts as much as possible. Host communities are more likely to have a more positive experience with these last two tourists as they seek more authentic experiences (Sharpley, 2018).

Fan et al (2017) expanded on this typology to ‘unveil’ tourists contact patterns with the locals to better understand the characteristics of different tourist types and behaviours. This study found five tourist types. The first type ‘Dependents’ are likely to travel with others in a package. They have the characteristics of institutionalised tourists and have social separation like a tourist bubble. The second type ‘Conservatives’ only interact with the local population in order to get information or solve a problem. The third type ‘Criticizers’ have service-orientated and casual conversations with the hosts, they contact with the hosts more than the last two types but are still detached from the local communities. The fourth type ‘Explorers’ are experienced travellers and connect with the local community in order to know more about their life. They can leave the destination with a changed image of the destination. The final type ‘Belonging Seekers’ have the most contact with the community they travel too. They like deep communications and participating in their daily life. The study found that different kinds of people behave differently in a new environment with new people. The first three types can be considered to have more negative social impacts as they do not try to understand the hosts and mostly keep to themselves. The last two types prefer to integrate more into the communities so could be seen as more ethical, however this interaction could result in the demonstration affect (Wall and Mathieson, 2006).

Poon (1993) created a new framework based on the new consumer’s versus the older mass tourism. It looked at the changing dynamics of tour preferences and behaviours. The characteristics Poon identifies for the new tourists are that they are more experienced, have changed values, changed lifestyles, changed demographics, they are more flexible and they are more independent. Wall and Mathieson (2006) states “the new tourist is the most important driving force of a new ‘alternative’ tourism.” These tourists could be seen as more ethical as they have a desire for authenticity and they seek more novel experiences.

Despite all these typologies and the conclusions that some tourists are more ethical than others, Goodwin (2011) states “all forms of tourism can be more responsible, the tourism is what we make it whether as producers or consumers”. Sharpley (2018) highlights a new type of tourist, the ‘post tourist’. This is where tourists can “adopt different characteristics or to seek different experiences according to specific needs and constraints”. Tourists cannot have a truly ‘authentic’ experience and so therefore these typologies are almost meaningless.

* 1. Tourist Motivations

What factors motivates tourists to travel needs to be considered as well, alongside the question of whether the ethical components of the trip are pull factors for the tourists.

The field of tourism has made significant progress in motivation theory over the past few decades. This is not surprising since “travel motivation is probably the most critical factor in understanding tourist behaviour” (Li, Cai, Lehto, & Huang, 2010: 336). Sharpley (2018: 144) “Tourist motivation has been identified as the satisfaction of an individual's needs, needs which push, or motivate, the individual into particular types of behaviour.” Mckercher (1993) explored eight ‘fundamental truths’ about the tourism industry and one such truth is that tourism is entertainment, especially many forms of ‘cultural’ and ‘environmental’ tourism. This means that it does not matter what the original motivation for travelling was as when the tourist is in the destination they would like to be entertained whether this is done ethically or not. He argues that this is the most difficult truth for host communities to except and if done unwillingly, adverse impacts can occur. Mckercher (1993) also states the tourists are consumers, even those who have strong ethical and environmental motivations for traveling and participating in eco-tourism. Iso Ahola, 1982 (cited in Ryan, 1995) created a framework for travel motivations. This consists of two main points. The first being the tourist is seeking to escape from their everyday life and the second is the tourist is searching for intrinsic rewards. This framework is quite romantic in its views. In a contrasting view, Dann’s (1977) socio-psychological motives frame work finds two motives that are not as romanticised. The first being ‘Anomic’ where people feel socially alienated and tourism is a relief from this and the second being ‘ego enhancement’ where tourist travel purely for the status of it, the greater respect they will get from going to a foreign country. This last typology is classed as push factors, reasons why tourists leave their home destination (Crompton, 1979).

1. A tour operator that operates in Africa

There is a small tour operator that is based in the North of the UK. They specialise in organising ‘fair-traded’ safaris and mountain treks. They provide insights into the environments, cultures and wildlife of countries like Kenya and Tanzania. The company are committed to running their holidays based on the principles of responsible eco-travel. This is shown through the tour operator being a member of Tourism Concerns Ethical Tour Operators Group as well as being a member of the Responsible Travel group, with this group recommending the operator to tourists who visit their website. These groups suggest that the type of tourist traveling with the company are ethical. The main desire of the tourist is to travel responsibly. In terms of the above typologies, the tourists can be classes as ‘Explorers’ from Fan et al’s typology (2017) and Cohen’s typology (1972) as they are travelling in order to integrate in to the community and learn from them. What motivates these tourists is the pull factor of being ethical and responsible. This ignores the fact that the tourists could be travelling for their own ego enhancement (Dann, 1977) and looks at the fact that they are travelling to areas that are completely different from their home life so they are seeking to escape from their everyday life (Ryan, 1995).

1. Reducing negative impacts

Tearfund (2002) did a survey on British holidaymakers and found that 52% would be more likely to book a holiday with a company that had a written code to guarantee good working conditions, protect the environment and support local charities in the tourist destination. This proportion has risen from 45% when Tearfund first conducted the poll two years ago. It shows rising demand from tourists for responsible behaviour by tour operators.

The tour operator operating in Africa state that there are great attractions in East Africa but tourism often has negative effects on the fragile environments and indigenous cultures. The company wants to avoid contributing to further damage whilst recognising that tourism and visitors can have good effects as well. Therefore all holidays are designed to give insights into the lands while ensuring their impacts on both the people and environment are minimised. One way they do this is by communicating with their tourists before they travel to the destination. Tour operators can educate tourists through online links, for example the link to Responsible Travel website which gives lots of advice on culturally responsible behaviour (Responsible Travel, 2018). The areas of Africa that this company tour in are classed as poor and so one of the biggest problems they have to combat is the reinforcement of inequalities and western influences. Tourist are seen as comparatively wealthier than the local residents, which leads to resentment and the locals trying to acquire this higher standard of living (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). To prevent the expansion of developed world multinationals, the company only use local hotels and campsites so the money goes to the local community. A good way to see if tourism is causing more negative problems is through using Doxey’s irridex of Tourist Irritation (cited in Butler, 1980) which looks at what the host destinations feel about tourism. This highlights 5 different stages hosts go through with their tolerance of tourists, Euphoria, Apathy, Annoyance, Antagonism and Abandonment. The tour operator needs to use this model to assess how the destinations they travel in are dealing with tourism. At this present time, tourists are still welcome and so is outside investment in the local communities so the destinations are in the Euphoria stage. The host destinations are taking a participatory development approach which facilitates a great implementation of sustainable tourism development ideals by creating better opportunities for local people to gain larger and more balanced benefits from tourism development taking place (Tosun, 2000). Lee (2013) states that “if the host residents perceive that they are likely to benefit from such exchanges without incurring intolerable costs, then these residents are likely to support and participate in exchanges with visitors and to support additional community-based tourism development”.

1. The benefits

Community participation plays a significant role in the sustainable development of community-based tourism as it increases the value of a community by enhancing the positive effects of tourism and reducing its negative effects (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Tourism can bring relatively wealthy consumers to marginal and economically poor areas, providing an opportunity for local economic development in areas where there is no other opportunity for the community to move beyond subsistence (Goodwin, 2011). The tour operator trys to benefit the communities they work in through direct donations and through employing local staff and using the local facilities and patronising locally owned hotels and campsites. Employing local guides give the tourists a greater appreciation for the destination as they have unique knowledge of the area. Hiring indigenous people as tour guides allows them to have training in this area and they have cross cultural understanding which can improve encounters between visitors and local (Osorio and Best, 2013). Another way they benefit the destination is they help improve local living standards through the funding of schools, teachers and equipment to ensure the children all have access to education. The guides are also educated in tour guiding and in languages to help them communicate with the tourists. They have also helped with traditional customs and practises by helping keep the cattle in Olanganaiyo, Kenya, healthy. The company uses the tour operators as ‘cultural brokers’ and their aim is to create harmony between groups and they could be seen as leaders as they help shape the future of the community in terms of sustainable responsible tourism (Osorio and Best, 2013).

1. Conclusion

This article has looked at different types of typologies and which tourists are considered more ethical. It has also looked at different motivations and truths about tourists to assist in understanding ethical behaviours. All of this was then applied to the tour operator Into Africa. The negative social and cultural impacts were looked at and how this company minimises these. The benefits for the local communities were highlighted as well. In conclusion, the tour operator attracts more ethical and responsibly conscious tourists regardless of the fact that they could be travelling for egotistical reasons. The tourists travel to fully engage with the communities and gain knowledge on their traditions and ways of life. The tour operator has the added value of trying to help improve the destinations they travel to and by empowering the population through education and employment. The company are also taking into consideration the destinations thoughts and ideas about their own future and they try to assist where they can for them to achieve these goals. In conclusion, as a tour operator they attract ethical tourists, however does not create them. The tourists utilising this ethical company are already wanting to travel for authenticity and to integrate into the hosts lives and experience their true nature.

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