

TOURISM

The sleeping giant awakes

Towards the end of last year the Director General of Lands and Survey, Bing Lucas, addressed the 57th annual conference of the Royal Australian Institute for Parks and Recreation held in Launceston, Tasmania. The subject of the address was "Parks, Recreation and Tourism" from a New Zealand perspective. We reproduce here an abridged version of the speech.

Tourism is big business. Internationally it is the second largest industry behind oil, while in New Zealand it is the sixth largest sector in the economy.

The importance of tourism is noted by the Government and others: at last year's Economic Summit Conference, the then President of the Manufacturers' Federation, Earl Richardson, termed the industry "the sleeping giant" of the economy. At the same conference, a tourism spokesman predicted the number of overseas visitors could increase from 583,000 to one million by 1990.

The way the environment is protected, managed, marketed, presented and enjoyed is a key to having satisfied customers who will tell others. If it is managed sensitively, the environment will remain a sustainable resource to be enjoyed in perpetuity, both as the people's heritage and the base for tourism to thrive.

Three main points emerge in discussing tourism:

- It can provide an economic justification for conservation, and by enabling people to enjoy protected areas, can promote public awareness and support for them.
- If overdeveloped or uncontrolled, tourism can endanger natural areas, cause visual and cultural pollution and destroy the very resource on which it is based.
- There is a need for close communication and co-operation between the tourist industry and park managers.

Visitor expectations: a changing scene

In 1980 Professor Brian Henshall of Auckland University prepared the report: "Tourism for Tomorrow: A Strategic Analysis of Tourism in NZ". The study listed the relative importance of factors which make New Zealand attractive to tourists. In order of importance these were: natural beauty and climate; cultural and social harmony; accessibility to the region; exemplary attitudes towards tourists; the groupings of attractions within the country; prices; sport, recreation and educational facilities; shopping and commercial facilities.

A further survey asked visitors and New Zealanders to identify what they would

like to do on their next holiday. At the top of both lists was "visit a national park" — at 71 percent for New Zealanders and 70 percent for overseas visitors. Next highest in both lists was "visit a museum" and in third place for overseas visitors was "visit botanical gardens". High on the list for overseas visitors were visiting arts and crafts and Maori cultural centres, and seeing a New Zealand family in their home.

It seems that a psychological change has taken place. As the Henshall report said: "The new tourist wants to do more than 'collect' countries: just going there is not enough. They want to experience a country — meet the people and gain a real insight into the culture." Some call this a change to "inner directed" tourists — people less concerned with following fashions but more responsive to inner needs. They want to share in the life of the country they travel through. For example, one of the factors attracting West Germans to New Zealand is the country's nuclear free image.

With the move away from the "been there seen that" syndrome, travel patterns in New Zealand have changed significantly.

Another study, "New Zealand Tourism: Issues and Policies" published last year showed that 66 percent of our visitors come from Australia and North America, followed by the UK and Japan, with rapid growth from West Germany and South-East Asia.

On average these people stay for 27 days, and many of them now drive themselves. The proportion who see New Zealand through the windows of a coach has dropped from around 70 percent to 57 percent, and this is predicted to come down even further.

I recall recently, when walking the Milford Track, meeting a South Australian family who were spending four days enjoying what is quite a strenuous walk. But the highlight of their time had been the excitement of white-water rafting on the Tongariro River.

Promotion of tourism used to focus on luxury hotels from which the scenery could be viewed. Now, adventure and outdoor action holidays are advertised. Television has enabled people to see the

wonders of the world on a small screen — an experience not dissimilar to looking through the window of a coach. What television or the coach cannot offer is a sense of participation, whether tramping, riding, exploring a glacier, skiing or relaxing in a hot pool.

Pressure in key areas

Not only are more people visiting less traditional tourist areas, they are also putting pressure on a few key destinations.

Mount Cook and Milford Sound are both priority places to see. Both require redevelopment which is happening slowly — in the case of Mt Cook, redevelopment started in 1973, but it is not yet finished as costs have had to be absorbed in competition with capital works demands in ten national parks. A Milford Sound development plan was agreed to by all parties in 1980, but needs an estimated \$3.2 million to implement, and debate on where to find this continues.

But tourists who stay an average of 27 days will not spend all that time at Mt Cook or Milford Sound... they will visit a wide range of places and seek a wide range of experiences away from cities and main tourist resorts.

As tourists become more mobile and more discriminating they demand better presentation. A whole paper could be devoted to the presentation of natural and historic places and the importance of integrity, sensitivity, accuracy, imagination and quality, in visitor centres, on-site interpretation and signs.

Growing awareness of our Maori heritage poses a challenge in sensitivity as we endeavour to interpret places and events through Maori as well as European eyes. For example, we need to avoid the inbuilt tendency to say that Abel Tasman "discovered" New Zealand when Polynesian navigators did so centuries earlier. And we need to avoid the risk of prostituting a culture.

The good, the bad and the ugly

There are many examples of what to avoid, and I want to draw from further afield as well as from New Zealand for some examples of the good, the bad, the ugly and the beautiful.

Ten years ago the Nepalese Government decided the approach to Mt Everest