

Regenerative Tourism: A Paradigm Shift

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Ōtepoti

Global tourism has been crippled by the COVID pandemic. The World Travel and Tourism Council's focus has been on re-opening borders, restoring tourism, accelerating the recovery and returning to where we left off - continued high growth in global tourism. Yet the tourism pause has come as a relief in many destinations and communities. The situation in Aotearoa that prevailed at the end of 2019 is comprehensively addressed in the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's first report (released 18th December 2019). It notes that we can not continue on a volume growth pathway, and that tourism must be reformed if it is to survive in the 21st century. We need to radically rethink the role of tourism in our natural environment, society and economy in order to address its obvious liabilities.

The high carbon footprint of tourism is tourism's greatly liability. Transportation currently accounts for 23% of total global energy-related carbon emissions. Aotearoa is a globally distant destination and is vulnerable to growing flight shame concerns. Currently we rely solely on individual decisions to forego air travel in order to reduce high risk emissions, but this approach can not possibly succeed. Coordinated collective action is required to address this existential threat. It is also important that we address the knowledge deficit in environmental accounting at the national scale. An understanding of the carbon costs arising from tourism in Aotearoa highlights the need for urgent low carbon transitions throughout the tourism system, but in tourist transportation in particular.

The presentation will then consider the nature of human/tourist interactions with wild animals. Viewing animals in the wild has been uncritically referred to as 'non-consumptive'. This terminology implies that interactions are relatively free of negative impacts on focal animals. However decades of research indicates that tourist interactions with wild animals are likely to be a cause of sub-lethal anthropogenic stress. I will draw on two contrasting local cases – viewing Hoiho (Yellow-eyed penguins) at Sandfly Bay and Korora (Blue penguins) at Takiharuru. These cases provide informative comparative insights into the old (depletive) and emerging new (regenerative) tourism paradigms.

To close I will overview the evolution from depletive to regenerative tourism, and offer a conceptual framework that highlights the environmental, social, economic and cultural potential of regenerative tourism; a framework that mirrors the government's Living Standards Framework. I will conclude that Aotearoa is well placed to offer global leadership in the emerging regenerative tourism paradigm. This is an opportunity that we can not afford to miss, given the need to address tourism's structural flaws and rebuild tourism for the 21st century.

Research Papers (*available upon request*)

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