

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, you learned about tourism's many economic and political impacts. Historically, decision-making was focused on the financial impacts of tourism in what is considered the singular bottom line of profit. However, while reading Chapter 11, as well as many of the other chapters, you may have thought of other benefits and problems that tourism can bring particularly to the natural resources and the local residents. The success of tourism is now evaluated on the **triple bottom line**, so that destinations not only focus on economic aspects of tourism, but also make decisions to maximize positive impacts and minimize negative impacts on the environment and the people who live there. For example, in Chapter 10, we considered the range of commercialization that exists at different types of resort locations. These developments may have been planned or they may have just happened. No matter if it is a destination or just a stop along the road, tourists and the activities they undertake have the potential of impacting the environment, social fabric, and cultural foundations both positively and negatively anywhere they travel.

But what impact does commercial development, no matter how extensive or how limited, have on the cultural, social, and natural environment? Can the attractiveness of an area that drew tourists in the first place be preserved when tourism development occurs? How are residents affected by the creation and growth of tourism in their area? Will the presence of tourism activities improve, maintain, or destroy the culture and environment that attracts tourists? Should we even be concerned that tourism can create change?

As the chapter opener suggests, the economic impacts of tourism are not the only important impacts that must be considered when tourism development is proposed. Effects on nature, peoples, and cultures of a region are just as important to study and predict as the economic effects of tourism. In this chapter, we will discuss the other two aspects of the triple bottom line in the environmental pluses and minuses of tourism as well as the benefits and costs of tourism to a society and its culture. Then in Chapter 13, we will explore how these benefits can be sustained.

## Tourism and the Environment

How can tourism be used to enhance and preserve the environment? Management, education, and appreciation are probably the most important ways. When visitor numbers are managed, and they see firsthand the wonders of the attraction or the beauty of the natural setting and are educated about visitor impacts and nature's fragile balance, they are more likely to understand the importance of preservation efforts. In addition to its educational role, tourism can be used to help finance the preservation of attractions and natural areas. Revenues generated from taxes, memberships, entrance fees, and other guest services can be used to preserve and improve the very attributes that attract tourists.

Think about the hundreds of thousands of acres of national parks and preserves, nearly 12% of Earth's land surface, that have been set aside all over the world primarily to preserve them for future generations to enjoy.<sup>1</sup> North Americans and visitors from around the globe owe U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt a great deal of thanks for his foresight in instituting the U.S. National Park System. Similar systems, public and private, as shown in Table 12.1, exist in countries on all continents, from Asia to South America.

But how can tourism managers and planners determine just how much tourism a natural site, an attraction, or any destination can handle? What types of positive and negative impacts does tourism have on culture, society, and the environment? The first question can be answered by determining the **carrying capacity** of a location. After we discuss the concept of carrying capacity, we will then consider some of the particular environmental benefits and costs tourism yields.