TOURISM IN ACTION

VENICE

Environmental and cultural issues are not restricted to natural destinations. One of the world's most beautiful and historic cities—Venice, Italy—is suffering from tourism's success. This cradle of European civilization, 1,500 years old, includes incredible riches in terms of art, architecture, and history. Ten million visitors each year travel to it and marvel at its beauty. So what's the problem?

The problem for Venice is its location and its size. Venice is an island city, constructed on pilings sunk into the sea and connected by causeway to the rest of Italy. The ancient city is a mere three square miles in size, with a permanent population of only 70,000 residents. And the streets were built hundreds of years ago, which virtually prevents the use of cars, buses, and trucks. Its famous canals and gondolas are a prime form of transit, but they, too, are small. Each day between 50,000 and 150,000 tourists descend on the city and crowd the streets to the point that simply walking across a town square becomes nearly impossible.

This overcrowding is taking its toll on more than just citizens' blood pressures. The amount of garbage and trash is massive and difficult to dispose of due to the city's size, location, and lack of transportation options. And the crowds of visitors are taking their toll on the ancient churches, palaces, and other historic places. Solutions that are being considered include selling tickets and limiting the number of guests who can visit the city each day, as well as allowing only tours that follow differing itineraries so that the crowds are more evenly spread through the streets and the city's monuments.

Source: Based on *National Geographic*, 187(2), 70–99.

Mesa Verde, a world-famous archaeological site of early Native American settlements, limits access to the more popular ruins by utilizing tickets. As the market for tourism grows, carrying capacity and means to enhance it will be a major concern for planners and managers.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is attempting to preserve many of the world's historic cities and natural and cultural properties for future generations. For example, UNESCO has declared Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, Canada, as having unique value to be preserved for the education and enjoyment of future generations by declaring it to be a World Heritage Site. "The World Heritage Convention (UNESCO) is the most important international agreement aimed at preserving cultural heritage and one of the most successful international conventions ever drafted when measured by the number of state parties involved and the number of sites included."[20] In addition to over 1,000 sites that are recognized on the World Heritage List, UNESCO also makes designations to the List of World Heritage in Danger if a site becomes threatened and needs corrective action to manage ascertained or potential danger.[21]

To assess and plan for the maintaining or improving the current benefits of tourism as well as planning for potential growth should require the use of strategic environmental assessments (SEAs). The application of SEAs in tourism planning is still in its initial stage of application when compared to other industries. As you saw in Chapter 11, tourism planning is a complex process involving many different steps as well as needing to include the many different sectors of the tourism industry to gain a holistic picture. Therefore, an integrated approach involving all sectors of the tourism industry is needed for SEAs to assess the growth and impact of tourism.[22]

Tourism is considered by some to be one of the economic sectors least prepared to deal with the potential risks and opportunities that may be brought about by climate change. Whether you think climate change is inevitable or you are agnostic to possible changes, the thoughtful responses to varying climate change scenarios from the tourism industry are critical to the sustainability of tourism.[23]

To try to preserve the environment and still gain the economic benefits of tourism, ecotourism has evolved. Although protection of the natural environment is the key component of ecotourism (sometimes called "green tourism" or "alternative tourism"), protection and appreciation of the native peoples of an area are also two of its guiding principles. We will take a closer look at ecotourism and other sustainability efforts in the next chapter.