

Interactive Exercise: What is Tourism? Who are Tourists?

Various additional/other definitions of tourism have been offered in the social sciences. These range from the poetic-philosophical to the pragmatic, from the theoretical to the simplistic. Make a list, a short list of some that you know and that you have thought of yourself. These should be one sentence / one phrase definitions.

For Example:

- Tourism is a search (pilgrimage, journey, quest) for alterity—cultural difference, the exotic, a temporary change of life style, or out of the ordinary experience.
- Tourism is a basket of goods and services
- Tourism is an industry... or a market
- Tourism is a packaged experience, a commodity

Now, think about these definitions as you fill out the table below. How does each definition-model help you answer or not help you answer each question in the table below?

Tourism	Why?	not Tourism	Why?
Who is a Tourist?		Who is <u>not</u> a tourist?	
What are essential, intrinsic or diagnostic traits of a tourist?		What are essential, intrinsic or diagnostic traits of a <u>non</u> -tourist?	
What activities or practices are those that tourists enact, perform or engage in?		What activities or practices are those that tourists do <u>not</u> enact, perform or engage in?	
What social agents, institutions, businesses, groups are part of tourism?		What social agents, institutions, businesses, groups are <u>not</u> part of tourism?	
What kinds of products, markets, exchange are part of tourism?		What kinds of products, markets, exchange are <u>not</u> part of tourism?	
Who is in control of the tourism narrative?		Who is not in control of the tourism narrative?	

In a recent presentation, a tourism scholar *defined tourism as an industry*. Because I am not really sure what is an “industry” I asked him to explain what this means.

Can you? What does the notion of industry include or suggest?

He explained that this industry included government regulations and businesses that create, advertise and sell these packages of experiences and various ancillary products and consumables, as well as it is the strategically organized places and markets where these commodities are sold, promoted and consumed.

1. Is anything “wrong”(confusing, conflated, slanted, or slippery) with this definition or wrong with the explanation of the definition? If so, how would you re-write it?
2. What are the essential (if any) components of an appropriate definition of tourism?
3. Does it matter?

➤ This tourism scholar concluded his presentation by citing a recent census and study by the Mexican government. This study indicated that the highest levels of poverty in México exist in that nation’s most developed tourism destinations, such as Cancun, Acapulco, Huatulco, etc.

- What is the implication of this statement?
- What is causing this poverty?
- What is not causing poverty?
- How is poverty measured? By what criteria?

Does tourism cause the poverty of New York City? London? Rome? México City? Cape Cod? Southampton, Long Island? Disney World?

What is slippery/inadequate with the study —or, better, what is the confusion/inadequacy with how we interpret, understand and use statements such as this, that “the highest levels of poverty are found in tourism destinations”?

- Are the owners of luxury hotels part of tourism?
- Are the workers of luxury hotels part of tourism?
- Are government regulations part of tourism?
- Are the tourists part of the strategy to produce, maintain, sustain poverty?
- Are tourists part of the strategy to restrain, dilute, reduce, obliterate poverty?
- In places such as Cancun, Florida Yucatán, where the entire economy of region is pervaded “by tourism” what sense does it make to say that tourism is the cause of anything?

➤ **What “part” of tourism counts “as” tourism?** What parts are disqualified as **tourism proper** so as to be categorized as that which is effected “by tourism”? In other words, what is given the analytical agency and what part of tourism is presupposed as incapable of agency, as the passive and inert part of society that is simply effected by some other agent, process, or dynamic?

Remember Always: “Tourism does *not* exist.”

Lesson 1: Tourism is a social construction – it is a social phenomenon that is constructed by different agents, including the social scientists who study tourism.

Lesson 2: It is not only tourists and those who pretend not to be tourists who have vague notions and ideological visions of what tourism is, but so do the social scientists and anthropologists who study tourism. Anthropologists have been using slippery models, loosely applied definitions, and contradictory concepts of tourism to study tourism. Who are hosts?!

Lesson 3. The studies of tourism that rely upon or assert generalized claims of causality need to be very closely inspected for the unstated and implicit conceptual assumptions that guide the causal reasoning. Impact is an ideological discourse, a mythology, a political tool to be used either and both against and for tourism development. Why is this moment of time designated as the un questioned beginning point, the zero marker, for CHANGE? What is it that is being claimed as “tourism” that has the agency of causality? What is presupposed to lack the agency of causality (capacity to transform, “impact”, society)?

Lesson 4. Tourism is a reified concept. Tourism is a reification. We might do well to question in fact whether tourism actually exists..... What is tourism? As a heuristic skepticism, this position (tourism does not exist) is useful to refine our thinking on and research of tourism phenomenon.

Lesson 5. Tourism as a topic of study is extremely complex, and the researcher must take great pains to clearly define what one is studying and how the thing or persons studied actually fall within a tourism topic. Tourism, like the concept of race, exists as a social concept, but it may not function well as a “scientifically-valid” topic. It is not an analytical term;

Lesson 6. Terms such as tourist gaze, *flaneur*, staged authenticity, authentic, travel, heritage and commodification, etc., carry a lot of baggage. It is best to develop your own meaning of the phenomena to which they are related, and within the context of your own study. Use the legacy of these concepts (the history of their meanings) to your advantage; cite and use those meanings and then transform them, re-make the meanings and uses of those concepts.

Lesson 7. Tourism studies seem to be categorizeable into 4 areas: (1) power, hegemony, discourse and impacts, (2) narrative and construction of identity through performance – either that of the tourist or of the local or through and a dynamic interaction, (3) the cultural and ideological connection of tourism to things (sights, museums, tourist art, performances, aboriginal natives, etc.), (4) the success and failure of tourism development “from below” (such as community-based tourism, community-based museums, ecotourism ventures, etc.) Nevertheless, none can be studied by themselves as they, like tourism itself, are all interconnected. The paradox is that tourism, seemingly so specific a concept, divides and re-shapes itself into many forms quickly and unpredictably, thus making tourism studies a proverbial quagmire unless precautionary limitations are folded into the study.