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Global Adventure Travel

Tourism and Conservation in Tanzania

My research topic is the impact of tourism on conservation in Tanzania. This topic is relevant to me for many reasons. While I was in Tanzania, I was struck for the first time by the true impact that tourists can have on the places they visit. I have been a tourist many times and will continue to continue my travels. Therefore, knowing the impact that my actions will have is important to me. Furthermore, the impact of tourism is a geographic problem and relevant to my major of Geography. I am also interested in conservation as a conscientious citizen of the world and hope the natural resources of the world today will be conserved to continue to benefit humanity in the future.

I was able to study this topic in a few ways while in Tanzania. I participated in two out of the three largest tourism activities available in Tanzania. Through this participation, I was able to gain insight into the perspective of tourists who hike Mount Kilimanjaro and go on Safari as well as have a first-hand look at what occurs during these tourist activities. Studying at the College of African Wildlife Management taught me about the perspectives of the government, citizens, and experts on conservation in Tanzania. I was able to learn from professors there for a whole week of classes.

From my initial studies of the impact of tourism on conservation in Tanzania, it is apparent that tourism has had many positive and negative impacts on conservation. In

Tanzania the very concept of conservation was caused by a form of tourism. Prior to colonization, the people of Tanzania maintained a relationship with the wildlife and nature that lived there that sustained steady human and wildlife populations. Once the Germans took control of the area, they designated the first game reserves in Tanzania so that Europeans could hunt the game and prohibit the locals who lived there from hunting and accessing the land. The British later followed this example by establishing more conservation areas. Once independence was gained, tourism based on natural resources was determined to be an economically beneficial activity and was encouraged by the opening of national parks and more conservation areas. Tourism continues to be a large part of Tanzania's economy comprising nearly 20% of it.

Because tourism is such a large part of Tanzania's economy, it is prioritized by the government. The purpose of most tourism in Tanzania is to see or hunt wildlife which means that the government emphasizes the conservation of this wildlife. As a result at least 25% of the land in Tanzania is contained in a wildlife protected area. Also many resources are put into protecting this land from poachers and keeping populations at sustainable levels. In these ways tourism has a positive effect on conservation in Tanzania.

However, even these positive effects from tourism on conservation can have negative effects on other factors. Due to the wealth that tourism brings in, nature can be prioritized over people in some cases. For example, the Chagga tribe, indigenous to the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, due to costs associated with accessing the mountain, functionally can no longer go up the mountain other than as porters for tourists. The

Chagga tribe traditionally viewed the mountain as a sacred place, lived on the mountain and would make their livelihoods based on the resources of Mt Kilimanjaro. The government is also attempting to restrict access to the Ngorongoro Conservation Area from the native Maasai in the same manner. The Ngorongoro Conservation Area has been the traditional homeland of the nomadic pastoral Maasai tribe for hundreds of years with the mountain they view as sacred residing there as well. Currently, the Tanzanian government is attempting to remove the Maasai from the land by offering compensation but many refuse to move and have reported forced removals following these refusals. These actions may have helped the conservation of wildlife and natural resources, but they have been a detriment to the conservation of the traditional culture and people of the area.

Tourism has been a driver of conservation in Tanzania, but it has still had negative effects on the wildlife within conservation areas. In general, the government of Tanzania seems to not see the inherent worth of nature but only its economic value. This attitude can be seen from Tanzania's first President Julius Nyerere in a speech in 1961 when he said "I personally am not very interested in animals... Nevertheless, I am entirely in favor of their survival. I believe that after diamonds and sisal, wild animals will provide Tanganyika with its greatest source of income. Thousands of Americans and Europeans have a strange urge to see these animals." This mindset means that conservation areas that receive less tourism such as those in the west and south have less funding and support to keep their wildlife safe. It also means that in places like the Serengeti, the wants of tourists are being put over the needs of animals. In the Serengeti, the Government has considered adding a paved road to the park to increase tourism and reduce the difficulty that tourists have

traversing the expansive park. If installed this road would mean that drivers would drive faster and kill more animals in accidents. For many animals in the Serengeti, migration is essential to gain access to various water sources throughout the year. A paved road would disrupt many of these migrations.

Tourists themselves can personally have negative impacts on nature in Tanzania in a few ways. Some tourists who want to see animals at a closer distance may tell their drivers to go off the road and even offer additional payment to do so. This destroys the habitat and frightens the animals. There is also an overabundance of tourists in the high season during the summer. This has caused crowding during the summer which also leads to more off-roading to avoid traffic. Animals such as baboons, vervet monkeys and mice have become used to the presence of humans and have changed their behavior to take food from humans.

Although an individual's impact may be minimal, each tourist adds greenhouse gasses to the air which increases the rate of climate change. Climate change has had a negative impact on the wildlife in Tanzania by causing more intense droughts and flooding. This has pushed animals into new migration patterns and puts the ecosystem at risk of collapsing. Climate change has also caused the zones of Mt. Kilimanjaro to change. The glaciers are receding and the alpine desert is growing. The glaciers on Mt. Kilimanjaro provide water for much of the mountain and their disappearance will alter the mountain's ecosystem.

If I were to continue to study this topic, I would look into other countries that rely on ecotourism such as Kenya and Costa Rica to see what effects tourism has had there. Then I would compare those impacts to those in countries where tourism is not a primary factor of the economy. I would also try to find research on how much of a negative impact tourists have on the animals that they visit through more subtle means such as dust from safari vehicles and noise and light pollution. Another struggle facing continued research on conservation and the impact of tourism in Tanzania is a lack of studies conducted on these topics as well as a lack of statistics. Future researchers would need to conduct further studies.

My time in Tanzania opened my eyes to the great impact of tourism and conservation. I was also able to learn that the topic of conservation in general is more nuanced than I had previously known. Before coming to Tanzania, I initially thought tourists had a completely negative effect on conservation and that conservation itself had no negatives. Through traveling and studying in Tanzania, I learned that tourism can have positive effects on conservation and that conservation can have negative effects. Clearly, the impacts of tourism and conservation deserve much more study. I'm eager to learn more about this important topic, especially as it pertains to Tanzania.