

Abby Lodge

Tourism, the Economy, Population Growth, and Conservation in the Galapagos

In the 1950s, the Galapagos had been a drain for the national economy and upon examining the traditional exploitable and marketable resources, it was decided that tourism would yield the highest economic return over time. No one expected that the inflow of tourists' dollar would spur an unprecedented population boom. In the 1970s, and a practice that continues today is the housing of tourist on vessels with brief visits to designated sites accompanied by knowledgeable, trained guides. With the economy expanding, there was now money to improve infrastructure and public services (such as the roads, schools, electricity, and water), which made the islands increasing a more desirable place to live and visit. In 1978, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated Galapagos as one of the first twelve World Heritage Sites.

Tourist numbers remained relatively stable between 1980 and 1985, with an average of 17,500 visitors per year. In the 1980s, a greater emphasis was placed on expanding land-based facilities rather than on the more expensive and ecologically sensitive "floating hotel" model of tourism. The resident entrepreneurs had long sought this shift, while others had feared it. In 1986, a Presidential Decree created the Galapagos Marine Reserve – it was not long after this that divers from around the world began to frequent the islands. The annual number of visitors jumped from approximately 18,000 in 1985, to 41,000 in 1990, to nearly 72,000 by 2000. In 1993, the central government kept 75% of the revenues generated with the remaining 25% going to the Galapagos National Park Service. In 1998, however, the Special Law for the Galapagos was created, and this insured that all the entrance fees were distributed to institutions in the Galapagos. Also in 1998, 24-hour electricity became available – increasing yet again the popularity of islands.

I found this quick break down of the recent history of the Galapagos helpful, as it made things from an economic stand point clearer because the book that was assigned for over the summer, *Ecuador's Environmental Revolutions*, was more politically focused. The paper then breaks down the Galapagos tourism industry into: tourist's profiles, the tourist fleet, island-based tourism, and a comparison of vessel and hotel capacities. The tourist fleet was further broken down into the following categories: fleet capacity and vessel ownership, fleet operation, cruise and travel agency prices and fees, and vessel prices and revenues. The island-based tourism section was also further down into: hotels and lodging, hotel prices, hotel and lodging occupancy and total revenues, and other on-island expenditures. While there was a large sum of information thrown at the reader in these sections, the authors did a nice job of summarizing all of this in charts.

A summary of the tourists' expenditures in the Galapagos, the employment by sector of the tourism industry (2006), and the Galapagos National Park Service were all discussed in greater details with good charts provided as well. The authors then described the NGO community in the Galapagos. Local NGOs and International NGOs – the Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF), and budgets for research and conservation in the Galapagos, international NGOs – were discussed in further detail.

Other interesting topics discussed in the paper are the contributions to the mainland economy, the global economic importance of Galapagos tourism, changes in the conservation philosophy and spending, and finally, the protected area management and resource rent.