Ethics, Tourists, and the Environmental Practices of the North American Cruise Ship Industry: A Comparison Study of the Ethical Standards of Alaskan and Caribbean Cruise Ship Tourists

by

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Abstract

The cruise industry has been recognized as the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry, with 8.4% growth each year since 1980. In North America the growth rate has been a staggering 15% per year since 1998. The cruise industry is, however, a visible and documented environmental offender, displaying a lack of ethics in its attitude toward the natural environment.

While a great deal of research has already been conducted on businesses and environmental ethics, little research has been undertaken in the area of ethics and tourism-related businesses. Even less research appears to have been undertaken regarding ethics and tourists. Consequently, this research sought to explore and examine the ethical standards and orientation of cruise ship tourists, in anticipation of discovering valuable foundational knowledge.

There were three objectives of this research. The first objective was to examine and compare the ethical standards and orientation of Alaskan and Caribbean cruise tourists. The second objective was to examine and compare Alaskan and Caribbean cruise tourists’ level of acceptance of the environmental practices of the industry. The third objective of this research was to create awareness amongst cruisers and anyone who reads this research regarding the environmental practices of the cruise ship industry.

An extensive literature review was undertaken to examine ethical and moral theory, which led into business and tourism ethics, and ultimately environmental ethics and the cruise ship industry. Two research sites were chosen as representing two different cruise ship markets: Alaska and Cozumel. Data was collected in Skagway and Juneau, Alaska from August 22nd to August 30th, 2004 and in Cozumel, Mexico from January
13th to January 22nd, 2005, by means of a self-administered questionnaire. Overall, 237 surveys were completed in Alaska and 246 were completed in Cozumel.

An analysis of the findings revealed that overall the majority of respondents found the environmental practices of the industry unacceptable. However, females in both Alaska and Cozumel found the industry’s practices to be significantly more unacceptable than did male respondents. Alaskan respondents were found to have a higher standard of ethical conduct than Cozumel respondents. Alaskan and Cozumel respondents differed on the type of ethical orientation they were likely to employ when judging the ethical MES scenario in the questionnaire. There were also significant differences between males and females in Cozumel regarding the strength of their ethical orientation, with female Cozumel respondents utilizing a significantly stronger justice orientation than male respondents. An interesting finding revealed itself through the negative correlation between the number of cruises taken and how the Alaskan respondents reacted to two sections of the questionnaire. Specifically, the more cruises the Alaskan respondents had been on, the more like they were to find the environmental practices of the industry acceptable, and the more likely they were to find the captain’s behaviour in the MES scenario more ethical.