

Chapter 6. Traditional and Alternative Tourism in Loreto, BCS

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Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of conventional tourism and alternative tourism in Loreto and their economic and environmental impacts. First, the conceptualization of tourism, the classifications, and the characteristics of alternative and conventional tourism are provided. Second, the theories that support economic activity of tourism as a driving force of regional development are discussed. Third, tourism is described in Mexico and Baja California Sur, and general data and statistical information are provided. Finally, conclusions are presented.

Tourism

For the purpose of this work, the definition of tourism used is that proposed by the United Nations' World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). It defines tourism as "a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon related to the movement of people to places that are outside of their usual place of residence for personal or business/professional reasons"(OMT, n.d). Ibáñez and Rodríguez Villalobos (2012) classify tourism into two categories: traditional and alternative that, in turn, encompass a broad group of activities. The first category has activities related to sun and beach, cultural activities in large cities, and other recreational activities in places with luxurious infrastructure. The second category includes ecotourism, adventure tourism, and rural tourism. However, there are other ways to classify this activity depending on: 1) Activities carried out, 2) Reason for travel, 3) Geographical scope, 4) Duration, 5) Age, 6) Conveyance, 7) Travel scales, 8) Form of travel (group, individual, family), 9) Type of operation, inbound or outbound (Universidad Interamericana para el Desarrollo, n.d.).

Traditional tourism, or conventional tourism, is mainly sustained with large numbers of tourists, mass tourism, and the development of large facilities for temporary or short-term lodging and for leisure and recreational activities. Generally, the actors of this type of tourism present consumption habits and demand *sophisticated* services. In the words of Morillo Moreno (2011), this type of tourism “includes products that are proper to the urban and industrial society, with tourism activities for large masses in terms of tourism supply and demand, and with sociocultural and environmental deterioration and threats.”

Alternative tourism has as main objective the realization of trips where the tourist practices recreational activities characterized by being in contact with the cultural, historical, and natural heritage of the region’s communities. Gámez (2007) states that alternative tourism rationally uses natural resources, providing significant control in local communities-vigilant and beneficiaries of their community exploitation. This concept can be used to designate tourist activities that are different from those corresponding to conventional tourism.

Tourism as a Development Factor

Due to its consolidation as a predominant economic activity, mass tourism has become a factor of socioeconomic development for developed and underdeveloped countries. This has often occurred through the design of strategies to develop marginalized areas. In this way, inequalities would decrease, and regional development would become important (Gambarota and Lorda, 2017; Almirón et al., 2008; Kotler, 1997). This agrees with the proposal by Córdoba and García de Fuentes (2003) that “tourism stimulates certain economic activities and favors productive reconversion; in social terms, it modifies the structure by actively intervening in the alteration of the traditional way of life, and, finally, from the spatial perspective, by encouraging the modernization and creation of basic structures.” There is also the tourism-led growth hypothesis that views tourism as the driver of economic growth. This hypothesis proposes that the link between tourism and economic growth may imply that tourism development drives economic growth and that this, in turn, stimulates tourism activity, or that there is a relationship between both variables (Brida et al., 2013).

The massification of tourism can generate investment. These flows are mostly from developed countries, which implies transnational companies in the tourism industry (Gamez, 2007). The complex interactions of tourism as a phenomenon have some degree of implicit globalization. The International Association of Tourism Expert Scientists (Aiest) (1996) states that this phenomenon can have both positive and negative impacts. These include: A) The expansion of international tourism that is accompanied by the emergence of new markets and emerging tourist destinations that would entail a gradual redistribution of tourist flows worldwide; B) The deregulation of air transport that, in turn, facilitates the development of long-distance travel; C) Scientific development that allows new technologies to be progressively incorporated; D) Business expansion toward new destinations is growing; E) The increase of business concentration, commercialization, and marketing of tourism products; F) The transformation of cultural identity; G) Environmental deterioration; and H) Marginalization of small companies or polarization of economic benefits (Aiest, 1996 in Ibáñez Pérez, 2011).. Some studies suggest that tourism promotes economic growth in the long term, whether it is economic expansion that leads to the growth of tourism activity or if it is the relationship between the two variables (Brida et al, 2013). However, it is difficult to measure competitiveness due its multidimensional nature (Torres and Chávez, 2018).

Alternative tourism may provide a financing source for the maintenance and preservation of natural protected areas. It also serves as a catalyst for economic development by generating jobs and when foreign currency is generated, national income increases (López Pardo, 2012). However, alternative tourism also can also promote “environmental degradation, alteration and commercialization of the culture and lifestyle of the local population, as well as the perpetuation of inequities” (Daltabuit et al., 2000 in López Bardo, 2012). In this regard, Goded Salto (2002) considers that the growth of tourism can negatively affect the development and economic growth of the region if not managed correctly. Despite potential problems, many countries have adopted tourism as a development engine (Orgas Agüera et al., 2012). Rodriguez Brindis (2014) notes that this activity has become a determining point for the design of economic and social policy in

Mexico and is even considered as a tool to generate economic growth and fight poverty. Tourism, from the perspective of local development effects has been viewed as an alternative for sustainable development. The assumption is the need to boost the economy of a given region through diversification of economic activities that allow the use of resources, articulating the efforts of the social actors that facilitate the synergy between external and internal resources in order to increase human development (Cueto et al, 2016; Chauca, 2011).

Tourism in Mexico and Baja California Sur

International tourists demand sustainable and competitive destinations that have diversified and provide world-class tourism products. Unfortunately, the tourism sector in Mexico has not exploited its full potential and its long-term vision is limited. It is necessary to take advantage of the natural and cultural wealth of the country, and design and adapt spaces, destinations, and projects for the new demands of the market (Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo, 2013). For the Mexican government, tourism is a prominent factor in social and economic integration of the country and is presented as a main subject in economic policy (Mendoza Ontiveros y González Soza, 2014). In the last government sexennium (2012-2018) of President Enrique Peña Nieto, the Mexican government's efforts in tourism matters were incorporated into the National Development Plan (PND by its acronym in Spanish) 2013-2018. According to the plan, "107 sectorial, institutional, regional, special and cross-cutting programs are aimed at determining and defining the lines of action that the agencies and entities must implement to contribute to the fulfillment of the proposed goals" (*Comisión Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, 2018, pág. 10*). The use of tourism activity and alternative tourism are also considered in the 2013-2018 PND strategies, as well as in the Tourism Sector Program (PROSECTUR, 2013-2018).

The emphasis on tourism in the National Development Plans is not surprising considering that according to the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2017), in 2016, Mexico ranked eighth in the number of international arrivals. Mexico and Canada, were 9% and 11%, respectively, in

the growth of U.S. tourism. In absolute terms, the tourism gross domestic product (GDP) of Mexico in 2015 was higher than the national GDP of some countries such as Slovenia, Luxembourg, New Zealand, and the Slovak Republic (SECTUR, 2017). For the first quarter of 2018, the total arrival of passengers in Mexico via airports increased 9.2% with respect to the same period of the previous year (DATATUR, 2018). The size and growth of the tourism sector has established its role as a stimulus for development (Torres García and Cruz Chávez, 2018). Benseny (2007) considers that Mexico enjoys a privileged position based on the wide availability of tourism choices such as archaeological tourism, sun and beach, cultural attractions, alternative tourism options, and so forth. Also, due to the geodiversity and biodiversity of Mexico, new market segments have been generated for tourism activities with alternatives to traditional tourism (Ibáñez and Rodríguez Villalobos, 2012).

Simultaneously, the growth of tourism attractions has brought other problems due to the increase in tourist arrivals at Mexico's different destinations. Development of new tourism destinations has brought negative effects in many areas. There is evidence, in the words of Torres García and Cruz Chávez (2018), of "fundamental problems such as the increase of migration, poverty, marginalization of classes, pollution, privatization of recreational spaces, insecurity, and the degradation of public health" that accompany new tourism developments. Ibáñez and Rodríguez Villalobos (2012) cite negative effects on the environment such as, "the urbanization of natural areas or not integrated into the landscape, overutilization of water resources, problems related to the treatment of solid waste, water pollution, destruction of historic monuments, air pollution from the use of vehicles and heating, changes in the landscape to favor leisure activities such as golf or skiing, etc." However, despite criticisms of tourism activity due to adverse impacts on the environment (Jiménez, 2005) and human wellbeing (Castro, 2006), tourism has increased in Mexico. The problems derived from tourism activity are global (Cruz Reyes, 2006)

Baja California Sur

Baja California Sur (BCS) has five municipalities with 712,029 inhabitants in 2015, 50.44% are men and 49.56% are women. Most of the population is in Los Cabos, followed by La Paz, while Loreto has the smallest population with only 18,912 inhabitants (Table 6-1). BCS is the second least populated state of Mexico.

Table 6-1. Municipal Population of Baja California Sur, 2015

Municipality	Total Population
Comondú	72,564
Mulegé	60,171
La Paz	272,711
Los Cabos	287,671
Loreto	18,912

Source: INEGI, México en Cifras, 2015.

The state's economy is dominated by the tertiary sector at around 67.7% of total economic activity and much of that is related to tourism. The tourism infrastructure and structure of the state includes four international airports and 416 temporary lodging facilities with 23,876 rooms or 3.10 % of total rooms in the entire country. Baja California Sur has 775 restaurants (1.54% of the national total) and 175 establishments for the preparation of food and beverages such as bars, nightclubs, discotheques, among others (SIIMC, 2017). Leading tourism attractions are in Table 6-2.

Table 6-2. Some BCS Tourist Attractions

Landmark or Attraction	Location
Magical Towns*	Loreto Todos Santos
Important tourist attractions	San Javier Mission Coronado Island Magdalena Bay Loreto Bay Port of La Paz
World Heritage Sites (UNESCO)	Sierra de San Francisco rock paintings (1993) El Vizcaíno whale sanctuary (1993) Gulf of California islands and protected areas (2005)

*The Magical Towns program is an initiative led by [Mexico's Secretariat of Tourism](#) and other federal agencies, to promote a series of towns around the country that offer visitors a "magical" experience – by reason of their natural beauty, cultural richness, traditions, folklore, historical relevance, cuisine, art crafts, and outstanding hospitality.
Source: SECTUR, 2014a and 2014 b.

Loreto

Loreto is the municipality with the smallest population, but it has grown significantly since 1995. According to INEGI, five-year increases from 1995 to 2000 are 19%; from 2000 to 2005 the growth was 23%; from 2005 to 2010 growth totaled 41.38%; and, finally, from 2010 to 2015 population increase was 12.99%. The population increase in the 1995-2015 period was 89.39%. This growth is partly due to planned tourism developments in the area and the arrival of residents of foreign nationality (Lampl and Sweedler, 2007, in Ganster et al., 2007).

The municipality has extensive natural resources concentrated along the coastline. The main aquifer of San Juan Londó is critical for the tourism development of the area (SECTUR, 2014b; Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2017).

The natural capital of Loreto is vast and includes a Natural Protected Area and Ramsar Sites (Table 6-3). The first concept refers to areas that

due to their eco geographic characteristics; flora and fauna species; environmental goods and services such as aquifer recharge, oxygen generation, improvement of air quality, climate regulation, and presence of recreation areas,, make their preservation essential (Secretaría del Medio Ambiente, 2019). The Ramsar sites are areas that have been recognized internationally by assigning them a designation according to the criteria established by the “Convention Relating to Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat” (Ramsar convencion), an international treaty of which Mexico is part (Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas, 2016).

The Loreto Bay National Park has been a national park since 1996, a Ramsar Site since 2004, and a UNESCO world heritage since 2005 Additional Ramsar sites in the region are the Sierra de La Giganta Oasis and the Los Comondú Wetland. Of the three Ramsar sites, only Los Comondú has a formal management plan.

Table 6-3. Ramsar sites in Loreto, Baja California Sur

Site	Location	Surface Area (hectares)	Admission Date
Loreto Bay National Park	Loreto	206,581	02-02-2004
Sierra de La Giganta Oasis	Loreto	41,181	02-02-2008
Los Comondú Wetlands	Comondú-Loreto	460,959	02-02-2008
	Total	708,721	

Fuente: Self elaboration with data of CONANP, 2018.

INEGI’s National Statistical Directory of Economic Units lists 1,016 economic units in the municipality of Loreto (INEGI, Base de datos) (Table 6-4). Of these, 90% are located in the town of Loreto, which is now denominated as a “Pueblo Mágico”. These units are mainly trade/commerce businesses (34.91%). Only 5.60% are lodging, car rental, travel agencies, and tourist transportation.

Table 6-4. Economic Units of Loreto

Activity	Economic Units
Loreto municipality	1,016
Loreto town	911
Lodging	20
Car rental	4
Travel agencies	6
Campsites and recreational lodging	2
Boardinghouses and B&Bs/guest houses	4
Tourist transportation by water	10
Tourist transportation by land	1
Motels	4
Trade/Commerce	318

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from DENU (2018).

Despite the number and types of economic units concentrated in Loreto, this integrally planned center has not had an adequate level of growth (Dávila López, 2014; Mendoza Ontiveros and González Sosa, 2014) in comparison with its counterpart in the state, the Los Cabos Integrally Planned Center. Although Loreto “has been promoted internationally and the infrastructure of the destination has increased, this has not achieved the objectives for which it was created as a tourist destination” (Montaño Armendáriz, 2014). De Sicilia (2000) attributes this to “the strategies of planning, location, distribution of economic resources, and the lack of continuity in the projects in Loreto” (Ibáñez Pérez et al., 2018).

Tourism in the Region

Loreto was named a Magical Town in 2012 (SNIEGT, 2016). The location and characteristics of Loreto allow it to develop tourism because it has stretches of beaches and other attractive natural areas. The greater region includes estuaries on the Pacific Ocean, the “El Azufre”

volcano, and the Sierra de La Giganta with an area of 3,198 km² (Secretary of Tourism of the State of BCS, 2014b; CONABIO, 2013).

Table 6-5 provides information on hotel and tourism in Loreto for 2015 and 2016. Importantly, hotel occupancy increased 27.3% between 2015 and 2016. During this same period, both domestic and international tourism increased, with the largest growth in international arrivals. In terms of total numbers, national tourism was nearly twice that of international tourism in 2015 and in 2016.

Table 6-5. Hotel Activity in the Municipality of Loreto

CONCEPT	2015 Annual	2016 Annual	% Var. 2016/2015
Rooms available	897	876	-2.4%
Arrival of tourists to hotel	84,226	107,218	27.3%
National tourists	59,953	69,657	16.2%
International tourists	24,273	37,561	54.7%
% Occupation	24.5	30.9	6.4%
National tourists	11.6	14.3	2.7%
International tourists	12.9	16.6	3.7%
Passengers on flights	30,915	37,223	20.4%
National	9,898	11,815	19.4%
International	21,017	25,408	20.9%
International visitors	23,332	26,529	13.7%
Passengers on cruise ships	25,045	17,693	-29.4%

Source: Anuario Estadístico y Geográfico de Baja California Sur (2016)

Loreto contrasts with Los Cabos, San José, and the Los Cabos Corridor, where international tourism dominates as indicated in Table 6-6. La Paz, however, had some 90 percent of its tourists from Mexico in 2015. Loreto tourists had the lowest average length of stay in the same period, with 1.3 nights per Mexico resident tourist and 3.1 from abroad. The longest stays were for Cabo San Lucas, with 6.1 nights per tourist of foreign origin. The preference of Loreto tourists was for low-cost establishments or of one star rating.

Table 6-6. Main Indicators of Occupancy in Hotels and Motels in Tourist Centers by Residence (2015)

	Tourist Center and Tourist Origin	Arrival #	Tourist Nights	Hotel Occupancy Rate %	Average Stay (nights per tourist)
	Cabo San Lucas	812,976	4,452,414	75.9	5.5
	Mexican residents	189,627	680,162	11.6	3.6
	Non-residents	623,349	3,772,252	64.3	6.1
	La Paz	330,180	594,144	42.5	1.8
	Mexican residents	297,820	520,703	37.3	1.8
	Non-residents	32,360	73,441	5.3	2.3
	Loreto	84,226	151,176	24.5	1.8
	Mexican residents	59,953	75,010	11.6	1.3
	Non-residents	24,273	76,166	12.9	3.1
	San José del Cabo	284,786	1,281,508	63.6	4.5
	Mexican residents	102,371	370,704	18.8	3.6
	Non-residents	182,415	910,804	44.8	5.0
	Corredor Los Cabos	133,653	643,811	56.8	4.8
	Mexican residents	24,462	86,552	7.9	3.5
	Non-residents	109,191	557,259	48.9	5.1

Note: The information includes tourists who stayed in categories five, four, three, two, and one star.

Source: Recovered from SECTUR. Monitoreo Data Tur. www.datatur.sectur.gob.mx.

According to the study carried out in the Loreto Competitiveness Agenda (SECTUR 2014b), this Magic Town does have the capacity to meet the needs of its tourist influx. It has marinas, an international airport, sufficient hotel capacity, and tourism service providers.

Within the municipality of Loreto, there are a number of leading tourism activities. These include visits to cave paintings, the historic center of the Magic Town, traditional beach destinations, and missions located throughout the region. The reconstructed mission church and complex in Loreto town is the most visited although nearby San Javier with its

beautiful 18th century mission structure and traditional town is a favorite site for visitors to the region. The mission sites at San Juan Bautista Ligüi and San Juan Bautista Londó are also of interest. The Bahía de Loreto National Park is also a principal tourism attraction with boating, sport fishing, whale watching, visits to the islands, and snorkeling and scuba as common activities.

According to the Instituto Nacional de Ecología y Cambio Climático (INEEC), together with SEMARNAT, the following are some of the main challenges that the Bay of Loreto National Park faces (Arizpe Covarrubias et al., 2018; Comisión Nacional de Áreas Protegidas, 2002):

- Overexploitation of fishing resources, plundering activities of species under some protection and fossil deposits, fishing and exploitation of banned resources, use and exploitation of the federal maritime terrestrial area;
- Impact on surrounding vegetation, creation of new trails, introduction of non-native species, and organic contamination by feces; and
- Exceeding daily limits of recreational sport fishing and the development of commercial fishing without authorization.

There are no official data regarding the number of visitors in the state's natural protected areas. Therefore, the economic assessment and environmental damage at the statistical level as a positive correlation is based on the databases of some specific projects (SEMARNAT, 2013). In this sense, these estimates project the dynamics of recreational activities carried out in natural protected areas, which focus on recreational and leisure activities in the ecosystem, and include kayaking, hiking, rappelling, observation of flora and fauna, and camping.

Conclusion

Tourism has undoubtedly been the engine of economic growth in Baja California Sur. Not only has it influenced the level of economic growth, but also it has generated population expansion. The greatest economic benefit is concentrated in the southern part of the state, specifically in Los Cabos and La Paz.

Such is the importance of tourism that just the categories of temporary lodging and preparation of food and beverages represent between 10% and 18% on average of the state GDP. The tertiary sector contributes between 70% and 75% of the state GDP. State and federal policies and programs support tourism, but there is no controlled growth. Uncontrolled growth, together with poor compliance regarding regulations for natural protected areas, produce negative effects can affect the natural, cultural, and historical patrimony of Baja California Sur.

In terms tourism, alternative tourism does need a periodic assessment (SECTUR, CONANP, SEMARNAT, others), not only in terms of tourist flows, but also for economic impacts and access to the NPA or natural reserves. In relation to conventional tourism that is characterized by large flows of tourists and in the creation of tourism infrastructure, the effects on residents or perceptions of residents on tourism have not been studied.

A key recommendation of this study is to track the influx of tourists into the NPAs, reserves, and cultural heritage sites. This would not be measured by the collection of fees, but through actual access to the area. It would also include periodic study of environmental conditions. It is also recommended to investigate the perceptions of the state inhabitants regarding some variables related to tourism such as economic, social, and cultural benefits; adverse effects; and tourist perceptions, among others. In this way, the information on environmental damage can be contrasted with the perceptions of the individuals. In the first instance, this can be used to determine the areas of public policy that need to be strengthened to ensure compliance with existing legislation. This also provides insights on perspectives of inhabitants regarding tourism and invites social and educational intervention with regard to the effects on cultural, natural, and historical capital. This would permit development of tourism activities without negatively altering the ecosystem and the social dynamics or the region. Importantly, various authors have concluded (Brown, 1997; Meadows et al., 1992) that the actions of human beings and of the social and cultural systems are behind the vast majority of environmental problems.

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