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Part 3

Turning now to the issue of the effect of environmental issues on tourism. Of course, a major concern is the problem of global warming, which is likely to have a great many implications for tourism. Researchers like Braithwaite, Leiper and Witsel point out that not enough attention is paid to the transit route to tourism destinations. If destinations can be sustained, many people assume that tourism must be sustainable. But this assumption is rather misleading. We shouldn't forget the effect of transit routes – remember that component of the tourism system that I mentioned earlier – when deciding what impact tourism has on the environment.

So, how serious a problem is global warming? First of all, there is no question that the Earth is heating up. We have to accept the evidence, such as the rise in temperatures, the melting of the polar ice caps, the changing patterns in the habits of wildlife and so on. But the real question is: is global warming the result of human activity? Some people claim, even some scientists have said, that it's nothing to do with humankind; it's the result of natural phenomena such as sunspots or volcano activity. But I'm afraid that just isn't true. It's quite clear that global warming is the direct result of human activity – especially business activity.

Within that, travel and tourism have a lot to answer for. Most of the research into global warming has concluded that the burning of fossil fuels is what is responsible. The evidence for this lies in the fact that there is a clear, positive correlation between the increase in the presence of CO₂ in the atmosphere and the rise in the Earth's temperature.

So, if business is the cause, then business will have to be a part of the solution. Although some people may continue to claim that climate change is inevitable, what seems obvious is that business must play a key role trying to improve a dangerous situation – dangerous for the entire human race.

What's more, of course, we can see other threats to the environment from pollution, waste, and so on, many of which derive directly from the activities of tourism and hospitality. As everyone is aware, emissions from the airline industry or other forms of transport can damage both human and animal health, as well as the environment generally. Waste disposal is becoming an evermore serious problem, too. A lot of waste is generated by hotels, resorts, theme parks, festivals and the like. It's just not possible any more to put all our rubbish in a hole in the ground. Attitudes to waste – not just from industrial processes but also waste from the service industries – need to change radically.

When we look at environmental concerns such as these, the big question is: how are we going to manage these problems? What strategies need to be put into place to help control CO₂ emissions, pollution and waste disposal? To some degree, as I've said, business must take responsibility for what is happening and must do something about it. This means, ultimately, that businesses and tourists must bear the costs of the changes that are necessary. Studies being carried out worldwide are looking at the footprint we are leaving behind and what can be done to minimize it. In tourism and hospitality, for instance, a lot of research has been done into building environmentally friendly accommodation.

On the other hand, rather than being a threat, perhaps we should think about whether environmental issues actually offer business something positive, too. Can tourism actually benefit from the steps which will be needed? We could argue that possible environmental solutions offer many opportunities. For example, environmental consultants can use their knowledge to advise operators; companies can develop environmental initiatives which appeal to consumers, ranging from environmentally friendly accommodation to restaurants serving only organic food. Other low-impact measures such as recycling may actually result in lower business costs.

Now, I'm going to set you a task which will involve investigating some of the points I've raised. I want you to do some research into which areas of tourism and hospitality might actually be able to benefit from the changes which are going to be necessary for the environment. I want you to focus, firstly, on some of the new plans, methods and technologies for dealing with environmental problems, with respect to the environmental categories I've mentioned – global warming, pollution and waste – and in the context of tourism and hospitality. Secondly, I'd like you to think about whether these methods and plans to save the environment could actually benefit tourism businesses in the future or whether they will mainly affect them in a negative way.