

Hot topic: Tourism

1. Collect some photos or postcards of tourists doing typical touristy things, such as sunbathing, scuba-diving, riding camels, windsurfing, etc. Before showing the photos, ask learners to work in small groups (3 or 4) and brainstorm the kind of things that tourists do on holiday. Tell them to make a list. Set a time limit. When the time limit is up, show them your photos. Ask how many groups wrote down the things that were in the photos. What other things did the groups write down?

2. There are three options for following up the first step:

Option A: Distribute, or read aloud, this news text, and ask the learners to note the tourist activities that are mentioned:

Six days after one of the worst natural disasters in decades, foreign tourists were back on the beaches of Thailand last Saturday, frolicking in the waves, riding jet skis, posing for snapshots and sunbathing topless on the sand.

That was intolerable for one island resident, a Swede who lives on the island with her Thai husband.

"I just think that, if everyone spends about an hour of their holiday time to help clean up, this would help a lot for the locals," she said, as she swept away debris.

But she agreed that the sooner the tourists return the sooner her husband's sailing business will be able to start making money again.

Tourists are the lifeblood of Phuket, and this is the peak tourist season.

Option B: Read aloud or dictate this sentence from the text, and ask learners to try and work out the context:

"I just think that, if everyone spends about an hour of their holiday time to help clean up, this would help a lot for the locals," she said, as she swept away debris.

Then hand out, or read aloud, the complete text.

Option C: a number of news websites feature photos of this or similar scenes. If you can access these photos and project them, this will save using the text. In which case, you can ask the learners to describe the photos and to speculate as to where and when they were taken. Then dictate the Swedish woman's quote (from Option B).

3. Organise the class into small groups – say four or five students per group. Appoint a chair and a spokesperson in each group. Write on the board the following:

- the tourists
- the Swedish woman
- the Swedish woman's Thai husband

Ask the students to work in their groups and explain, in English, the point of view of each person or group and say whose point of view they agree with.

4. Ask the spokespersons to summarise the views of each group to the class. Depending on the degree of interest aroused, you could let this turn into an open class discussion, exploiting any contrasting views and opinions, by asking questions such as “Why do you think that?” and feeding in questions at strategic points, such as:

- Shouldn't tourists be made to help with the clean up?
- Should tourists be allowed to return to disaster zones, while relief efforts are still in progress?
- Have the recent images of grieving tourists (the tsunami, the Bali bombings, etc) exposed the negative side of tourism and its risks?
- And haven't the images of tourists sunbathing in the debris exposed the basic selfishness of tourism?
- Should countries be encouraged to rely so much on tourism that it takes a single disaster (natural or otherwise) to seriously damage their economy (as in the case of Thailand after the tsunami, or of Indonesia or Egypt after terrorist attacks)?
- Are some countries not so much dependent on – but *addicted to* – tourism?
- Doesn't tourism do more harm than good, especially in the developing world, where the needs and traditions of the local people are ignored or trivialised?
- Has touristic imagery – such as palm-lined beaches, sunbathers, etc – distorted western ideas of developing countries, and blinded tourists to the reality behind the facade?
- Do the recent natural disasters plus terrorist attacks spell the end of tourism as we know it?
- Should the only form of tourism that is allowed (in the developing world, at least) be in the form of volunteer service and aid work?
- Should you have to get a licence to be a tourist?

You can “soften” these questions by using the following “frames”:

I read somewhere that... What did the writer mean by that? Do you agree?

Some people say that... What do you think?

There is a point of view that says that...

One controversial suggestion is that... How would you respond to that?

Note: When running a class discussion, it's worthwhile to try and keep it safe. Some hot topics can boil over. Here are some ground rules for the discussion so as to avoid it becoming too emotive or personal. For example,

- Try to ensure everyone can see and hear you when you speak (In a big class this may mean standing up).
- Only one person can speak at a time.
- Ask permission to speak.
- Use people's names (not *She/You said...* but *Marta said...*)
- If in doubt, ask people to clarify what they meant.
- Be prepared to clarify what *you* meant.
- Don't pretend that you speak for everyone: use *I* rather than *we*.
- Avoid generalisations of the type *Everyone knows that...*
- Speak in English, unless given permission by the group to speak in your own language.

5. Alternatively, write all or some of the above questions on to cards and distribute a pack of question cards to each group of four or five learners. They discuss one question at a time, placing the "used" cards at the bottom of the pack. If a question doesn't interest them, it can go straight to the bottom of the pack. They should be prepared to summarise their discussion to the rest of the class.

6. Pick up on the theme of a "tourist licence" – analogous to a drivers licence, or a firearm licence – and ask learners to devise a "test" which potential tourists would have to pass to visit a) their own country b) a developing country, such as Thailand or Egypt. This could take the form of general knowledge questions, hypothetical questions (What would you do if...?), questions about a person's previous tourist "record" and their touristic "qualifications", and questions about purposes and motivation.

7. The test that each group devises could then be trialled in a role play situation, where members of different groups "interview" one another. Some of these interviews could be performed to the whole class.

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