

Experiential Camp - Iceland

Iceland is a new niche tourism destination market, geographically located at the 'edge of the world' in the North Atlantic between North America and Europe. It has recently seen an exponential growth in tourism over the last 10 years. It has an extremely small population of just 320,000 residents, consequently this massive growth in tourism has presented many challenges to its economic, social and environmental fabric. It has always struggled to survive economically and suffered a major economic disaster in 2008 with the world financial crisis, as a result the Icelandic economy collapsed entirely. In 2010 the famous volcano Eyjafjallajökull erupted stopping all air traffic in the North Atlantic for 4 days, this natural disaster put Iceland firmly in the imaginations of tourists through global news reports. Tourism had always been part of the economy but as a minor industry, fishing being the dominant economic resource. Since 2008 tourism has exponentially grown and has now over 1.2 million tourists (2016) visiting Iceland. As noted earlier, the pressures are immense from this tourist growth and the Icelandic Government and Tourist Board are trying to establish policies to ensure a sustainable growth of tourism, but currently are not succeeding.

The geography and landscape of the Iceland is seen as its primary attraction (70% come to Iceland for Nature) it has 30 active volcanoes and is entirely made from volcanic rock. However, the Icelandic Culture is unique and has many mystical and cultural attributes that contribute to the tourist experience as well. In fact, the UNESCO heritage site of [Pingvellir National Park - Visit Iceland](http://www.visiticeland.com/things-to-do/national-parks-in.../ThingvellirNationalPark) was designated because of the cultural landscape rather than just its physical attribute, although this too is seen as important, as Iceland is located on the two continental plates of America and Europe and the Pingvellir National park stands on these two continental plates.

Iceland has 3 of national parks and these are part of an ongoing debate and strategy to designate the 'Highlands' as one single national park. The accelerated growth of tourism has raised many issues relating to supply of accommodation and supporting facilities and there is continued pressure on the environment which although volcanic and appears barren has an extremely fragile ecosystem which tourism is now threatening to degrade. The extreme northern part of Iceland is also within the Arctic Circle and therefore has connections with the development of wilderness and arctic tourism which too is now under pressure from tourism.

Within the teaching of this module the four pillars of Global Sustainability Tourism Criteria will be used as a model to evaluate the impact that tourism is having on Iceland and assist in trying to construct a number of models and strategies to manage the current exponential growth in tourism.