



# CARBON MANAGEMENT IN TOURISM

MITIGATING THE IMPACTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

STEFAN GÖSSLING

# Carbon Management in Tourism

Mitigating the impacts on climate change

Stefan Gössling



First published 2011  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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Typeset in Times New Roman by Swales & Willis Ltd, Exeter, Devon  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International Ltd,  
Padstow, Cornwall

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-415-56632-2 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-56633-9 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-86152-3 (ebk)



## Preface

The final chapters of this book were written in the months after the December 2009 UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen (Conference of Parties 15), which ended as a failure, largely due to the refusal of the Chinese government to accept any binding global reduction targets for climate mitigation – even if these targets were set by other countries or regions, such as the European Union (EU), and only comprised these countries' or regions' own emissions. Despite observations of climate-related ongoing changes in the environment, and increasingly urgent warnings by key climate scientists, national interests and a new wave of 'climate scepticism' have dominated rational action to find a solution to what is one of the most important long-term problems of our time: limiting climate change on global average to a maximum warming of 2 °C by 2100 compared to pre-industrial levels.

It is not too difficult to see why there is reluctance to engage in mitigation: in the USA, the country solely responsible for about a quarter of global emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG), ambitions by the Obama administration to initiate significant cuts in emissions have stopped short in Congress, where the country's industrial lobby has exerted considerable pressure to counter what is (correctly) perceived as a threat to the emission-intense US-American lifestyle. The same lobbyists are also involved in various actions to question and discredit climate science – a process supported by a conflict-hungry media – leading parts of the population to believe that there is no scientific consensus on climate change as a phenomenon, and uncertainty regarding its human causes. In China, the country responsible for another quarter of global GHG emissions, the past ten years have seen unprecedented economic growth. The Chinese government, keen on leapfrogging a large and often impoverished population to economic prosperity, has been keen to outline that per capita emissions are still moderate in the country and that, in historical terms, China has been a negligible contributor to the problem. One might add that a considerable share of the country's current emissions is a result of production for industrial countries.

This leaves the world with a challenge: there is consensus that warming beyond 2 °C, often defined as the level that constitutes 'dangerous interference with the climate system', will be largely detrimental to humanity, but there is no willingness to initiate measures that will significantly cut emissions of greenhouse gases. The EU is so far the only region in the world with binding emission reduction targets, even though many states within the USA

and Canada envisage making cuts in their own emissions. Moreover, a number of emission-intensive countries have announced ambitions to reduce emissions on a voluntary basis. The Stern Review (2006) and other studies have shown that in the long run, mitigation is less costly than non-action, and the refusal of many countries to join a global agreement on binding mitigation goals would strike many as a paradox, particularly as even far-reaching measures to decarbonize the global economy would only cost a fraction of what it has cost to address the global financial crisis. Again, an explanation could be that many actors seem to think that adaptation to climate change is a more viable alternative to deal with the problem, notably postponing action to the future, and possibly leading humanity on a path to geo-engineering, i.e. the manipulation of global biogeochemical systems. This opens up a new dimension of risk, possibly on a scale never experienced before by humanity, as the consequences of changing global systems as well as the limits to adaptation are not well understood (see e.g. Trick *et al.* 2010). A rational conclusion is that mitigation based on reducing energy use and the development of renewable energies needs to be a key priority.

Reducing emissions at the speed required to stay within safe limits of climate change is an enormous task, however, demanding far-reaching changes in the way economic systems operate, the degree of innovation and restructuring needed, as well as the lifestyle choices made. While the global economy might actually profit from massive investment in green technologies, unleashing a new cycle of more sustainable growth, it will be far more difficult to change lifestyles. Tourism and leisure in particular will be central elements in this endeavour, as relaxation, experiences of new cultures and environments, and visiting friends and relations are powerful elements in contemporary lifestyles. Moreover, tourism and travel are associated with strong emotions and belief systems, where cheap motorized private mobility has come to be understood as a basic human right in industrialized countries. At the same time, tourism is one of the main, or *the* main, source of individual emissions for a considerable share of humanity. This makes mitigation in tourism potentially difficult.

The idea for this book was born out of two major observations. First, in encounters with stakeholders of large and small tourism enterprises, there has often been an expression of deep scepticism regarding the seriousness of climate change and its relevance for tourism. Few stakeholders seem to wish to engage with the abstract concept of CO<sub>2</sub>, the main GHG responsible for climate change. While this is understandable from an organizational point of view – after all, there are already too many problems to be dealt with on a day-to-day basis – it is surprising that this disinterest also seems to comprise energy-related issues more generally: energy has essentially remained a non-issue in tourism, even though saving energy can entail considerable short-term profits. Hilton Worldwide, for instance, reports that energy management helped to reduce emissions by 15 per cent, corresponding to savings of US\$16 million in the period 2005–08. Many case studies in this book have shown similar potential for emission reductions that are entirely economical – in most cases a range of simple measures can cut 10–15 per cent from energy consumption. If savings can be this substantial, why is there not a greater interest in energy management in the global tourism industry?

Several explanations seem possible. Broadly speaking, energy use has remained a non-issue because it has been cheap – and humans only tend to preserve what is scarce and

expensive. More specifically, business management programmes have only recently taken an interest in environmental management, and graduates with a basic understanding of these issues have not as yet entered the decision-making ranks of the industry. In tourism businesses where more substantial pro-environmental management has occurred, for instance in the Scandic Hotel chain, this engagement has often been born out of the need for innovation and/or the environmental interest of top executives. For most players in tourism, however, energy and emissions remain issues of little interest and value: high energy use is even, in some businesses, seen as a sign of quality and potency, while climate change remains disregarded as a concept abstract in time and space.

This book argues that this perspective ought to change. Of the arguments presented to support this view, two might be particularly powerful. The first is economic: in mid-2008, oil prices reached a price of US\$147 per barrel, leading to considerable changes in the perception of energy as a cost factor, particularly in the aviation sector. Even though energy prices declined again to about US\$40 per barrel in autumn 2009, it seems clear that in the medium-term future, fossil fuels will become more costly again. Reducing energy use consequently means saving costs and increasing competitiveness. A second argument is that even though a global agreement on emission reductions has so far failed to materialize, the EU and some other countries have established emission reduction targets of their own. The UK has a legally binding national target for emission reductions. These developments are likely to lead to growing costs for mobility and energy-intensive activities – notably even for countries not seeking to reduce emissions: the EU's integration of aviation in its Emission Trading Scheme (EU ETS), for instance, will include international carriers as well. Businesses should thus prepare for tougher climate policy to emerge in the next decade. In summary, carbon management is an issue of economics in the short-term future, and an important adaptation process in the medium-term future. As always, forerunners are likely to have a competitive advantage in dealing with change.

This book is intended as a resource for students, academics and stakeholders in tourism. It provides a comprehensive introduction to a complex and often theoretical and abstract topic: carbon management. To facilitate reading and understanding, 33 'Carbon Management in Focus' case studies illustrate management pathways that have already been proved to work. Tourism is, currently, one of the least eco-efficient sectors in the world. *Carbon Management in Tourism* is intended to address this, with the ultimate goal to make the sector more competitive, innovative and profitable.

Many friends, colleagues and partners in industry have supported this book with their time, energy and advice. On the industry side, I am particularly thankful to Michaela Weitkamp, Aarnout Mijling, Angela Giraldo, Bård Huseby, Bart Otto, Bruno Peters, Dirk Heese, Dr Peter Brandauer, Gerd Deininger, Inger Mattsson, Jens Morawetz, Jörg Adler, Dirk Wewers, Karlyn Langjahr, Bertram Späth, Michael Liebert, Hans-Peter Christoph, Kati Ihmäki, Kristine Simonis, Laurent Le Breton, Lottie Knutson, Valere Tjolle, Manfred Kojan, Marie Malmros, Marion Heider, Mark de Bruin, Matthias Meier, Michael Grehl, Michael Schürch, Oliver Noppen, Pär Larshans, Paul Cooper, Rolf Pfeifer, Pascal Jenny, Edgar Meier, Simone Probst, Arnfinn Oines, Auden Schendler, Stefanie Hidde, Stephanie Schulze, Susi Zentner, Sybille Riedmiller, Thomas van den Groenendaal, Pascal Jenny,

Preben Byberg and Ute Linsbauer for providing me with information that has been essential input for the various case studies.

Among the colleagues that have helped to develop much of the knowledge this book is based on, I am particularly indebted to Wolfgang Strasdas, who has helped to identify the case studies and collected some of the material contained in the presentations, for which I am extremely grateful; Paul Peeters, who has patiently responded to a hundred requests for data, calculations and the latest update on all sorts of transport-related topics; Bernard Lane, who is an enormous resource within all areas of sustainable tourism development and always willing to share his knowledge; as well as the troika Michael Hall, Paul Peeters and Daniel Scott, with whom I have written more articles in recent years than with anyone else. Most of this book is based on this work.

I also owe many other colleagues for their support, suggestions, critical assessments, ideas and friendship, including, in alphabetical order, Carlo Aall, Ralf Buckley, Susanne Becken, Robert Bockermann, Paulina Bohdanowicz, Petra Bollich, Dietrich Brockhagen, John Broderick, Jean-Paul Ceron, Tim Coles, Janet Dickinson, Ghislain Dubois, Alain Dupeyras, Eke Eijgelaar, Frida Ekström, Elin Eriksson, Warwick Frost, Mathias Gößling, Roger Graf, Johan Hultman, Karl Georg Høyer, Marcell Kästner, Jennifer Laing, Lone Lamark, Leslie Lumdson, Michael Lück, Chris Lyle, Dagmar Lund-Durlacher, Jan Henrik Nilsson, Romain Molitor, Shuna Marr, Karmen Mentil, Sabine Minninger, Jörn W. Mundt, Jamie Murphy, Rolph Payet, Helena Rey, Brent Ritchie, Murray Simpson, Paul Upham, David Weaver, Emma Whittlesea and Andreas Zotz. I am also indebted to all those colleagues who make my different working environments liveable places – Agnes Landstad, Agnes Brudvik Engeset, Marte Lange Vik, Eivind Brendehaug, Otto Andersen, Erling Holden, Ståle Brandshaug, Ivar Petter Grøtte, Eli Heiberg, Idun Husabø, Guttorm Flatabø, Christer Eldh, Erika Andersson Cederholm, Richard Ek, Hervé Corvellec, Katarina Zambrell, Per Pettersson-Löfquist, Hans Wessblad, Christer Foghagen, Maxmikael Björling, Anneli Andersson, Hartmut Rein, Holger Lütters and Dörte Beyer. Agnes Landstad and Katarina Zambrell supported me with funds to employ assistants, without which I could not have managed to finish this book in time. Malin Jonell has done a superb job in collecting material for the case studies and copy-editing the material, and has later on been supported by Karin Froms-Andersson. I am also extremely grateful to Emma Travis for her very efficient, personal and professional support at Routledge, and Faye Leerink for efficiently managing the production process. My sincere thanks to all of you.

In concluding this preface, I wish to express my deepest gratitude and love to Linnea and Meike Rinsche, because much of the time invested in this book should have been yours. This book is yours, Linnea, and that of your generation. It is all I can do to address our wastefulness of this planet.

Berlin, Helsingborg, Kalmar & Sogndal, March 2010  
Stefan Gössling



# Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	ix
<i>List of tables</i>	xi
<i>List of carbon management in focus case studies</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
1 Travel, tourism and carbon management	1
2 Climate change mitigation: reasons for advocacy	6
3 Climate change: the physical basis	14
4 Climate change mitigation	28
5 Tourism and climate change	62
6 Trends in emissions from tourism	84
7 Understanding emission growth in tourism	95
8 Mitigation: systemic considerations for restructuring	101
9 Mitigation: technology	110
10 Mitigation: management	154
11 Mitigation: education	245
12 Mitigation: behavioural change	265



13	Mitigation: politics and research	277
14	Planning for change, exploring innovation	290
	<i>Glossary</i>	295
	<i>References</i>	311
	<i>Index</i>	336

# Figures

1.1	International tourist arrivals 1950–2020	1
1.2	Geographical overview of case study locations	3
2.1	Crude oil prices 1869–2009	9
2.2	Fuel costs as part of worldwide operating cost	10
3.1	Growth in emissions of GHGs, and distribution by sector	15
3.2	Radiative forcing in 2005	17
3.3	Aviation radiative forcing components in 2005	18
3.4	Fossil fuel CO <sub>2</sub> emissions (GtC per year)	21
3.5	Reconstructed temperatures and projected temperature increases	25
4.1	Emission reduction pathways in relation to emission peaks	29
4.2	Emission reductions achieved at various cost levels and in bottom-up versus top-down approaches	30
4.3	GHG emissions in comparison to population	42
4.4	Changes in GHG emissions 1990–2007 excluding LULUCF	44
4.5	EU aviation business as usual emissions growth scenario and ETS proposed emission caps for 2012 and 2020	53
4.6	International shipping CO <sub>2</sub> emission scenarios	57
4.7	Number of organizations commencing voluntary carbon offset sales, 1991–2006	58
5.1	The emergence of climate change as an issue for tourism	62
5.2	Direct and indirect sources of CO <sub>2</sub> from tourism and travel	67
5.3	World tourism transport volume by mode, 2005	72
5.4	World tourism passenger kilometre volume by mode, 2005	72
5.5	CO <sub>2</sub> emissions by tourism transport, 2005	73
5.6	Energy use in hotels and pubs in the UK	77
6.1	EU emission reduction targets and aviation emissions	86
6.2	Global CO <sub>2</sub> emission pathways versus unrestricted tourism emissions growth	87
6.3	Relationship between air traveller and trip number shares	91
6.4	Long-distance flights made by tourism academic 1983–2009	92
6.5	Development of travel distances and flight numbers, tourism academic	93

6.6	CO <sub>2</sub> emissions of various journeys, 2005	93
7.1	Screen shot of Pet Airways website	99
8.1	Scenarios of CO <sub>2</sub> mitigation potential from global tourism in 2035	103
8.2	Relationship between trips and transport related emissions of CO <sub>2</sub>	105
8.3	Average emissions for various journeys per passenger and day	106
8.4	Eco-efficiency by source market for Amsterdam, 2002	107
8.5	Energy use per Norwegian crown	109
9.1	Historic and expected future trends in fuel efficiency for aircraft	112
9.2	Fleet weighted and seat density corrected average energy consumption per skm (MJ) in 2007	112
9.3	Energy intensity of intercity trains (kWh per skm)	119
9.4	Energy loss for cold production	131
9.5	Schematic overview of SWAC system	132
9.6	Technical details of SWAC system	133
9.7	Energy use in Hotel Victoria	145
10.1	Energy benchmarking, Dehoga	171
10.2	Carbon-labelling of foods on illuminated displays, Max hamburgare	175
10.3	Example of booking information provided by Cheaptickets	187
10.4	Average per customer flight distance in km	190
10.5	Emissions per customer per day in kg CO <sub>2</sub> -eq	190
10.6	Resort destination energy consumption and emission model	206
10.7	Lake Constance and surrounding regions	218
10.8	Total carbon footprint for counties in the South West of England, 2006 (t CO <sub>2</sub> )	227
10.9	Per visitor day carbon footprint for counties in the South West of England, 2006 (kg CO <sub>2</sub> )	228
10.10	South West England carbon footprint per visitor day (kg CO <sub>2</sub> )	228
10.11	System dynamics model and input data	231
10.12	Emissions caused by a flight from New York to Toyko	242
11.1	Climate account statement	252
11.2	Energy label for white appliances (left-hand side, from Sweden) and an emission label for cars (right-hand side, from Ireland)	253
11.3	Energy rating used in Australia	254
11.4	Lightbulb energy indicator	255
11.5	Emissions caused by flights from Germany to Spain/Costa Rica	256
11.6	Flybe environment label	259
11.7	Optimized carbon label (proximate values)	260
11.8	Screenshot of Finnair's carbon calculator	261
11.9	Facility performance report generated by IBLF/ITP BenchmarkHotel	263
12.1	Information on water use	272
12.2	Quiz based on principles by The Natural Step	272
12.3	Tips for responsible housekeeping	273
12.4	Energy key performance indicator table, Hilton Hotels	274
13.1	Plans for extensions of the Chinese train system to 2020	284
13.2	Per capita emissions in Caribbean islands	285

# Tables

4.1	Greenhouse gas emissions by country	31
4.2	Countries as grouped under the Kyoto Protocol	37
4.3	Base year emissions and reduction commitments in the period 2008–2012	38
4.4	Quantified economy-wide emission targets for 2020, Annex I Parties	39
4.5	Non-Kyoto carbon markets	45
4.6	Total quantities of Kyoto Protocol units for Annex B Parties as at 31 December 2008, Mt CO <sub>2</sub> -eq	48
4.7	Emission reduction targets and suggested action in aviation	54
4.8	Summary of GHG emissions from shipping during 2007	56
4.9	Principles of credibility and efficiency	59
4.10	Types of credits in the voluntary markets	60
5.1	Distribution of emissions from tourism by sub-sector	66
5.2	Contribution of tourism to radiative forcing, 2005	67
5.3	Approximate tourism volumes, 2005	68
5.4	Emission factors for tourism transport modes in the EU context	69
5.5	Interrelationships between transport and emissions, 2005	70
5.6	Energy use in accommodation	74
5.7	Estimated global average energy use by type of accommodation	77
5.8	Number of trips, guest nights and CO <sub>2</sub> emissions from tourism accommodation, 2005	78
5.9	Energy use for activities	79
5.10	Emissions involved in transporting various foodstuffs to Germany	83
6.1	Scenario assumptions, travel framework conditions	84
6.2	Model assumptions: efficiency	85
6.3	Emissions in 2005 and 2035, business-as-usual	85
7.1	Energy use associated with different comfort classes	96
8.1	Distribution of trips, pkm and GHG emissions for distances classes, EU25 outbound tourism	104
8.2	Leisure consumption by people living in Norway in 2001	108

9.1	Assessment of potential reduction of CO <sub>2</sub> emissions from shipping by using known technology and practice	117
9.2	Environmental impact of travelling 1,000 km by train in Sweden, compared to other transport modes	119
9.3	Emissions from various sources, Evason Phuket	123
9.4	Benchmark of key emission indicators, Six Senses Thailand	125
9.5	Total energy requirements for producing bottled water (MJ per litre)	135
9.6	Additional measures leading to reduced energy use and emissions	146
9.7	2006 and 2007 fuel consumption, costs and emissions, Aspen Skiing	150
10.1	Energy and emissions monitoring	172
10.2	Carbon content of various foods offered at Max	176
10.3	Recommendations for climatically sustainable food management	178
10.4	Emissions caused by various train trips from Sweden	199
10.5	Energy and greenhouse gas projections	207
10.6	Energy and greenhouse gas emissions including transportation	208
10.7	Matrix emission inventory	209
10.8	Emissions associated with different transport choices	211
10.9	Willingness to take personal action to reduce the environmental impact of air travel	237
10.10	Offset providers and key criteria, 2008	244
11.1	Perceptions of environmental impact of (air) travel and tourism	246
11.2	Examples of carbon calculators	261
13.1	Support for policies to reduce the environmental impact of air travel	281
13.2	Energy characteristics of island tourism, 2005	286
13.3	Market structure and emissions ratio	287

# Carbon management in focus case studies

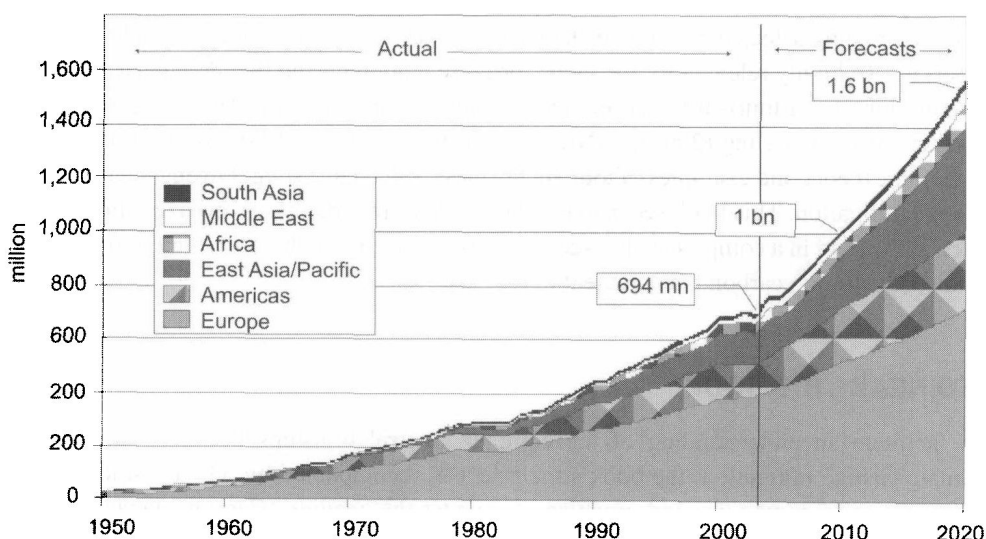
1	Evason Phuket & Six Senses Spa, Thailand: Comprehensive carbon management	120
2	Coral Lodge 15.41, Mozambique: Reducing energy for air conditioning	128
3	Pacific Beachcomber S.C., French Polynesia: Sea Water Air Conditioning to minimize energy use	130
4	Scandic Hotels, Sweden: Phasing out bottled water	135
5	Chumbe Island, Zanzibar, Tanzania: Low-energy solar-powered small-scale accommodation	139
6	Hotel Victoria, Freiburg, Germany: Achieving zero-carbon accommodation	142
7	Aspen, Colorado, USA: Achieving CO <sub>2</sub> reductions and building pressure on supply chains	148
8	SBB (Swiss Railways), Switzerland: Punctuality and customer service to initiate models shifts from air and car to rail	156
9	Avanti Bus Travel, Germany: Modal shift from aircraft to bus	159
10	9292, Netherlands: Facilitating public transport through information technology	162
11	Star Clippers, Monaco: Low-carbon cruise experiences	164
12	Hotel Tørvís, Marifjóra, Norway and Naturhotel Baltrum, Germany: Reducing the number of electrical appliances in upscale accommodation	166
13	German Hotel and Restaurant Association: Involving businesses in mitigation	170
14	Max Hamburgare, Sweden: Informing customer decisions through food carbon-labelling	173
15	Scandic Hotels, Sweden: Choice-editing food – the case of prawns	179
16	Maritim pro Arte Hotel, Berlin, Germany: Reducing wastage from buffets involving social marketing	182
17	Cheaptickets, the Netherlands: Customer-friendly carbon-labelling for online booking services	186
18	Forumandersreisen, Germany: CO <sub>2</sub> -benchmarking of tour operators	188
19	Ecotourism Norway: Attracting visitors from close markets, involving de-marketing	192

20	Fritidsresor, Sweden: Modal shift from air to train	197
21	Alpine Pearls, Europe: Creating networks for sustainable mobility	202
22	OV-Fiets, the Netherlands: Facilitating low-carbon transport through bicycle rentals at train stations	210
23	Werfenweng, Austria: Modal shift from car to train based on mobility guarantees and pleasure mobility offers	212
24	Euregio Bodensee, Switzerland, Germany, Austria: Facilitating trans-border mobility by means of public transport	217
25	Konus-Gästekarte Baden-Württemberg, Germany: Mandatory public transport support from tourists	219
26	Energielandschaft Morbach, Germany: Renewable energy as a tourist attraction	221
27	South West England: Implementing low-carbon destinations	224
28	Best Food Forward, UK: Avoiding emissions from festivals	232
29	Atmosfair, Germany: Offsetting emissions from air travel that cannot be avoided	240
30	Zoo Zürich, Switzerland and Zoo Münster, Germany: Visitor information to raise awareness of rainforest and species loss	247
31	Klimahaus® Bremerhaven 8° Ost: Building awareness and interest in climate change	250
32	Forumandersreisen, Germany: Carbon-labelling and offsetting	255
33	Hilton Worldwide, USA: Building staff knowledge and creating awareness	270

# Travel, tourism and carbon management

Tourism has grown immensely over the past 60 years. From 1950 to 2005, international arrivals have grown by 6.5 per cent per year, i.e. from an estimated 25 million in 1950 to 806 million in 2005 (Figure 1.1; UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 2001, 2010a). In the following three years to 2008, international arrivals increased by more than 100 million to 920 million. By then, however, the global financial crisis set a stop to the strong growth trend, and arrivals declined by 4 per cent in 2009 to 880 million (estimate, UNWTO 2010b). However, UNWTO (2010b) projects that the world economic system will stabilize and that growth will resume at 3–4 per cent in international tourist arrivals in 2010 to reach 1.6 billion in 2020 (UNWTO 2001).

Domestic tourism has grown even faster, and accounts now for almost 10 times more tourist trips than international tourism (UNWTO-UNEP-WMO 2008). The enormous growth in



**Figure 1.1** International tourist arrivals 1950–2020

Source: based on UNWTO 2001, 2010a



global mobility for leisure and business has been going along with high and growing energy use: travel to the destination, staying at the destination, and tourist activities are all energy-intensive. As most energy for tourism is derived from fossil fuels, tourism is also a significant contributor to climate change. In the future, with an expected 1.6 billion international tourist arrivals by 2020 (UNWTO 2001), tourism is likely to become an ever more important factor in global warming, particularly in a world seeking to decarbonize. So far, few actors in tourism appear to have been concerned with this. As this book argues, there is thus an urgent need to address energy consumption and associated emissions of GHGs in tourism planning, management, politics and education.

Even though *Carbon Management in Tourism* is the first book to exclusively deal with emissions from tourism, aspects of climate change mitigation in tourism have been considered in a number of scientific books, including C. Michael Hall and James Higham's (2005) edited volume *Tourism, Recreation, and Climate Change*, which covers a wide range of related issues; Stefan Gössling and C. Michael Hall's (2006) *Tourism and Global Environmental Change*, another edited volume with an ecosystem-/theme-specific approach; and Susanne Becken and John E. Hay's (2007) *Tourism and Climate Change*, which provides a general overview of tourism, adaptation and mitigation, and a very readable introduction to many basics of mitigation.

Moreover, there have been two reports summarizing the knowledge in the field and providing specific advice of how to achieve emission reductions. These are 'Tourism and Climate Change: responding to global challenges', published by the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in 2008, as well as 'Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation in the Tourism Sector: Frameworks, Tools and Practice', published by UNEP, Oxford University, UNWTO and WMO, also in 2008. 'Tourism and Climate Change: responding to global challenges' is still the most comprehensive overview of the two-way relationship of tourism as a sector being affected by climate change as well as contributing to climate change. The report is also highly relevant for this book, because it contains the first detailed assessment of emissions from tourism transport, accommodation and activities (for an earlier rough assessment see Gössling (2002)). UNEP-Oxford University-UNWTO-WMO (2008) contains some theory and examples of tourism businesses that have sought to engage in climate change mitigation. This book seeks to go beyond these reports by summarizing the knowledge in the field in a comprehensive state-of-the-art review, and by providing in-depth case studies illustrating carbon management in practice.

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

To facilitate an understanding of the complex interrelationships between tourism and climate change mitigation, the book's main text is accompanied by 33 case studies from 17 countries of companies and organizations under the heading 'Carbon Management in Focus'. These provide in-depth descriptions of innovative management strategies, where possible in combination with calculations of carbon savings, costs and profits – the latter either financial or including marketing, branding, loyalty, insurance or other benefits. This