

The Future of Adventure Tourism in a Warmer World: An Exploratory Study of Mountain Guides' Perception of Environmental Change in Canada

Authors : Brooklyn Rushton, Michelle Ruddy, Natalie Knowles, Daniel Scott

Abstract : As people are increasingly on the search for extraordinary experiences and connections with nature, adventure tourism is experiencing significant growth and providing tourists with life-changing experiences. Unlike built attraction-based tourism, adventure tourism relies entirely on natural heritage, which leaves communities dependent on adventure tourism extremely vulnerable to environmental and climatic changes. A growing body of evidence suggests that global climate change will influence the future of adventure tourism and mountain outdoor recreation opportunities on a global scale. Across Canada, more specifically, climate change is broadly anticipated to present risks for winter-snow sports, while opportunities are anticipated to arise for green season activities. These broad seasonal shifts do not account for the indirect impacts of climate change on adventure tourism, such as the cost of adaptation or the increase of natural hazards and the associated likelihood of accidents. While some research has examined the impact of climate change on natural environments that adventure tourism relies on, a very small body of research has specifically focused on guides' perspectives or included hard adventure tourism activities. The guiding industry is unique, as guides are trained through an elegant blend of art and science to make decisions based on experience, observation, and intuition. While quantitative research can monitor change in natural environments, guides local knowledge can provide eye-witness accounts and outline what environmental changes mean for the future sustainability of adventure tourism. This research will capture the extensive knowledge of mountain guides to better understand the implications of climate change for mountain adventure and potential adaptive responses for the adventure tourism industry. This study uses a structured online survey with open and close-ended questions that will be administered using Qualtrics (an online survey platform). This survey is disseminated to current members of the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (ACMG). Participation in this study will be exclusive to members of the ACMG operating in the outdoor guiding streams. The 25 survey questions are organized into four sections: demographic and professional operation (9 questions), physical change (4 questions), climate change perception (6 questions), and climate change adaptation (6 questions). How mountain guides perceive and respond to climate change is important knowledge for the future of the expanding adventure tourism industry. Results from this study are expected to provide important information to mountain destinations on climate change vulnerability and adaptive capacity. Expected results of this study include guides insight into: (1) experience-safety relevant observed physical changes in guided regions (i.e. glacial coverage, permafrost coverage, precipitation, temperature, and slope instability) (2) changes in hazards within the guiding environment (i.e. avalanches, rockfall, icefall, forest fires, flooding, and extreme weather events), (3) existing and potential adaptation strategies, and (4) key information and other barriers for adaptation. By gaining insight from the knowledge of mountain guides, this research can help the tourism industry at large understand climate risk and create adaptation strategies to ensure the resiliency of the adventure tourism industry.

Keywords : adventure tourism, climate change, environmental change, mountain hazards

Conference Title : ICMSS 2022 : International Conference on Mountain Science and Sustainability

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : January 14-15, 2022