

Water for Everyone ★ Unit 2 Resource A

How does tourism affect the demand for water?

As air travel has become cheaper, British tourists are taking holidays more often and further afield. In our efforts to swap British weather for guaranteed sun, we're increasingly visiting places where water is scarce and becoming scarcer. This scarcity could be because the climate is dryer than our own, or because poverty prevents everyone having adequate water supplies and sanitation.

We usually have enough water in the UK for our daily needs. But what impact does the lifestyle we bring with us have on the local water situation?

Water at home

At home we use water in our flush-toilets, washing machines and dishwashers. On top of that we consume around 4 litres of water in drinks and food every day. Much of what we eat and drink has already taken large amounts of water to produce.

For example, it takes:



70 litres to
grow
one apple



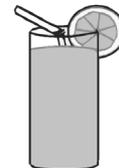
35 litres to
produce a
cup of tea



4,100 litres
to produce a
cotton T-shirt



340 litres
to grow a
bowlful of rice



170 litres
to produce
a glass of
orange juice



1,450 litres
to grow a
kilogram of
wheat

Water on holiday

Tourists often consume far more water than they do at home – and far more water than locals. According to one recent estimate, the amount of water servicing 100 guests in a luxury hotel for just 55 days would support 100 families in poor countries for three years.

Even if we are not on a luxury holiday, we have come to expect not just flushing toilets, baths and showers but water features, swimming pools, well-tended lawns and golf courses. Imagine how difficult it is to provide these where water is in scarce supply.

Yet because tourism is seen as a vital industry in many poor countries, governments often make it a priority to give the tourist industry access to plenty of water. Where there is water scarcity, this may mean diverting water from the local community's own supply.

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Tourism and water issues

Here are some examples of how tourism affects the availability of water for local communities across the world:

Kerala (India)

This once rural Indian state with its backwaters, beaches and nature reserves has seen rapid tourist development. "Water is probably the biggest issue here now," says campaigner Sumesh Mangalassery. "Most of the hotels rely on water being brought in by tankers from nearby villages... Two years ago, there were protests about the situation here, with villages complaining their water was being stolen. A handful of the villagers were selling access to their wells to the hotels, who were using them to fill giant ten-thousand-litre tanks on trucks and transporting them down here."

Cyprus (Mediterranean Sea)

In water-scarce Cyprus, it takes approximately fifty million litres (11,000,000 gallons) of water to keep a single 18-hole golf course lush and green for a year. That's roughly the same as almost a thousand average households. Water supply is already a problem and reserves are said to be at their lowest for a century. Yet in 2009 the government gave the go-ahead to 14 new golf courses, which will bring the total number on the island to 17.



Zanzibar (East Africa)

The estimated daily domestic water consumption of local people on the island of Zanzibar is just 30 litres per day. In contrast, luxury resorts in Zanzibar use up to 2,000 litres of water per tourist per day. Some hotels even have guards patrolling their water pipelines to prevent thirsty locals from trying to tap into them.

Costa Rica (Central America)

In 2009 the villagers of Sardinal in Costa Rica successfully fought against a controversial water pipeline project, which would have drawn water from their aquifer to supply sprawling resorts and golf courses on the country's Pacific coast. According to campaigner Mauricio Alvarez, the villagers had not been told about the pipeline. "They feared that in the future there will be no water for them and that priority will be given to the tourists," he said.

The Gambia (West Africa)

A lodge owner in this popular wintersun destination tells how new hotel developments are affecting his community: "The water table in our region is dropping by one metre per year. It is a serious problem and yet there appear to be no controls whatsoever on the tourist strip where most of the hotels are."

