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Until The Water Sparkles

Implementing Sustainable Tourism that Heals Destinations and Communities

By Jacquie Chandler

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As featured on:


Poposal Contents

Overview

Tourism destinations across the globe are struggling with overcrowding and degradation in the midst of a rapidly warming climate. Lake Tahoe, where author Jacquie Chandler lives, has received negative tourism and sustainability scores for decades despite billions of dollars spent on cleanup and a myriad of local nonprofits all fighting to save the lake. In fact, Tahoe is more crowded than ever as tourism corporations focus on unsustainable, short-term profit at the expense of the very destinations they profit from. Why the disconnect?

Tourism executives, hospitability managers, and destination locals know that destinations are in trouble. What seems to be missing is how to fix the outdated, auto-centric tourism model even as everyone pledges to do better. The current status quo shoves too many tourists into too few spots and charges taxpayers for the cleanup.

The model Jacquie Chandler proposes instead combines tourism and conservation activities with the support of local businesses, government agencies, and nonprofits, giving tourists a truly authentic experience by immersing them in a destination's natural surroundings, culture, and heritage, all while generating more local profit and spending less on cleanup.

The author calls this the Currency of Caring.

Jacquie Chandler came up with the Currency of Caring concept from what she learned as National Geographic's Lake Tahoe Geotourism Liaison, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the nonprofit Sustain Tahoe, Earth Gym co-inventor, Earth Walk

practitioner, Airbnb host, as well as from other destinations that successfully implemented geotourism, insights from Indigenous knowledge, and from the Earth itself.

UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES fosters a deep connection to place that provides wisdom and healing. While this used to be our way of life, and still is for many Indigenous people around the world, most of us today have lost this sacred relationship, which is hurting our ecosystems, economies, and our physical and mental health.

UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES takes readers on a journey through stunning personal stories and groundbreaking research to educate tourism managers and destination leaders on this new (or ancient) way of doing business—and how to implement it.

Each chapter ends with a summary of the information covered. At the end of the book is a Geotourism Implementation Framework (GIF) workbook for readers to easily implement UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES' concepts and develop their own destination-specific geotourism programs. There is also an appendix containing a list of additional resources for readers to continue their education and personal geotourism journeys.

In addition to the Currency of Caring and Geotourism Implementation Framework (GIF) workbook, other original concepts in UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES include: the "8 Worlds of Wonder," which are eight layers of life that define every destination, are the reasons people travel, and serve as distinct opportunities for tourism most don't think of; the terms "Geotrack" and "Geotour" to describe one activity on a geotourism menu; and the "carrying capacity" of a destination, which is

what a destination can handle without being degraded in the long term—understanding a destination's carrying capacity is only possible through collaboration with other stakeholders and when we have an active relationship with nature.

Annotated Table of Contents

Introduction

Why Lake Tahoe? Lake Tahoe stands as one of the world's most protected natural treasures, yet it faces immense challenges in becoming a sustainable destination. Despite Lake Tahoe's storied history of breaking new ground in political, social, and environmental arenas, it continuously fails sustainability and geotourism metrics and has landed on *Fodor's* list of destinations NOT to visit for several years in a row! This is because destinations and tourism corporations are still operating on an outdated, autocentric, profit-first model that doesn't actually sustain destinations or their local populations that rely on tourism for their livelihoods.

This book serves as a blueprint for anyone who desires to help create a better tourism model for their destination or region. It is also the foundation for a destination

stewardship certification program or college course where students can learn to craft geotourism programs that enrich communities and sustain environments.

1. Indigenous Wisdom Equals Wealth

The author is stunned by a comment from a Washoe elder, who told her Lake Tahoe has lost its sparkle because *no one is singing to it anymore*.

When the National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations (NGCSD) appointed Jacquie Chandler as Geotourism Liaison for the Tahoe Watershed, she had no idea the course of her life would change. But what she learned on that journey—especially from Indigenous people like the Washoe—is a better way forward. While modern, profit-centered habits continue to degrade and overcrowd tourism destinations the world over, especially at Lake Tahoe, nature runs on a different currency. The Currency of Caring is a currency, or energy force, that uses gratitude through ceremony, prayer, and song—a reciprocal connection to place that empowers readers to choose long-term health and prosperity over the current model that destroys and spends the profits on cleanup.

The book serves as a blueprint for:

- How to identify more tourism opportunities using the 8 Words of Wonder
- Create a holistic Geotourism program in any place
- Work collaboratively with other entities using TriNomics™

- Let nature be the guide for a place's carrying capacity and better decision-making
- How large tourism companies can put these principles in place
- How small companies, travelers, and individuals can do the same
- How to include the next generation for a more profitable and sustainable future

Jacquie argues that if Indigenous people took care of the land for thousands of years, we can too. If we care about the places where we live and visit, those places will in turn take care of us. In doing so, we will have healthier and more prosperous destinations and communities while staying consciously connected to the living, regenerative force that is nature's spirit.

This is the Currency of Caring, and it generates the greatest ROI. It's what makes the water sparkle.

Chapter 1 Summary:

1. <u>The Power of Indigenous Practices in Environmental Stewardship</u>

Indigenous cultures, such as the Washoe, maintain a life-supporting connection with their environment built on reciprocity. Such traditions promote sustainable living and can guide modern efforts to protect and restore natural habitats. This is the Currency of Caring, and it generates the greatest ROI.

2. Challenges and Solutions in Sustainable Tourism

Modern tourism often strains natural ecosystems, as seen in Lake Tahoe, where pollution and urbanization have diminished its clarity and harmed wildlife habitats. Efforts to change this narrative involve fostering geotourism, where visitors engage in responsible travel that supports environmental preservation.

3. Reconnecting with Nature through Reciprocity and Gratitude

Modern society's disconnection from nature has led to unsustainable practices that damage the environment. Embracing Indigenous wisdom, which emphasizes reciprocity and gratitude towards the Earth, can foster a more harmonious relationship with nature. This involves recognizing the intrinsic value of natural systems and contributing positively to their health, ultimately benefiting both the environment and human wellbeing, which better supports long-term prosperity.

2. The 8 Worlds: Why People Travel

Based on the author’s experiences along with Indigenous wisdom, Jacquie realized there are eight reasons people travel to destinations. These are: sky, water, land, plants, wildlife, community, culture, and heritage. These 8 Worlds are missed tourism opportunities that can help spread people out across various activities and locations, thereby easing the strain on overused sites, while providing tourists with more authentic experiences. Focusing on the 8 Worlds also prompts tourism managers, locals, and experts to better notice and care for these different aspects of the ecosystem.

Chapter 2 Summary:

1. The 8 Worlds of Tourism are: sky, water, land, plants, wildlife, community, culture, and heritage. This approach emphasizes the importance of integrating natural and cultural elements into the travel experience, promoting sustainability and fostering a deeper connection between travelers and destinations.
2. The story of Mick Dodge and the "Earth Gym" exemplifies how nature can be a therapeutic space, encouraging people to connect and learn the "landuage"—the language of the Earth, a part of indigenous wisdom.
3. By adopting the "samurai mindset," tourism uses sustainable practices, service, and integrity to enhance the visitor experience and create economic opportunities while preserving local ecosystems and heritage.

3.Geotourism: A New Way Forward

Based on results from successful Geotourism campaigns, and interviews with their directors, along with demonstrations her NGO Sustain Tahoe hosted, Jacquie provides vivid details on how a geotourism plan can take shape, along with the many positive, long-term benefits this brings to any community.

Chapter 3 Summary:

1. Destination Stewardship through Geotourism

Geotourism aims to inspire travelers to become stewards of the places they visit. Unlike other forms of tourism, it encompasses a holistic approach that includes cultural, ecological, and community aspects to ensure sustainable and enriching experiences.

2. Economic and Community Benefits

Geotourism promotes local economies by prioritizing authentic, local experiences over homogenized, chain-driven tourism. This approach not only sustains local businesses and cultural heritage but also creates a deeper, more memorable experience for visitors.

3. Long-term Sustainability and Local Involvement

Successful geotourism requires ongoing evaluation and involvement of local stakeholders. This ensures that tourism initiatives align with community values and ecological sustainability.

4. TriNomics: The Power of Working Together

Based on a three-circle Venn diagram created by consultant Sheri Woodsgreen, Jacquie introduces the concept of TriNomics™. Readers learn how to ensure a geotourism plan succeeds by incorporating and collaborating with the public, private, and social sectors of a community. Successful examples, such as READ Global and Sustain Tahoe's own Geotourism Exposition of Stewards ("Tahoe Expos") portray the power of working with all stakeholders to better sustain a place for long-term profit and health. It

can be hard to get different entities to work together, but like the Washoe say, the hardest part of making their traditional baskets is starting them. Once that cooperative foundation is set, the result is beautiful.

Chapter 4 Summary:

1. TriNomics™ Collaboration's Superpower

TriNomics™ is an inclusive approach that ensures all stakeholders see value in a project, significantly increasing its chances of success. The key insight is that excluding any sector can lead to opposition and project failure, while inclusion leverages diverse strengths and resources for mutual benefit.

2. Successful TriNomics™ Examples:

The creation of Sierra Nevada College, READ Global, and the Tahoe Expos, where collaborations between government entities, local businesses, and nonprofits created engaging and educational experiences for tourists while preserving the environment.

3. Challenges and Incremental Progress

TriNomics™ offers a robust framework for achieving buy-in from all sectors, though this requires overcoming ingrained ways of operating and fostering openness to new solutions. The approach necessitates incremental progress, addressing each sector's needs, resources, and willingness to contribute.

5. Let Nature Lead

Using research and her own experiences, Jacquie explains what Indigenous people know intuitively—that nature is the true teacher. Jacquie admits this is hard to grasp for most readers just as it is for her, but for geotourism to really benefit a place and all of its inhabitants, we must recover and restore our connection to place. In addition to using TriNomics™ and learning from Indigenous people, Jacquie explains how readers can gain wisdom by going on Earth Walks and by listening to the wind and the trees, just as children naturally do before they "grow up."

Chapter 5 Summary:

1. Ecosystem Interdependence

The story of the Erima peninsula illustrates the intricate connections between terrestrial and marine ecosystems. The removal of forests led to the collapse of both land and marine environments, emphasizing that the health of one part of nature often depends on another.

2. Understanding Carrying Capacity

Sustainable tourism and development require acknowledging the carrying capacity of both the environment and the community. Overlooking these limits can lead to environmental degradation and societal issues, as seen in the history and present challenges of Lake Tahoe and other areas.

3. Listening to Nature and Indigenous Wisdom

Modern approaches to nature often prioritize human needs and control, leading to ecological harm. Embracing Indigenous perspectives, which view humans as part of a broader natural community, can help us develop more sustainable and respectful relationships with the environment. This means letting nature lead and learning from its inherent wisdom and resilience.

6. Tourism's New Currency

Jacquie compares the current profit-first model of business against the Currency of Caring. Embassy Suites and Monterey Bay Aquarium provide compelling positive examples on how the tourism industry can change for the better. By combining conservation and tourism, a destination can generate more profit with less cleanup and uplift an entire community.

Chapter 6 Summary:

1. Sustainable Tourism and Corporate Responsibility

The 2010 Stewardship Congress in Tahoe highlighted the critical role businesses can play in promoting sustainability, and reflected a shift towards viewing sustainability as a continuous lifestyle rather than a temporary measure.

2. Economic and Environmental Challenges of Tourism

Over-tourism has resulted in pollution, a lack of affordable housing, and insufficient public services. Local Tahoe advocates argue for systemic reforms, such as

higher taxes on tourists, improved public transit, and stricter housing regulations to balance economic benefits with environmental and community wellbeing.

3. Community-Driven Conservation Successes

The transformation of Monterey Bay through initiatives like the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Seafood Watch program demonstrates that integrating environmental conservation with economic development can create thriving, sustainable ecosystems and communities.

7. Rewild Yourself: Solutions for Everyone

For readers who may not feel they have much power to change the tourism industry, Jacquie provides examples of what anyone can do to foster geotourism, develop a deeper connection to place, and live by the Currency of Caring. Information is provided for locals, hosts, visitors, small business owners, nonprofit leaders, and government employees. But it may take time to see change, just like it takes time to grow a millennial forest. An interview with Mick Dodge and a conversation with a Washoe woman further illustrate how readers can connect with nature—and even communicate with wildlife!

Chapter 7 Summary:

1. Stewardship and Local Engagement

Practicing stewardship in both public and private life is essential. Locals can positively influence tourism by hosting visitors better and promoting sustainable practices.

2. Sustainable Practices and Local Businesses

Examples include the Madroña vineyard creating a deer migration corridor, and Winterhill Olive Oil using regenerative agriculture. These practices not only support the local ecosystem but also create unique, enriching experiences for visitors.

3. Community and Nature Connection

Engaging with local wildlife and ecosystems, as well as learning from Indigenous wisdom, helps create a deeper understanding and respect for the environment. This connection is crucial for personal and environmental wellbeing, and for economic health and prosperity.

8. Let the Future Lead

The best advice on how to accelerate needed change is to let younger generations take charge. Just as wild horses need to run free, entrenched tourism leaders must give the reins to those who have fresh ideas, as well as foster real-world engagement in academia. Several case studies and success stories serve as guides for empowering those who will be Earth's next stewards.

Even so, greed threatens to derail even the best of intensions—Jacquie suggests using greed as an advantage instead. Readers should allow themselves to be greedy for clean air and water, community collaboration, sharing gratitude, and protecting the things they love and don't want to lose. Do whatever it takes to keep our destinations alive. Don't give up until the water sparkles.

Chapter 8 Summary:

1. Restoring Ecosystems through Indigenous Wisdom and Soil Health

Embracing Indigenous wisdom and recognizing the value of native plants and microorganisms in soil are crucial for ecosystem health and sustainability.

2. Reforming Tourism for Sustainability

The current tourism model is outdated and detrimental to ecosystems. Transitioning to a geotourism approach that integrates environmental stewardship and local culture can enhance visitor experiences, support local economies, and ensure long-term environmental health.

3. Empowering Future Generations

Future leaders must be given the tools and opportunities to innovate and implement sustainable practices. Education and real-life experiences in sustainable tourism and environmental stewardship can drive change and foster a deeper connection between humans and nature.

Appendix I: Geotourism Implementation Framework (GIF)

The Geotourism Implementation Framework (GIF) workbook is a step-by-step guide that enables readers to easily implement UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES' concepts and develop destination-specific geotourism programs, individual tours (geotracks), or a region-wide geotourism program. It includes the eight steps of geotourism based on the author's own concept and a blank worksheet designed by the author to help readers collaborate and develop the details. It also contains the 13 Geotourism Principles, the Global Code of Tourism Ethics, and the International Cultural Tourism Charter's Principles that tourism managers should reference throughout the process.

Appendix II: Resources

This appendix lists additional resources for readers to continue their education and implementation, including: the nonprofits, agencies, and businesses mentioned in the book; media resources (documentaries, podcast episodes, and more); and books.

About the Author

Jacquie Chandler is the Executive Director and Chief Visionary Officer for Sustain Tahoe, a nonprofit focused on geotourism education and promotion in the Lake Tahoe region. She co-founded Sustain Tahoe (formally Sustainable Tahoe) after she was appointed Geotourism Liaison for the Tahoe Watershed by the National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations (NGCSD).

Sustain Tahoe organized Lake Tahoe's first ever Stewardship Congress, where local leaders from various sectors discussed ways to create a basin-wide geotourism program. Participants included tribal elders, tourism industry leaders, business owners, politicians, and activists such as Al Gore. Sustain Tahoe then created the Tahoe Geotourism Expositions of Stewards ("Tahoe Expos" for short) that hosted a variety of geotourism events in the Lake Tahoe region several years in a row.

More recently, Jacquie has focused her efforts on spreading geotourism ideas as a speaker and author. After completing the Thought-Leader Talks program, her talk was chosen for the stage in 2023. In 2024 she was invited to speak at TEDxWoodinville. Later that same year, she served as an intercollegiate panelist at an HSMAI (Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International) Sustainability Conference, and more.

Over the years Jacquie has given dozens of geotourism presentations and workshops to tourism professionals, clubs, and local stakeholders. She has been featured on local TV stations, newspapers, podcasts, and other media; taught her Earth Gym classes for three years at a local college; created a university-level geotourism curriculum; led school children on Earth Walks, Earth Gym sessions, and crafting classes; and presented at numerous fairs and local events.

Before moving to Tahoe, Jacquie met Mick Dodge, and together they formed an earth-based practice they named Earth Gym. She also designed a line of clothing that became Mick's signature brand and contributed to him landing the reality TV show *The Legend of Mick Dodge*, which aired on National Geographic from 2012 to 2016.

In addition to this book, Jacquie is writing a short travel guidebook and journal highlighting the 8 Worlds of Tourism that make each destination unique. She also plans to self-publish a children's book about connecting with nature, and is working with a producer on a children's TV show based on that children's book. This is her first attempt at publishing. (Her CV is attached separately.)

Audience & Market

The Audience

The primary audience for UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES are tourism industry leaders at the destination level: local and regional directors of tourism, tourism company owners, resort owners, destination business leaders, destination city managers, and other leaders seeking new perspectives on how to maximize long-term profits by sustaining healthy destinations and communities.

A secondary audience are colleges and universities looking for additions to hospitality/tourism/environmental curriculum and content, as well as hospitality students searching for a “greener” and more ethical career path in tourism.

Other audiences include destination locals and activists seeking new solutions as well as travelers seeking ways to do no harm.

The Market

According to Publishers Weekly, the US sold 3.1 million print travel books in the first half of 2022, an 8% increase from 2021. Also strong were guides on outdoor recreation, road trips, and hiking. The World Travel and Tourism Council’s latest research

shows that in 2023, the travel and tourism sector contributed $9 trillion (9.1%) to the global GDP and accounted for approximately 290 million jobs. International visitor spending registered a 33.1% jump in 2023, amounting to $1.6 trillion.

Considering the size and economic benefits of this industry, it's unfortunate there aren't more books aimed at helping travel and tourism leaders conduct business for the new realities of overcrowding, climate change, and sustainability. In fact, the majority of titles for tourism management are academic. The few trade titles that exist are tailored to a niche audience rather than to industry or community leaders. UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES changes that. Now those who want to make change have the blueprint in an easy-to-read trade title that will inspire them, both inside and outside of the boardroom.

Primary BISACs

BUS081000 **BUSINESS & ECONOMICS** / Industries / Hospitality, Travel & Tourism
TRV026020 **TRAVEL** / Special Interest / Ecotourism
NAT011000 **NATURE** / Environmental Conservation & Protection

Secondary BISACs

BUS072000 **BUSINESS & ECONOMICS** / Development/ Sustainable Development
NAT052000 **NATURE** / Indigenous Stewardship
OCC043000 **BODY, MIND & SPIRIT** / Nature Therapy

Ways to Reach the Audience

- U.S. Travel Association
- Global Business Travel Association
- International Society of Sustainability Professionals
- National Association of Environmental Professionals
- Society of Environmental Journalists
- SMG Consulting

- Visitors bureaus and chambers of commerce
- Association for Environmental & Outdoor Education
- Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education
- Tourism Leaders Club
- Association of Nature & Forest Therapy
- Climate Change Resources – Organizations for Gen-Z

More relevant associations for the book's audience, including those in which the author is active, are listed in the Promotion section.

Top Publications

The author's top publications for a book review/excerpt would be (in no particular order):

- Pebble Magazine
- Outlook Travel Magazine
- Frontiers in Sustainable Tourism
- Journal of Sustainable Tourism
- Tahoe Daily Tribune
- Moonshine Ink
- SFGate Travel
- San Francisco Chronicle Travel
- The Travel Foundation
- Earthwatch

More publications and outreach details are listed in the Promotion section.

It may be of interest that some of the books Jacquie Chandler used as research and would like to quote are published by Island Press: *Over the Seawall* by Stephen Robert Miller; *Overtourism* by Martha Honey and Kelsey Frenkiel; and *The Death and Life of Monterey Bay* by Stephen R. Palumbi and Carolyn Sotka.

Marketing Platform

Recent Speaking Engagements

- Intercollegiate panelist, Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) Sustainability Conference, Feb. 6, 2024
- Speaker, TEDxWoodinville, Oct. 24, 2023
- Opening speaker, Thought-Leader Talks, Apr. 23, 2023
- Speaker, National Tourism Association FoodTreX Summit, Nov. 15, 2022
- Earth Walk presentation, Sierra Alliance Conference, Sep. 2020
- Speaker, Nevada Rural Roundup, Apr. 2018
- Speaker, Nevada Rural Round-Up, Apr. 2017
- Keynote speaker, Nevada Naturalist Conference, May 2016
- Dozens of other presentations and geotourism workshops with Sustain Tahoe listed here: https://www.sustaintahoe.org/history.html and here: https://www.slideshare.net/jacquiechandler

Interviews

- NPR interview Purple Politics Nevada with Lucia Starbuck, July 2024
- Episode 23, *The Thought Leader Podcast* (Speaker Mastermind), July 2024
- Episode 28, *Tahoe TAP Podcast*, Mar. 31, 2022
- Episode 61, *Eat Well Travel Better* podcast, Dec. 19, 2022
- Episode 2, *The Reno Podcast*, Jun. 9, 2020
- Episode 12, *Joyous Every Day Living* podcast, Jul. 12, 2020
- Dozens of other media interviews and appearances, as listed here: https://www.sustaintahoe.org/speakers.html

TV & Print Media Interviews

Below is a list of both TV and print news outlets the author has been featured in over the years for Sustain Tahoe (in many cases more than once), which she will approach for a press release and/or interview about UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES:

- Comstock Magazine (Allison Joy)
- Tahoe Arts and Mountain Culture
- The Union
- Reno News & Review (Sage Leehey)
- Lake Tahoe TV
- Lake Tahoe News
- South Tahoe Now (Paula)
- Sacramento News & Review
- Chico News & Review
- Tahoe Daily Tribune / Sierra Sun (Amy Edgett)
- Reno/Tahoe (Standley White)
- The Tahoe Weekly (Priya Hutner)
- PSA Today Radio (Jessica Levity)
- Tahoe Talks

Gift Shops & Bookstores

Based on connections the author has, including stores that already sell Sustain Tahoe merchandise, Jacquie Chandler will approach the following stores about selling UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES:

- Tahoe Provisions, Hyatt Regency
- Verdi Market, Reno-Tahoe International Airport
- University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) Bookstore
- Cuppa Tahoe (bookstore and coffee shop)
- Tahoe Visitors Center
- West Shore Market & Deli
- GaiaLicious Boutique
- Copper Lane Café & Provisions
- Mountain Freak Boutique
- Great Basin Store at Taylor Creek, South Lake Tahoe and Galena, NV

Future Promotion & Conferences

Jacquie can book appearances/speaking engagements or a booth to sell and promote the book with the following organizations and upcoming events, most of which she has presented to in the past:

- On Sustainability 2025 Conference
- Annual Bioneers conference
- Rural Roundup, Travel Nevada's rural tourism conference
- Annual Lake Tahoe Summit
- Annual American Indigenous Tourism Conference
- Mountain Travel Symposium
- Incline Village Crystal Bay Community and Business Association (IVCBA)
- Sierra Nevada Alliance
- Sierra Club
- Rotary Club of Tahoe (Incline Village, South Lake Tahoe, and Truckee)
- Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority
- Stateline Chamber
- South Lake Tahoe Soroptimist Club

Book Tour

Based on where Jacquie lives and places she can stay with family and friends, she will approach local bookstores about selling the book and book signing/speaking events in the following locations:

- Lake Tahoe and surrounding area
- Seattle, WA
- Portland, OR
- Santa Barbara, CA
- Boulder, CO
- Ashville, NC
- Vancouver Island, BC

Bulk Sale Opportunities

In addition to the above connections, and perhaps with a little help from New Society Publishers, Jacquie hopes to sell the book and promote the ideas of UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES through bulk sales, as listed below.

- Gift shops in airports, hotels, resorts, zoos, aquariums, and other destinations, via Event Network, Western National Parks Association, and Eastern National
- Colleges and universities with hospitality or similar programs, such as:
- University of Nevada, Reno
- Lake Tahoe Community College
- Sierra College (Tahoe-Truckee Campus)
- Unity Environmental University
- University of Southern California

Social Media & Website

- TikTok @earthgymsensei: 1,167 followers; one video has over *500,000 organic views*
- Sustain Tahoe website: book landing page
- Sustain Tahoe: Blog
- Sustain Tahoe: Facebook
- Sustain Tahoe: Instagram
- Jacquie Chandler speaker: Facebook
- Jacquie Chandler, Primal Designs Facebook
- Earth Gym Facebook
- Jacquie Chandler, Twitter
- Penelope Curtis (Sustain Tahoe President), Twitter
- Sustain Tahoe Mailing List: 1,400 people
- Planning a Podcast

Competing/Comparable Titles

A book that covers like-minded principles for a similar audience is ***Ecotourism*** by David A. Fennell, published by Routledge in 2020. This 5th Edition relies on its prior success as a definitive textbook for alternative tourism "as the antithesis of mass tourism… through… the promotion of nature-based activities that are sensitive to both ecological and social systems." But it's an academic study on the effectiveness of ecotourism that is not necessarily accessible to those making decisions in the field. Rather, **UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES** is a user-friendly guide refreshingly written by a non-academic who is practicing sustainable tourism, not just researching it.

A great companion title is ***Sustainable Tourism on a Finite Planet: Environmental, Business and Policy Solutions*** by Megan Epler Wood (Routledge; 1st edition; January 23, 2017). Well-researched and engaging, Wood discusses international tourism's immense problems and provides recommendations for top decisionmakers in the global supply chain, hotel, airline, and cruise industries on how they can protect vital resources and destinations. **UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES** similarly brings to life tourism's issues and ways we can improve but is geared more towards leaders at the local

destination and regional levels, including tourism managers, local business owners, government agency leaders, and nonprofit directors. The author has found that most corporate CEOs are too slow to implement new ideas even after they've been proven effective. Plus, *Sustainable Tourism* is still a bit lengthy (over 300 pages) and priced as a textbook ($168 on Amazon), begging the question: How many leaders have read it outside of the classroom?

A comparable trade book is ***Green Your Airbnb and Make More Money: A Practical Approach to Increasing Profitability in Your Airbnb by Going Green*** by Tracey Hodgkins (Purple Fox Group; March 3, 2024). Following **UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES'** bottom line—that sustainability actually enhances profit—Hodgkins lays out a detailed guide for Airbnb hosts to go green, though it lacks the geotourism emphasis that **UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES** emphasizes from the author's own days as an Airbnb host. Plus, the market for this book is somewhat limited when compared to the range and depth of **UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES**, which provides a how-to manual for more than just Airbnb hosts.

Production Considerations

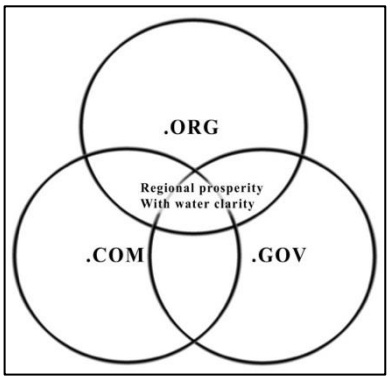
A draft manuscript was completed with the help of a Book Coach and is ready for review. It is currently 53,000 words. However, now that Jacquie's unique concepts, experiences, and research are on paper, she is willing and able to work with Island Press' expert editors to make any necessary changes, revisions, and rewrites.

Also complete is the Geotourism Implementation Framework (GIF) workbook for readers to easily implement UNTIL THE WATER SPARKLES concepts and develop their own destination-specific geotourism program, as an appendix at the end of the book.

Jacquie is in the process of securing permissions from all individuals and entities mentioned and quoted in the manuscript. Some have already mentioned they'd like to know who the publisher is before responding.

Jacquie has a background in theater and radio and would be happy read for an audiobook edition.

Photographs: 3



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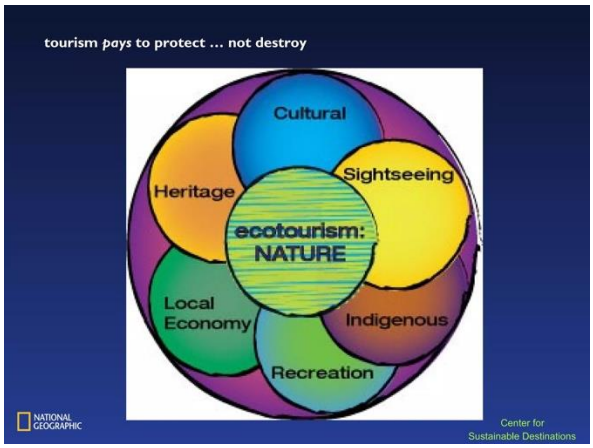

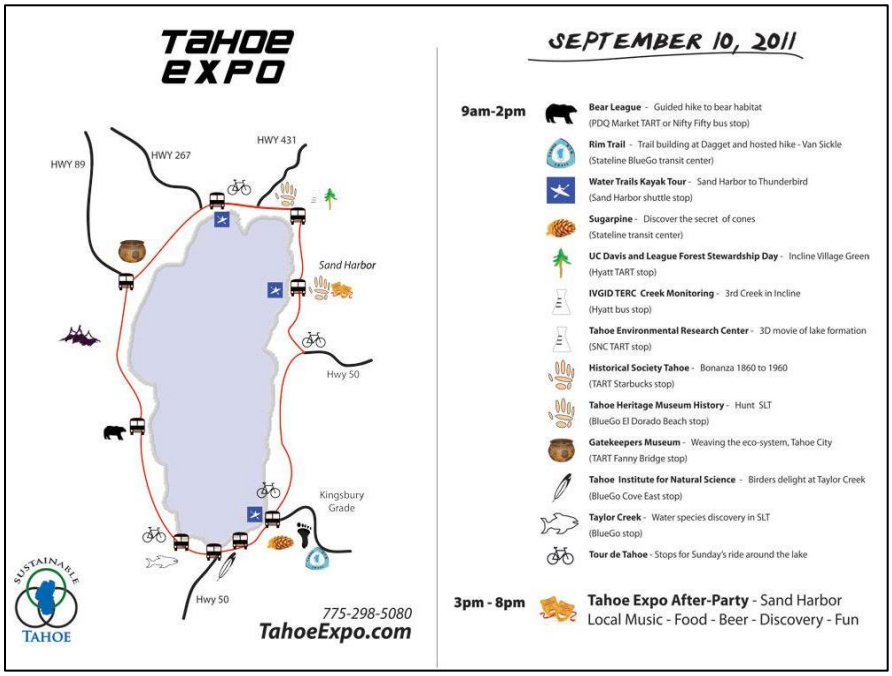

Chapter 1. Indigenous Wisdom Equals Wealth

"If all the world is a commodity, how poor we grow. When all the world is a gift in motion, how wealthy we become."

— Robin Wall Kimmerer[1]

I'm at the water's edge with a Washoe elder. The Washoe are the original people of Lake Tahoe, still here after 10,000 years. Though they're not exactly "here." They were removed from their homes around the lake to reservations down in the valley, which is why this elder hasn't seen the lake since he was a small boy.

I watch him stare into the lake, as if looking through time.

After a long, silent gaze, he finally speaks.

"The water has lost its sparkle. I guess no one is singing to it anymore."

Singing to it? I wonder. What would that do?

Perhaps I should start at the beginning…

In 2007 I attended a tourism conference in Lake Tahoe. I was so inspired after a presentation by Jonathan Tourtellot, Executive Director of the National Geographic

[1] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Canada: Milkweed Editions, 2013).

Center for Sustainable Destinations (NGCSD), that I volunteered for the appointment of Geotourism Liaison for the Tahoe Watershed. When Jonathan called the following day, he asked which chamber I was from.

"I don't work in tourism," I explained. "I'm a corporate story coach."

He paused, then said, "Well… Tahoe needs a new story."

I knew Tahoe's tourism story was broken. What I didn't know was how hard it would be to rewrite.

Jonathan continued, "You'll need help. You'll have to work with the tourism industry." *How hard can that be?*

I later found out that inspiring a shift in the tourism industry involves changing our culture's relationship with destinations. Sometimes it feels impossible.

I haven't given up yet. Even as NGCSD has changed into the Destination Stewardship Center, I have continued researching geotourism and educating others through Sustain Tahoe, the nonprofit I co-founded. And what I've been learning has blown me away.

As the largest alpine lake in North America and second deepest lake in the United States, Lake Tahoe once boasted visibility to depths of over 100 feet. Unfortunately, the lake's famous crystal-clear, cobalt-blue water is not what it used to be. Decades of urbanization and pollution have diminished the lake's clarity to only sixty feet in some places. The surrounding wildlife habitat has been carved by commercial convenience. Indicator species are threatened or dying off. Forests are filled with dead trees due to

diseases and drought, which makes forest fires only one spark away from devastating reality.

"Business as usual" means we have to continually mitigate or restore what gets destroyed by how we recreate, landscape, develop, and host the destination. According to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA), the federal government along with California and Nevada spent 1.4 billion taxpayer dollars to clean Lake Tahoe from 2000 to 2010.[2] The TRPA estimated it would cost $2.45 billion over the next ten years if we continued on this same path and mitigating the damage we do to the lake and its surrounding ecosystems. No doubt this money has already been spent.

The more recent Lake Tahoe Restoration Act has spent hundreds of millions more on watershed management, forest health, invasive species control/prevention, infrastructure improvements, and fire suppression management.[3] Yet, after all that, Lake Tahoe just landed on "Fodor's No List 2023"—one of the top ten regions not to visit! The article declares, "Lake Tahoe has a people problem" and "nature needs a break."[4]

Lake Tahoe is not the only destination in this predicament. Venice, Amsterdam, and Maui are also on the list, accompanied by numerous natural landscapes, watersheds, and Antarctica. In early 2024, the City of Miami Beach produced a campaign

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[2] Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, "2010 TRPA Environmental Improvement Program," as quoted by Jacquie Chandler, "2014 Tahoe Geotourism Expo 2014 Report" (January 3, 2015): https://www.slideshare.net/jacquiechandler/2014-tahoe-geotourism-expo-2014-report.
[3] "$29 million in federal funds to Lake Tahoe," *Mountain Democrat* (March 28, 2022): https://www.mtdemocrat.com/news/lake-tahoe-to-get-29-million-for-environment-infrastructure/.
[4] Rosie Bell et al., "Fodor's No List 2023," *Fodor's Travel* (November 2, 2022): https://www.fodors.com/news/news/fodors-no-list-2023.

ad saying they're "breaking up with spring breakers," asking tourists not to come if they can't behave themselves.[5]

Yet many of these destinations rely on tourism revenue to stay in business. It's a balancing act that's getting harder to sustain.

But singing could help?

An Unsustainable Story

A native of Southern California, I was living in the San Francisco Bay Area when I first visited Lake Tahoe with family and friends. Less than four hours away, Tahoe is the Bay Area's backyard playground, so I was excited to experience this magic for myself. But the trips left me exhausted and confused instead of exhilarated. I admit the skiing was great, but the lift lines were long and the serenity of the place was further interrupted by blaring music. In the summer the beaches were just as overcrowded and noisy. With only one two-lane road around the lake, it was—and still is—bumper-to-bumper traffic (even when there aren't snow closures or construction zones), with few signs to tell you where to go or where to park.

The picturesque panorama is covered by hotels, restaurants, bars, and casinos. The dominating developments hide over 200,000 acres of nature—forested mountains with creeks and waterfalls every couple miles that move rainwater and snowmelt into the lake—which I couldn't see and had no idea how to access. This lakeside landscape is

[5] Daysia Tolentino, "Miami Beach is 'breaking up' with spring breakers," *NBC News* (March 4, 2024): https://www.nbcnews.com/news/miami-beach-officials-spring-break-rules-warning-rcna141650.

a challenging mix of private and public lands where most trailheads are hidden from view, leaving many visitors confused as to how to access all the incredible wilderness the alluring photos promote. Even when I tried to access the famous nature views, friends told me I better not hike the trails because of dangerous wildlife. Well, I just didn't get it.

Jean-Baptiste Renié, a city councilor in the tourist town of Étretat, France told *Fodor's*, "Many [tourists] leave angry after having spent several hours in the car without being able to find parking, someplace to eat, or toilets, because there isn't enough infrastructure. This mass tourism satisfies nobody."[6] This had been my experience at Tahoe, and I didn't see a reason to go back.

Then one day my job asked me to relocate to Tahoe. I decided it was worth the move financially but was hesitant to be part of a place I had not really enjoyed or understood. However, I was eager to leave Livermore, the city I had been stuck in due to my marriage and then divorce. So within two weeks of the relocation offer I put my house up for sale, packed my belongings, rented a condo sight unseen, and set off to find my new reluctant residence.

The Real Tahoe

It was Easter when I arrived. Snow still lingered but the locals were already wearing shorts, which I found strange. As I drove along the lake's Northshore, I crossed into Nevada and entered Incline Village—my new address. A gated community nestled

[6] Bell et al., "Fodor's No List 2023," *Fodor's Travel*.

against the steep Sierra Nevada Mountains, it affords dramatic views of the lake and boasts its own beaches, golf course, and other amenities just for residents. This was not like my other visits.

Suddenly the "other" side of Tahoe—places not on the popular visitor menu—came into view. I was able to see, hear, and feel "the jewel of the Sierra."

I finally saw the magic.

At every free moment I had available, I explored all the trails near my house. My new neighbors told me about Tunnel Creek Trail—and what a trail it is! Mountain switchbacks climb 3,000 feet over three miles with incredible sights along the way. But I would have never found it without local guidance.

I like to run at dawn, especially uphill, and barefoot when the ground is soft. Since Tunnel Creek Trail was less than a mile from my house, I often jogged there and then ran up the trail as the sun was rising. I rarely saw anyone, or anything, at that hour. So I was excited one early morning when I noticed another set of footprints in the sand. *Perhaps there's another barefoot runner ahead!* Farther up the trail, I stopped on a boulder to catch my breath and take in the spectacular view. Then something caught my eye about thirty feet in front of me. It wasn't another runner—it was a black bear! Those were bear prints! As the bear moved forward, I slowly backed up, turned around, and sprinted down the trail, my heart pounding.

The encounter reminded me that I was now living in a wildlife habitat. I am a part of this urban interface—an animal with other animals. But if I didn't know what that

meant, how would the millions of annual visitors know? Who was telling them they could encounter a bear or cougar while hiking the trails?

That incident, followed by a few more wildlife encounters (including with a local cougar), heightened my awareness. The animals had been there all along, watching me. I just hadn't expected them.

A New Path

This triggered a deeper exploration and research about my new home, and I started asking difficult questions. Where can travelers learn about this unique ecosystem? Why were the places I knew as a resident not on the visitor menu? And why were they so hard to access? What responsibilities do I have living here? What responsibilities do the tourists have? And the business owners? Where is the stewardship? Who is in charge? Why is there such a disconnect—conflict even—between efforts to preserve the place and the desire for tourism profit? Who pays for the cleanup? (We all do, with our taxes, whether we have ever been or plan to go to Tahoe or not.)

I realized what I had experienced as a visitor was not the "real" Tahoe. And while it may sustain a financial profit for some, it doesn't really sustain the lake or the area's special assets, which is why I could never feel connected to it as a tourist.

As I continued to explore this other side of Tahoe, I started to feel a sense of place, a connection to Tahoe's unique terrain carved by water, and began to care about it more and more. I learned about wildlife habitats, watersheds, and the challenges of this

“urban interface,” which is where human habitat encroaches and diminishes wildlife habitat as they become “shared habitat.” We modern humans assume that once we “buy in,” we have full agency over “our land,” yet nature keeps struggling to adjust.

For instance, there are sixty-two streams that flow into Lake Tahoe. But now they either flow under or over the highway that encircles the lake like a wall. What I didn’t know, and most tourists and even residents don’t know, is that these creeks are wildlife corridors—transit routes that help animals navigate from the mountains to the lake. They are part of the lake’s DNA, which wildlife have used to survive for thousands of years before the new landowners thought they could make it better with expensive infrastructure—and without Indigenous (local) knowledge.

It's easy to understand why you might be more likely to see a bear if you live or hike along a creek, since that water is their passageway. Bears are omnivorous eaters like we are, so we share overlapping food interests. But bears have a much stronger sense of smell. So from the bear's perspective, we moved in, set up big dens, and brought in some “fast food” to share. Our trash smells pretty tasty to the hungry bears, who’ve had their natural food sources diminished by our need for all the space—thus an urban interface problem.

The seventy-two-mile highway that hugs the lake not only disrupts these wildlife corridors but is a major reason for the water’s pollution. “Heavy traffic crushes Tahoe’s roads into fine dust and debris and pumps tailpipe emissions into the air. When it rains or snow melts, stormwater transports these fine pollution particles into the Lake,

clouding its cobalt blue waters."[7] The very infrastructure we rely on is hurting our shared habit.

So, with the desire to be a responsible resident, I attended local meetings, joined local advocacy groups. I became friends with Dr. Charles Goldman, the famous limnologist and ecologist who founded the Tahoe Environmental Research Center (TERC) at UC Davis, now UNR's Tahoe campus. Dr. Goldman was my initial inspiration for embracing the unexpected journey that my love for Lake Tahoe took me on. Through him and others, I learned about the critical limits of Lake Tahoe's sensitive watershed, and actions I could take to help preserve the lake and improve tourism at the same time.

This brought me to the tourism conference, where I heard Jonathan Tourtellot's presentation. He opened my eyes when he said that visitors are actually the key for sustaining and enhancing the places they visit. But they must be hosted in a way that's conducive to sustaining it.

This made so much sense. It was clear visitors were the main players in protecting or destroying a destination, depending on how they are welcomed, guided, and hosted. A responsible, caring traveler leaves no trash. People may argue that some people just don't care, but everyone cares about something. And caring is contagious.

I was so inspired that during the question and answer session I was jumping out of my seat with ideas on how this program could work in Tahoe, despite not being an

[7] Bell, "Fodor's No List," *Fodor's Travel*.

active member of the tourism industry. By the end of the conference I accepted the offer to be the Geotourism Liaison for the Tahoe Watershed, a volunteer appointment I took on with such fortitude it changed the course of my life.

I had no idea what I was in for.

Protecting the lake means negotiating with an $11.3 billion tourism industry and subsequent corporations and small businesses, tens of thousands of full- and part-time residents spread over dozens of communities and their respective local governments, five counties, two states, local and federal agencies including the U.S. Forest Service, and around 200 nonprofits focused on various aspects of saving this national treasure that spreads over 200,000 acres.

As you can imagine, these entities don't always see eye to eye.

Despite being on no-visit lists, "Recent studies [in 2021]… peg Tahoe's annual visitation at 15 million, up from previous estimates of 5 million in 2012."[8] These visitors are still carelessly corralled into a tiny fragment of what Lake Tahoe has to offer, and millions of dollars are still spent on cleanup and damage control.

The concepts of geotourism, sustainability, and destination stewardship have been around since the early 90s and keep slowly gaining traction. More and more small businesses and corporations are seeking to move in this direction, while government agencies try to enforce rules and nonprofits try to clean up the mess. There are so many

[8] *Overtourism: Lessons for a Better Future*, edited by Martha Honey and Kelsey Frenkiel (Island Press, Washington/Covelo, May 27 2021), Kindle Edition.

people and organizations doing great work. Yet somehow the solutions continue to fall short of the goal. Tourism stakeholders and residents know that our destinations are struggling under the weight of unchecked tourism, but the will to pivot from the current 'activity menu' runs into obstacles fast.

No business wants to ignore environmental wellbeing. But our culture, and society as a whole, is fixated on money as the only currency. We're entrenched in a 1950s profit-first, auto-centric tourism model that fails to find holistic solutions, because we're not connected to each other, and because we're not connected to the Earth or the land or the lake—even when our livelihoods depend on nature and we're living and working right next to the lake!

But singing can help?

Our True DNA

When Jonathan Tourtellot appointed me as geotourism liaison, he said, "I'll tell you one thing. If you don't involve tribal knowledge, you have nothing. Because they hold the key to sustaining our destinations." They had taken care of the Earth for thousands of years, and for the remaining tribes still here, we owe it to them and to ourselves to learn as much as we can. Yet this is no easy task, because Indigenous wisdom is a different mindset. It requires us to slow down, back off a bit, and think before we act.

Some people I've talked to think the Washoe People are named after Washoe County, which is pretty sad. Not only have we lost our own Indigenous knowledge and

connection to the land, but years of suppressing and ignoring the original inhabitants have furthered our ignorance. This is not to say that our culture and modern way of life is bad, but it lacks some important knowledge. Without Indigenous wisdom, it's incomplete. Especially if we work in tourism.

In the documentary *Call of the Forest*, Diana Beresford-Kroeger explains that the ancient Irish were a woodland people whose relationship with trees formed their language and alphabet, called the Ogham Script. "The Celts heard the song of nature. The song of the power of nature. And they heard it through the trees… These trees were considered sacred, just as trees were considered sacred all over the Indigenous world because of their ancient, medicinal properties."[9]

Similar to what happened in the United States, many things through the course of history led to Ireland now being one of the least forest-covered countries in Western Europe. One of reasons was the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, who wanted to quell an Irish rebellion and also wanted Irish timber for her growing navy. A proverb at the time was, "The Irish will never be tamed while the leaves are on the trees."[10]

Indigenous people feel they belong *to the land*; the land never belongs to them. You can't own what gives you life. The natives who were removed from their ancestral lands often say that when they left, a part of them died.

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[9] Diana Beresford-Kroeger, *Call of The Forest: The Forgotten Wisdom of Trees*, directed by Jeff McKay, (Treespeak Films, Merit Motion Pictures, and Edgeland Films Inc., 2016).
[10] "The History," Woflgang Reforest website (accessed January 30, 2024): https://www.wolfgangreforest.ie/irish-forestry-history/.

I say that DNA stands for "Direct Nature Access" or "Divine Nature Access." It's time for us to reclaim our true DNA.

Indigenous Knowing

After becoming Tahoe's Geotourism Liaison, I began learning from other US destinations and how they were benefiting by making Geotourism their tourism directive. Then in 2010, I co-founded Sustainable Tahoe (SustainTahoe.org) with others also interested in accelerating the adoption of geotourism (destination stewardship / sustainable tourism). In 2010, we hosted the first ever Tahoe Stewardship Congress. Representatives from agencies, businesses, and nonprofits gathered at Sand Harbor, a beach on the shores of Lake Tahoe.

The focus (aside from the lake) was how we might collaborate to better welcome, guide, and host visitors in ways that inspire stewardship behaviors. The result was the Tahoe Geotourism Expositions of Stewardship that ran annually from 2011 to 2014. These "Tahoe Expos" worked with various local businesses and agencies to demonstrate how geotourism is a great tool for hosting visitors sustainably while making a profit from tourism at the same time—and with less damage control!

When planning for the 2014 Tahoe Expo, the Washoe said they wanted to share a part of their traditional *Luka'lelup* (Gathering of the One) which included a water blessing. And so, on the eve of that year's expo, I found myself on the edge of the lake with a Washoe elder, who hadn't seen his people's homeland in decades. His comment

that singing would make the water sparkle blew me away. I had to find out what he meant.

I met other Washoe people through my involvement in various efforts to sustain and protect Lake Tahoe's natural environment, and I discovered more about their relationship with Mother Earth.

The Washoe describe Lake Tahoe as the womb of their mother, because it is the center of Washoe culture and where their ancestors were born. (They call it *Da ow aga*, which is where the word "Tahoe" comes from—it's a mispronunciation of *da ow*, which means "lake".) It was their seasonal home where they lived, hunted, fished, and harvested food from late spring until the threat of deep snowfall in winter.

The Washoe sang, danced, and gave thanks to the Earth for all it provides. Sacred rituals were part of their everyday life. As they describe in a USDA pamphlet, "When they killed an animal, the hunter prayed to the Maker and asked for forgiveness for taking a life. They thanked the Maker before they ate, and they showed their appreciation by leaving some food for the Maker. Special celebrations with dance and prayer offerings were held before the first fish was taken from the annual spawning, before the annual 'rabbit drives,' and at the time of the pine nut harvests."[11] The Washoe took nothing for granted.

[11] The Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, *WA SHE SHU: "The Washoe People" Past and Present*, 2009, 9: https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5251066.pdf.

A Washoe friend shared a few native songs, but since they were not in my language, it was hard to remember them or even know what I was singing. I began to think about where gratitude songs might originate. I wondered where the songs came from. They're not exactly online, much less thousands of years ago!

One song I did learn is: *No way yen-nah, no way yen-nah, no way no way yen*, which basically means, "I don't know how I know, I don't know how I know—I just know." Indigenous people listen to the land, the water, the wind, the trees, the wildlife. And nature gives them guidance.

I decided to try this for myself. Instead of learning another culture's songs, I started taking slow, meditative walks through nature to see what would happen. Sure enough, songs started to enter my mind. I'm not a singer or songwriter, but in fascination with what felt like a gift supporting my understanding, I started to write them down. Now I'm working on recording several songs with children and writing a children's book to go with them!

Before libraries and the World Wide Web, we passed knowledge on from one generation to the next by telling stories. We gained knowledge by listening to those stories, and also through prayer and meditation. We still do these things today, but in our fast-paced, busy lives, it can be easy to miss the insights, songs, and rhythms from nature. Wherever you are, nature is actively communicating. We've just forgotten how to listen.

Modern survival requires active attention to the noise of the human-made world we created from the Earth's resources. And our exchange is money. But before stores, we would "shop" directly from the Earth. And what did we give back in return?

Most people living in harmony with the land gave gratitude.

We gave thanks to the Earth that sustained us and gave us its abundance. The Earth is our life support, and we were conscious of that give-and-take relationship.

The Washoe, like other American Indian tribes and Indigenous people around the world, repay the Earth that sustains them with gifts, ceremonies, songs, dances, and prayers. This is their way of giving back. They care for their natural environment like their lives depend on it—because they do. All our lives depend on it.

Our modern cultural narrative is not aligned with the perspective of reciprocal practices and Indigenous wisdom. And that lack of awareness is actually costing the tourism industry and the tourists, locals, and taxpayers billions of dollars and wasted opportunities.

The Washoe Warrior Society supports a cultural exchange program with Indigenous Siberians native to Lake Baikal through the global nonprofit Cultural Survival. One of the organizers of this exchange, Erjen Khamaganova, explained how Indigenous people use song, dance, and ceremony as their currency. "For me, ceremony and ritual are not important for conservation, they ARE conservation. I get angry because it IS

conservation in its highest manifestation."[12] Conservation is often carried out with the right intentions but ends up with the wrong results. Part of this is because we forget to have a *relationship* with nature. We think of it as an "other" and not part of us, even though we're nature too.

The word "currency" used to refer to continuous energy or movement, such as ocean currents, wind currents, and electricity currents. Currency was about natural flow. It wasn't until the 1600s when "currency" came to mean "money." The flow of the world was no longer in nature or service or trade, but in coins. What made the world alive with riches was not what it grew or provided or nurtured, but what others could extract and sell. Yet, as we now know, even atoms—the building blocks of everything—are made up of energy. Everything is energy! So while song and dance and prayer may not be as tangible as the number of visitors or annual profit margins or a list of trees planted or pounds of trash recycled, they still contribute to a healthy environment—and to healthy communities.

Indigenous people had the understanding that everything in nature is connected to everything else. Relationships are the currency of all living systems. It is also the currency business runs on. It is the currency that moves through people to create markets, social media, and all the stories we turn into reality. Stories—ideas that start in

[12] Erjen Khamaganova, as quoted by Dr. Lisa GrayShield, "Gatherings," *Washoe Warrior Society/Washiw Zulshish Gum T'anu* (accessed January 30, 2024): https://wzgt.org/gatherings/.

our imagination and then gain life through relationships. Relationships are the currency that attract the most interest, and have the greatest return on investment.

Those who are still Indigenous today—those who still have that deep relationship with the Earth and all living things—have wisdom because of that relationship. But when we see ourselves as separate from nature, we forget the currency of connection—even though it's the one we can't live without.

The more science grows, the more it confirms those ancient beliefs. And as Indigenous people know all too well, when we're cut off from nature and our sacred heritage, we lose that currency—and that's poverty for life.

The Washoe write: "The health of the land and the health of the people are tied together, and what happens to the land also happens to the people. When the land suffers, so too [do] the people."[13] The Washoe only took what they needed. They always left enough animals to reproduce so they would have food to hunt in coming years. Their teepee-like temporary structures blended with the Earth and were later reabsorbed by the Earth. They left little trace even after 10,000[14] years of existence.

Learning about how the Washoe lived made me realize how much modern culture provides us what we *think* we need to survive and thrive, at the expense of what we truly need. We have become so far out of alignment with our natural surroundings

[13] A. Brian Wallace, as quoted by The Washoe Tribe, *WA SHE SHU*, 5.
[14] USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, "Cultural Heritage of the Lake Tahoe Basin": https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/ltbmu/learning/history-culture.

that we work against the very support system that is now struggling to sustain us. Today we measure everything in dollar amounts—but nature runs on a different currency.

I call it the Currency of Caring.

A More Profitable Future

"Despite their artistic pretensions, sophistication, and many accomplishments, humans owe their existence to a six-inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains."
– Paul Harvey

The earth has three names: "planet," which is the earth in relation to space and the universe; "world," which usually means all of us humans, our societies, and everything we've made; and "earth," which usually means the ground, oceans, plants and trees. Yet when we say those three different words, we often primarily think only of the human, manmade "world." We forget that we are of the earth. We *are* nature.

We have created an amazing world, but the earth can wreck the world with its earthquakes and hurricanes. And the world can also wreck the earth when we're not in tune with it. And because the world is built on the earth, without the earth, the world cannot survive.

We think we need money to live, but everything we actually need and use is sourced from the earth. We built the world from materials found on and in the earth. If the earth stops producing forests, water, and wind, then the world with all its money becomes irrelevant pretty fast.

It's hard to build structures without raw materials, or sustain ourselves for long on contaminated water, polluted air, and chemically engineered food. When our world is out of sync with the earth, we forget to pay the earth our respects. We think water comes in bottles—but if we made our world *with* the earth, we would be able to drink straight out of rivers and streams. It's not about going back to the "cave man" days. It's about moving forward consciously and conscientiously, in tune with the earth, so that both the world and the earth can support each other and thrive in harmony.

The current playbook is to take what you need and let the next generation worry about any deficit or repercussions. This quick-money culture doesn't think like the earth does, which is the millennial forest, the long game.

Right now, we're out of sync. We have lost our sacred relationship with the earth, and it's hurting our destinations, our economy, our physical health, and our mental and spiritual health. When the earth's ecosystems go out-of-balance, we feel the effects.

I'm not against industry or our Western culture, which has brought benefits I enjoy. But as with almost anything, there is a cost for short-term gain and carelessness that compromises the life support systems we depend on. The good news is that this profit-first directive is based on a story we collectively agreed to, and it can be changed when we collectively agree to something else. And we don't have to make huge sacrifices to achieve it. In fact, our way of life will be improved.

When we remember our sacred relationship with nature, we can remember, recover, and restore our story—our culture—to one that works in harmony with natural law instead of in violation of it.

The tourism industry is uniquely suited for this task.

Tourists are open to trying new experiences in the interest of gaining special memories and stories they can share. We travelers yearn to gain a sense of place, which means full immersion in the unique landscape, culture, and community. Sustainable tourism, when done properly, enables these experiences through stewardship behaviors, that not only give tourists unforgettable experiences but inspire them to be local stewards at home and everywhere else they travel.

With our modern scientific knowledge and technology, we have an incredible opportunity to remember, recover, and restore our destinations, our communities, and our health.

Scientist David Suzuki says, “The way we see the world shapes the way we treat it. If a mountain is a deity, not a pile of ore; if a river is one of the veins of the land, not potential irrigation water; if a forest is a sacred grove, not timber; if other species are biological kin, not resources; or if the planet is our mother, not an opportunity—then we will treat each other with greater respect. Thus is the challenge, to look at the world from a different perspective.”[15]

[15] Suzuki, as quoted on Goodreads.

Conservationists and capitalists don't need to be in conflict. We don't need to cancel businesses or ban tourists. If we care about nature as though our life depends on it, because it does, we can actually increase profit and decrease costs, and generate a wealth that goes far beyond the currency of money. That's because the relationships between sky, water, land, plants, wildlife, and humans is a life support system of collaboration and mutual benefit. Each system depends on the other for survival.

Many books on the tourism industry are academic-focused, while others hype the problems but don't get to the root cause. Furthermore, many leaders in the tourism industry think of themselves as more in the hospitality or travel industries; they want to increase business at their restaurants, hotels, shops, airlines, cruises, tours, and rentals. Sustainability is a growing concern—and a growing concern for consumers—but it's never enough to make real change. Working collaboratively with local businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies are not usually in our consciousness, much less working with nature.

It's time for a new story.

As the Washoe explain, "It is difficult to separate the sacred from the everyday life of the Washoe. The Washoe see every aspect of the environment as sentient beings that are deserving of respect and cooperation if humans are to survive."[16] I think we can bring this back. And frankly, both those in the tourism industry and the tourists are tired

[16] The Washoe Tribe, *WA SHE SHU*, 8-9.

of paying for never-ending restoration that doesn't work, while the residents lose money and patience, and the tourism stakeholders lose precious destinations. There's a better way!

I wrote this book to serve as a blueprint for:

- How to identify more tourism opportunities using the 8 Words of Tourism
- Create a holistic geotourism program in any place
- Work collaboratively with other entities using TriNomics™
- Let nature be the guide for a place's carrying capacity and better decision-making
- How large tourism companies can put these principles in place
- How small companies, travelers, and individuals can do the same
- How to include the next generation of leaders so we continue to live in the new currency (or rather, the ancient currency) for a more profitable and sustainable future

If Indigenous people took care of the land for thousands of years, we can too. If we care about the places where we live and visit, those places will in turn take care of us. We can cultivate the knowledge and respect to walk softly on this Earth, reap the landscape's resources without depleting them, live in nature without destroying it, and enjoy destinations without putting them on a "Do not visit" list. In doing so, we will have healthier and more prosperous destinations and communities while staying consciously connected to the living, regenerative force that is nature's spirit.

This is the Currency of Caring, and it generates the greatest ROI.

It's what makes the water sparkle.

Chapter 1 Summary

4. The Power of Indigenous Practices in Environmental Stewardship

Indigenous cultures, such as the Washoe, maintain a life-supporting connection with their environment built on reciprocity. Rituals like singing, dancing, and other forms of gratitude embody their deep respect for nature. They see the Earth as a living being to be in relationship with rather than a commodity. Such traditions promote sustainable living and can guide modern efforts to protect and restore natural habitats.

5. Challenges and Solutions in Sustainable Tourism

Modern tourism often strains natural ecosystems, as seen in Lake Tahoe, where pollution and urbanization have diminished its clarity and harmed wildlife habitats. Efforts to change this narrative involve fostering geotourism, where visitors engage in responsible travel that supports environmental preservation. This approach requires collaboration across various stakeholders, from local businesses to government agencies, to prioritize ecological health alongside economic gains.

6. Reconnecting with Nature through Reciprocity and Gratitude

Modern society's disconnection from nature has led to unsustainable practices that damage the environment. Embracing Indigenous wisdom, which emphasizes reciprocity and gratitude towards the Earth, can foster a more harmonious relationship

with nature. This involves recognizing the intrinsic value of natural systems and contributing positively to their health, ultimately benefiting both the environment and human wellbeing, which better supports long-term prosperity.

Chapter 3: Geotourism: A New Way Forward

"Virtually all of the extremely important services that nature provides are completely ignored by conventional economics."

— David Suzuki[17]

Geotourism is tourism that strives to do no harm; the goal is to inspire "destination stewardship."

The National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations (NGCSD) created geotourism as "Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents."[18] While NGCSD no longer exists, currently the nonprofit Destination Stewardship Center is carrying on NGCSD's original mission[19]

Ecotourism, cultural tourism, agrotourism, or any other type of tourism you may have heard can all be part of a geotourism program. While those other terms

[17] David Suzuki and Holly Dressel, *From Naked Ape to Superspecies: Humanity and the Global Eco-Crisis* (Greystone Books, 2nd edition, July 1, 2009), Kindle Edition, as quoted on Goodreads: https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/145364.David_Suzuki.
[18] Jonathan Tourtellot, "Geotourism," *Destination Stewardship Center*: https://destinationcenter.org/geotourism/.
[19] Tourtellot, "Geotourism," *Destination Stewardship Center.*

differentiate specific types of tourism, geotourism is the collective, sustainable tourism program for an entire destination.

Geotourism is all the ways we experience a place, done in ways that excite us to care more about it, hosted in ways that are easy to access and benefit the local environment and local economy, and sustained by local communities through combined ownership, shared interest, and collective investment across a region.

Geotourism provides a plethora of experiences for a variety of interests that welcome, host, and guide tourists on immersive and educational experiences that connect them to the place and enable them to learn and care about it at the same time.

In short, geotourism makes the tourist a steward. Now, instead of locals complaining about trash and crowded beaches, travelers become the sustainers of the places they visit. And who doesn't want to be a hero in their travel story? Who doesn't want to be welcomed back with open arms?

In fact, geotourism is not just about tourism, and it's not just about nature.

It's about building better communities.

Save the Food

It's interesting that cuisine is a great way to showcase the 8 Worlds, because that's actually one of the reasons the National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations was created. In Jonathan Tourtellot's presentation at Tahoe, he explained that National Geographic photographers around the world started noticing that even in some of the most far-off, exotic-to-us places, cities and towns had Western chains like

McDonald's and Starbucks. Other places were so overrun with tourists they weren't fun to visit, and the very assets that tourists were traveling to see were becoming degraded by overuse or misuse. National Geographic staff became increasingly worried that destinations were losing their destination appeal. Why travel if every place is the same, or if there are terrible crowds or pollution, or they're difficult to access? That was the impetus for NGCSD and geotourism—a new model of tourism where locals and visitors sustain and enhance the unique assets of a place.

National Geographic began dispersing travel experts to the top 100 destinations on the planet to score each one using their Destination Scorecard, which rates destinations based on the 12 Principles of Geotourism. In 2006, Lake Tahoe came in 66, a C grade.

Jonathan Tourtellot, the Executive Director at the time, presented those findings at the Strategic Marketing Alliance Tourism Conference in May of 2007. He knew Tahoe was falling deeper down the list and needed help. Overcrowding and lack of care for our natural resources were only parts of the problem. Other concerns included what you could do in Lake Tahoe, like hiking and skiing, that you could do in many other destinations. What was it that made Tahoe unique?

After being appointed Lake Tahoe's Geotourism Liaison, I gave my first presentation at a Sierra Club meeting and received intense push-back from locals, who were understandably resentful that Nat Geo had scored Tahoe a low C. So I suggested they use the Destination Scorecard and score Tahoe themselves. The room got quiet as

we went through each of the 12 principles. By the end their collective discussion, we tallied the results. They gave Tahoe a D+!

Tahoe was failing to enroll travelers in stewardship.

Erik Wolf, founder of the World Food Travel Association, interviewed me on his podcast *Eat Well Travel Better*. He mentioned how locals in many places, especially in developing countries, "feel they've arrived big time" when they get a Western chain in their area. They even ask corporations to come in so workers can participate in the franchises.[20] Yet many of us know what happens when too many chains take over our downtowns. Not only does it hurt local workers, it ruins a place's authenticity. Geotourism is about more than enforcing building codes so a KFC "blends in." It's about keeping the generations-old restaurants, farms, shops, landscapes, and 8 Worlds authentic and thriving so the local economy thrives too.

On that same note, when visitors are in a foreign place and aren't hosted in a way that makes them knowledgeable enough to try new things, many end up going to those franchises because they're not sure where else to go. It's easy for visitors to get overwhelmed with fatigue, travel decisions, transportation issues, language barriers, and the like, so that a familiar chain is a welcome relief in unfamiliar territory.

[20] Wolf, "Episode 61," *Eat Well Travel Better* (December 19, 2022).

We must be the gatekeepers so tourists get involved, care, and do no harm. Which means those of us in the tourism industry need to get involved, care, and do no harm.

There's a place in Tahoe where you can put your hand out in winter and feed the birds right out of your hand. But people have to be guided up the trail so they don't ruin it—and that's a gate that can *make money* while preserving the destination.

One problem Tahoe has is that there isn't one gate. Since it's so large and part of two states and five counties, there must be a coordinated effort across the region to have multiple gates that guide and host tourists more responsibly than the current model. And visitors would appreciate this, because they would gain valuable information on how to access more of Tahoe's unique 8 Worlds than they do now fending for themselves with millions of other tourists.

Lake Tahoe has some great golf courses, but golf is another activity that isn't unique to any one destination. And grass doesn't grow very well in the desert without a lot of water and fertilizer, which can be toxic to native soil, streams, wildlife, and the lake. The way to make golf courses a geotourism activity would be to sculpt native plants and grasses into a Tahoe-unique golf course, preserving both the destination and the experience.

Luckily, even golfers are getting wise to geotourism principles. The United States Golf Association (USGA) found that "46 percent of golf courses are increasing their acreage of naturalized areas" that "enhance the golf experience while playing a critical

role in conserving resources," which in turn helps "golf facilities control costs and green fees."[21] Now an activity you can do in numerous places around the world becomes more of a cherished experience, because it's woven into the destination's unique 8 Worlds, and does less harm to those worlds and residents.

When businesses or organizations use geotourism to promote the strength and unique flavors of their geographic area, patrons don't just have a nice time, they have an *irreplaceable* experience. And as a result, they will pay more and stay longer.

That's why hosting is so important. Geotourism promotes user-friendly menus of activities that are "gated." Those gates, or access points, regulate where tourists go, what they can do, and how they do it.

The 8 Worlds are the treasures, and geotourism is the vehicle (or pirate ship) that takes people on immersive voyages to those hidden treasures. Geotourism provides a variety of treasure maps that visitors can choose from, so they're guided on the high seas in ways that help them appreciate and help preserve the 8 Worlds and all the local residents, animals and humans alike, while having much more memorable experiences.

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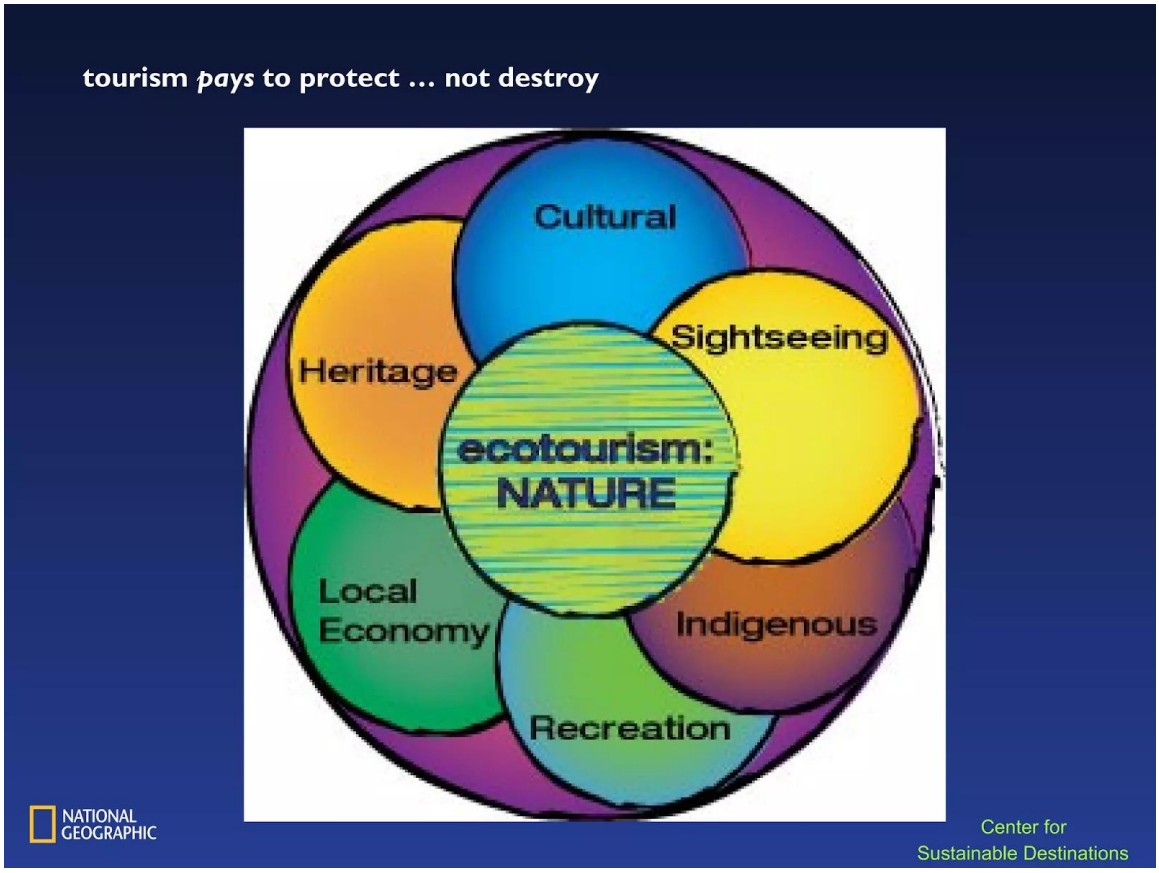
[21] George Waters, "How Naturalized Areas Benefit Golf Courses of All Types," *United States Golf Association* (June 10, 2018): https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/articles/2018/06/naturalized-areas-fescue-grasses-benefit-golf-courses.html.



The Basics

Geotourism is developed and scored based on 4 steps and 12 principles.

The 4 steps are:

1. **Identify** the geotourism assets in your area through scouting, vetting, researching, and mapping
2. **Develop** geotourism assets by building relationships with those willing to provide access to the assets/attractions/activities/adventures as ongoing geotourism opportunities

3. **Promote** collaboratively to communities of interest (CI) through alliances with tourism and marketing
4. **Sustain** geotourism with annual reviews, evaluations, and by continually fostering and deepening relationships with all stakeholders

The 12 principles are:[22]

1. **Integrity of place**: Is the asset reflective of the place's distinct character (market differentiation) and a source of local pride?
2. **International codes**: Does it adhere to the United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) Global Code of Ethics for Tourism[23], and to the International Cultural Tourism Charter established by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)[24]?
3. **Market selectivity**: Does it serve local market segments likely to appreciate, respect, and disseminate information on this asset to encourage tourism growth?
4. **Market diversity**: Does it add to the range of appropriate food and lodging amenities, so as to facilitate all demographics and to maximize economic resiliency in both the short and long term?

[22] Tourtellot, "The Geotourism Principles," *Destination Stewardship Center*.
[23] UNWTO, *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*: https://www.unwto.org/global-code-of-ethics-for-tourism.
[24] ICOMOS, *International Cultural Tourism Charter*: https://www.icomos.org/en/newsletters-archives/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/162-international-cultural-tourism-charter.

5. **Tourist satisfaction**: Does it excite tourists enough for them to bring new vacation stories home, thus inspiring others to visit, encouraging continual demand for the destination?
6. **Community involvement**: Does it encourage local small businesses, civic groups, and other community resources to build partnerships and to effectively promote and provide a distinctive and honest visitor experience?
7. **Community benefit**: Does it involve and provide social and economic benefits to the local communities and businesses, with clear communication of the destination stewardship policies required to maintain those benefits?
8. **Protection and enhancement of destination appeal**: Does it encourage local communities and businesses to sustain the 8 Worlds and prevent degradation by keeping tourist volumes within acceptable limits, and by using business models that can maintain profitability within those limits?
9. **Land use**: Does it anticipate development pressures, and apply techniques to prevent undesired overdevelopment and degradation (such as resort and vacation-home sprawl, especially on coasts and islands) so as to retain diversity of natural and scenic environments and to ensure continued resident access to waterfronts?

10. **Conservation of resources**: Does it align with regulations that encourage businesses to minimize water and solid waste pollution, energy consumption, water usage, landscaping chemicals, and overly bright nighttime lighting?
11. **Planning**: Do local businesses and communities recognize and respect their immediate economic needs without sacrificing the asset's long-term character and geotourism potential?
12. **Interactive interpretation**: Does it engage both visitors and hosts in learning about the place and encourage residents to show off the natural and cultural heritage of their communities, so that tourists gain a richer experience and residents develop pride in their destination?

After these 12 principles are met, the final and ongoing step is **evaluation** (which some consider the 13th principle). This is where each asset is evaluated and refined on a regular basis using publicized feedback and data, in coordination with the stakeholders involved.

In the back of this book I have provided an updated version of these steps, so you can easily go through each one and set up your own geotourism plan wherever you are.

More than Maple Syrup

Soon after becoming Tahoe's Geotourism Liaison, I took it upon myself to learn how other destinations in the US had adopted and integrated the geotourism steps and principles in their tourism strategy, and how they were benefitting. One of the people I

reached out to was Gloria Bruce in Vermont, which was one of the first places in America to adopt geotourism in the early 2000s.

At the time, dairy was the primary agricultural driver in the state. But when large corporate farms started taking over across the US, milk prices tanked. The small, 100- to 200-head farms in Vermont were now up against mega corporations. It was a perilous situation that threatened their livelihoods and the culture of Vermont. The farmers held protests against the agriculture conglomerates but it was a losing battle. The local economy was in trouble.

When Gloria Bruce became Executive Director of the Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association, the geotourism program was already under way. ("Northeast Kingdom" is the name for the three most northeastern counties in Vermont.) The team before Gloria had identified their unique geotourism assets but hadn't yet developed them.

"Assets" is kind of the wrong word. What they had identified were the answers to two main questions:

1) What do we love and not want to lose?

2) What are we willing to do to save what we love?

They didn't want to lose their culture, their communities, or their values. They were willing to work collaboratively to ensure everyone benefited from tourism, so that every community could make a good living without losing what they loved—in fact, they were going to use their unique culture and values to increase a holistic, beneficial

economy for the entire Northeast Kingdom and beyond. Gloria explains how the process worked:

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"When you look at geotourism at its core, it's about protecting what we value about our home. And that is not just a few cherished things. It's the small farm down the road, the corner store in the village, the hiking trails, the small-town vibes, the beautiful landscapes—it's everything.

So when we were planning the geotourism experiences, nothing was off the table. If we cared about it and we wanted to protect it, and we felt like we could leverage tourism in a way that was a win for the visitor and a win for us culturally, then it was something we were doing.

To me, the most critical step to take in geotourism is to enhance and protect what we love like a wave that washes over the whole landscape. Because, still to this day, we feel like the landscape is not just Vermont. It's the whole Northern Forest region, which is Vermont, New Hampshire, part of Northern Maine, and the Adirondacks of New York. And the Northern Forest is critically important in terms of its ability to help cleanse the air and the environment. We always wanted to amplify what we were doing across our state and across this region. So as we developed the geotourism experiences, they were done with that wider preservation of the whole region in mind."[25]

[25] Gloria Bruce, interview with the author, August 25, 2023.

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The association decided that they could help the small farmers by adding them to the tourism menu. Anyone who didn't grow up on a farm would learn something and have a unique experience.

But agri- or agro-tourism was a new concept. This was before Airbnb and Verbo. The culture of visiting a working farm or staying in a stranger's home didn't exist. There were a lot of decisions the association had to make about how it would work.

At the same time, many of the small farms were forced to diversify to survive. A lot of farmers started shifting to organic farming as that became popular. Some started growing lavender. Others started raising goats and sheep. With these changes, the small farms also added diversity to the agritourism menu—and things started to connect across the region.

As more farms diversified into goats, goat cheese became a thing. Then the restaurants started buying the goat cheese and promoting the local food scene, which helped advertise agritourism to people already visiting the restaurants. And then, instead of just experiencing a goat farm, visitors could also see cheese caves.

Suddenly Chef Emeril was coming up to Vermont for tastings of the local, farm-grown cheeses and other fares. Some farmers began growing hops, and beer production took off. The number one brewery in the world is still in the middle of the Northeast Kingdom. That brewery now hosts a tradition every spring when locals gather together to pick dandelions for the beer's unique flavor.

Of course tourists like to have plenty of options, which is why geotourism works so well at providing local and regional profitability, because it's the blending of everything—and that matters in terms of sustainability. The Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association didn't want to be compartmentalized. They wanted to look at things holistically, even to the extent of coupling things that didn't seem geotourism related.

For instance, there was an ATV and snowmobile trail system in the Northeast Kingdom that the association realized complemented agritourism, because people who wanted to ride ATVs and snowmobiles could do so in conjunction with farm visits. When multiple experiences are combined, the visitor gets more out of it. This also made agritourism accessible in the winter season. They used existing forms of recreation to grow into greater benefits for the whole community.

It was the same with cycling tours, which could take people further into the Kingdom and connect them with the mom and pop grocery stores in the villages that Vermonters wanted to protect. The team designed cycling routes on mountain roads, through covered bridges, and along waterways which also showcased different local places where the cyclists could stop (and shop), whether that was a farm stand, museum, country store, fiber producer, sheep farm, historic landmark, bed and breakfast, brewery, restaurant… suffice it to say that when you think of the 8 Worlds, destinations have a lot to offer!

When Gloria joined the association, the team had developed a printed document full of geotourism experiences. Now they had to assess every idea to make sure it was viable.

As Gloria says, “We had to figure out how to weave each experience into the fabric of the whole, so instead of just unique entities that made it on the map, they were experiences that had positive impacts on the community. Because for geotourism to really work, it has to become part of the larger economic development strategy. It has to become part of larger community conversations. It has to be woven into the existing tourism experiences in meaningful, myriad ways so they cascade across our communities with multiple benefits.”

Once they chose which geotourism events they wanted to pursue, they had to breathe life into the map. This meant working out the specific details of each activity. Gloria continues:

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“The logistics happened in a neighborhood way. Vermont is really like a small town. Everybody knows everybody. When we approached a local farmer and shared with them what they could do to earn more money, soon other farmers would know about it. It was less about having executives in a meeting room and more about community conversations and community connectedness, which is the whole point of geotourism anyway. Because if someone tells a farmer to try something and it really helps them, they’re going to tell five other people they care about, who are going to tell

five other people. So we had conversations directly with farmers, the people who run the farmers markets, and with other community members and stakeholders.

If you're sitting in a boardroom and you're having a conversation with ten people who aren't really the stakeholders, like in Tahoe where the big tourist companies are not locally owned, they're going to go back to their desks and do ten other things in their work day, and then maybe they'll give geotourism some thought. You have to get those influencers out of the meeting rooms and in with the local communities in the destinations. You need to work with the people you're trying to impact. In those situations, it can be tough. But getting those people more involved can help them understand the value of geotourism."

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Agritourism was the hardest to figure out. They had to ask: What does this all look like? What are the biohazard challenges that could exist as a result of connecting people with farms? What are the safety considerations? What are the considerations for the farm families themselves?

Vermont farms are absolutely beautiful, but functioning farms have electric fences, machinery, and livestock. So the association partnered with local universities to conduct analyses, which greatly helped them answer those questions. The University of Vermont came up with an onsite visitor's guide for agritourism, which considered the safety concerns and how those concerns impacted the farmers' liability and insurance, such as how to prevent the spread of disease with boot baths, where visitors would

park, if bathroom facilities were available to visitors, and so on. By using the local universities, the association tapped into the combined knowledge of the community, which helped them form a much more comprehensive plan, and helped generate community ownership of the plan.

The Power of Local Flavor

One of the first farm tours was an alpaca farm, which even attracted the locals because it was such a new experience. Visitors would ride the alpacas all through the farm fields and then have a picnic along a river. And that saved the farm—the farm owners had been planning to sell, and the land probably would have been subdivided. It's true that a lot of farmers weren't raising milk cows anymore, but every business has to adapt to stay relevant as times change. By being connected to communities, geotourism helps businesses do that with integrity. And in this case, geotourism saved many small farms and other businesses from failing or moving out of state.

Other farmers started raising alpacas, llamas, sheep, and goats for fiber, and a farm and fiber fest was one of the first big events that came to life on the geotourism menu. As a direct result of those activities, different farms around Montgomery started a fiber coop where they sold locally-procured fiber, uniquely-dyed yarns, and crocheted and knitted items made by local craftspeople. Today, the Vermont Sheep & Wool Festival is an annual event that gets bigger and bigger every year.

The fiber coop and farm visits grew other local markets, like the cheese workshops, and it kept growing from there. Winegrowers and winemakers started

hosting more tours and wine tastings. Other places set up areas for wildlife viewing, and moose viewings became a big hit. Local brands of cheese, yogurt, maple syrup, wine, and beer started flying off the shelves. The Northeast Kingdom still hosts Vermont Open Farm Week, where farms promote visits, experiences, and products.

Then there was Claire's restaurant in Hardwick, a small farming community in the middle of what was left of the granite industry. Three friends decided their town needed a new place to eat, and they wanted to only serve food from the local farms within a certain radius. With geotourism in full swing by the time they opened in 2008, Claire's became such a big deal that patrons had to make reservations months in advance. People found it fascinating that the menu changed based on what the local farms had available. Claire's transformed Hardwick into a thriving town.

Another example is Northeast Kingdom's Jay Peak Resort, one of the larger downhill ski mountains in the state of Vermont. But during the early 2000s, they were feeling Vermont's economic troubles like everyone else. They decided to embrace geotourism, because the Vermont landscape and culture shouldn't be something visitors only saw on their drive there or at the top of the ski slope. It should be part of the experience. One of their decisions was to buy as much food as possible within thirty miles of the resort.

When you think about the amount of food a resort serves, and what buying locally means to the local farmers, store owners, other businesses and their families, that matters. It's lifechanging for the local economy.

It also meant Jay Peak (JP) was able to design their menu around a really traditional, authentic Vermont cuisine. They even commissioned to have beautiful photographs of the local farms featured as décor in their restaurants, so guests knew where their food came from. By buying as much food as they could super locally, JP was able to provide an even more exclusive retreat.

JP could have bought their food from a mass food supplier and kept their costs really low. Instead, they chose to profit-share tourism with the local community. As a result, they ended up making more money than they ever had before. Their prices could reflect their exclusivity to accommodate buying locally, which helped keep the local farms viable and even thriving. It really was a win-win.

JP advertised some of the other geotourism activities to their guests and even included some of them into the JP experience by partnering with the local farm tours and so on. They even brought in local musicians like fiddle players to perform mountain music at the base of the ski slopes, which of course gives local musicians more opportunities to perform and earn a living. I mean, where else can you ski to the sounds of live music?

By embracing geotourism, JP still immerses its visitors in that part of Vermont, so it's not just fleeting scenery tourists drive by on their way home—it's a truly memorable getaway. Geotourism aims for those hyper local experiences that are not only better for both the visitors and the locals, but provide businesses with a competition buffer in an otherwise crowded marketplace. As Gloria says, "You can't get that experience

anywhere else, because that experience is our home. These things can only come from us. You can't replicate it because it's our people and our place." Every destination should be that different, that immersive, that special.

The Profit-Sharing Planet

Jay Peak Resort went from a struggling mountain to a financially viable, healthy company that continues to thrive and grow today. They've diversified into a four-season resort "far from anything resembling ordinary," as they say on their website.[26] "Featuring a year-round indoor waterpark, ice arena, rec center (with climbing walls, obstacle courses, arcades and a movie theater), championship golf course, easygoing disc golf course, and… skiing and snowboarding… live music in the amphitheater… corporate… accommodations, [plus] restaurants, activities, and amenities." All of this is on one campus, as it should be. Rather than buying out massive swaths of land all around them and encroaching on local landowners (wildlife and trees included), they're keeping everything they do in a relatively small, combined area by redeveloping the space they already own.

Furthermore, they're not just thinking of tourists. They offer community swimming lessons and lifeguard training, and they give students at the local high school on the honor roll a free ski pass. During the pandemic, they cooked hundreds and hundreds of meals every day that were transported to elders in the community who

[26] "About Jay," Jay Peak Resort website (2024): https://jaypeakresort.com/resort/about-jay.

didn't feel comfortable going out for food. JP's example also prompted the community to wonder if the local schools could also purchase more food locally, and now many schools have a better lunch menu.

Because JP is so focused on the local community, the decisions they make for their particular campus have very healthy ripple effects all around.

Instead of *profit* as their bottom line, *profit sharing* is their bottom line.

That's the level of connectedness we need to have when developing and updating any destination.

Even though Jay Peak Resort is big enough to act like a nonlocal corporation, they choose not to. This economic strategy can be adopted by any business or organization, big or small.

Gloria explains.

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"We celebrate JP's success and their growth because it nourishes our growth at the same time. So if we see something working so well at a ski mountain, where visitors are coming and spending money, it stands to reason that it will also work in our school systems. Which has nothing to do with tourism, but when we weave those values into the broader community and all of a sudden schools are purchasing foods at a more localized level, that further sustains our local agriculture. I would say that geotourism is part of the fabric of who we are now. It's our shared values in our schools, in our farmers markets, and in our big tourism experiences.

Unfortunately, you don't see it in the economic development strategy overall. And that needs to change. Because what we saw at the time, and in the subsequent years that followed, was that the geotourism program was a sharing of bounty, almost like a harvest. We wanted geotourism to become the architecture of sustainable tourism and development in all of Vermont and the Northern Forest region and beyond.

Although we don't hear the term geotourism as much today, in some ways that's almost a good thing, because it's no longer restricted to tourism. These are values that we see now infused in communities and sustainable business models, and all of these different threads are weaving together. It's part of our quality of life. It's about living our lives in a way that protects and sustains our home. And that certainly includes tourism because of the power of that particular sector. But it can't just be tourism. You have to adopt it and use it everywhere."

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When you have geographic areas experiencing multigenerational systemic poverty, which we see around the country and the world, these are often incredibly beautiful, natural destinations. And poor urban areas are often the ones with the most history and potential benefit if they were restored. Yet while economic development is needed, the fear is that economic development will erase a place's beauty. That's because instead of taking time to restore a place in a way that benefits everyone, we often take the easier, short-term solution.

So often the mentality is that something is better than nothing. Why wouldn't we want a Dollar General? Why wouldn't we want a Walmart? We need the jobs! It's hard to push back on something that's seemingly being handed to you when people are struggling to make a living. But adopting geotourism means asking the hard questions, like what those jobs would be, and how those stores would really benefit or hurt the local economy. Walmart usually has a camping section. So what will happen to the mom and pop stores selling camping gear? The chains address an immediate pain point, but they don't usually solve any of the underlying problems. They're a band aid, not a solution. It's a dangerous precipice.

I'm not against the chains, but too many can cause economic issues. As David Suzuki writes, "It's… interesting that the words 'economy' and 'ecology' both come from the Greek *oikos*, meaning 'domain' or 'household.' Ecologists seek the principles, rules and laws that enable species to flourish sustainably. Economists are meant to 'manage' our activity within the biosphere, our domain—ideally within the rules and strictures ecologists find."[27] In other words, as Mick Dodge likes to say, we need to put the "eco" back in the economy, or as I call it, the "eco-onomy." We need to change *profit* as our bottom line to *profit sharing*.

Geotourism invites us to consider:

1) What are the costs to the community?

[27] David Suzuki and Yannick Beaudoin, "Economics should reflect what really matters," *David Suzuki Foundation* (April 16, 2020): https://davidsuzuki.org/story/economics-should-reflect-what-really-matters/.

2) What are the broader benefits to the community?

Economic development can be a lot of different things, so we need to determine if a particular activity is going to develop and sustain the community and its 8 Worlds in a healthy way, for the long-term, and if it fits into the overall economic development strategy based on the geotourism principles. If not, then we need to see if the activity can be changed so it does meet all the criteria. We need to ask: Who are we profit sharing with? Are we profit sharing with the marsh? With our children? With the Native population? We need to say the truth out loud.

There are big profits to be made anywhere—even bigger when we profit share with nature and with the wider human community, which is what JP Resort does. They decided to profit share with the 8 Worlds that surrounded them—the 8 Worlds that gave them the mountain to begin with.

Finding Treasures

As you can probably see, geotourism requires a lot of coordination and collaboration with a variety of stakeholders, which is more time consuming and complicated than our normal way of doing things.

But as with most hard things, the benefits are worth it.

Natalie Chew, (participant at the Nevada Naturalist Conference I was the keynote speaker at) shared her thoughts after our 4 hour workshop like session assessing geotourism assets in southern Nevada:

"The presentation and group brainstorming session broke open our conventional ways of thinking so that we were able to see new paradigms, see new possibilities and create a geotourism model based on one of the unique features in the area. It was fascinating watching the room become energized and transformed by the excitement of this new way of seeing our community's inherent assets, seeing the need for collaboration, using the [new] model, and presenting it in a way that benefited all…"[28]

Geotourism is not about the local tourism board or chamber of commerce doing all the work. The local businesses, nonprofits, agencies, residents, tribes, and other stakeholders need to be a part of any geotourism model. The magic happens when they work together to develop those opportunities. Because if geotourism is actually going to enhance a place and be the tide that lifts all boats, then everyone must benefit, from the visitors to the residents and environment and everyone in between.

Geotourism is a variety of activities hosted by a variety of local stakeholders that can be ongoing every day in every season in every style. I call geotourism activities "GeoTracks" or "GeoTours," because we built them to include transit to and from the place/activity, and often linked several activities together that enriched the experience.

So geotracks involve multiple activities and stakeholders, to enhance the visitor experience and to broaden the local entities who profit. This gives the visitor a greater

[28] Quoted by Jacquie Chandler and Sustainable Tahoe: https://www.sustaintahoe.org/uploads/1/2/7/7/127782591/jchandlerbio.pdf.

sense of place, more options, and more reasons to come back for more—and tell their friends about it.

Aside from the multistakeholder coordination piece, the biggest pushback I get against geotourism is on how many people attend the geotracks in contrast to the thousands of people who come all at once to big events, festivals, and concerts. However, one of the goals here is to spread people out to avoid a few choice places being continually overcrowded, which also degrades the ecosystem, the visitor experience, and the destination itself. Our Tahoe Expos demonstrated how to spread people out, generally in groups no bigger than fifteen at a time, so they have a personal, immersive experience. This enriches the visitors' connection and caring, while minimizing the harm and cleanup that comes after. Destinations cannot afford visitors who do not become stewards at some level. Especially when those same visitors can become the solution.

When Sustainable Tahoe set up our Geotourism Expos, we had about a dozen geotracks that each hosted several tours in one day. The idea was that a dozen geotourism adventures could host around three tours a day year round. So 12 geotracks x 3 tours each = 36 tours a day x 15 people per tour = 540 people per day per place. Now multiply that by a conservative 300 days a year, and your region has beneficially hosted 162,000 people. That's a lot more than a 5,000-person concert.

Of course those bigger events can still happen. So add up all the patrons who go to the "regular" concerts, beach weekends, ski resorts, etc. to the geotracks. Now you've

got way more visitors supporting more local businesses and spending more money and leaving less trash and doing less harm—even becoming stewards themselves—than you could with the old model.

The more geotourism becomes the new model, the more geotourism-experienced stewards can also help plan and host those large events. Now, the 5,000-crowd concert also becomes sustainable—even beneficial—in more ways than just the old bottom-line currency.

This is the sustainable business model, and the majority of us want it. But change is challenging. So let's add more incentives.

Businesses can add geotracks to their business model not just by being a part of a geotrack, but also encouraging visitors to participate in others. For instance, a hotel could include a free or discounted geotrack with certain lodging packages. How many people actually sift through those dusty brochures in the lobby? Selling package deals can be a win-win for multiple stakeholders, especially since the geotourism model aims for a steady flow of visitors throughout the year, especially when bigger events aren't on the menu.

The other problem with larger events is they don't always expose people to the uniqueness of a place. If you attend a concert at Tahoe, you may drive away thinking "That was great. I wonder where those bands will play next?" But if you do a geotrack, you think, "Wow, I should go back and do the stuff I didn't have time to do, try more of the local cuisine, rent one of those kayaks again and see more rivers, and use the

transport again so I don't have to sit in traffic! I'm definitely telling my friends about this place!"

Geotourism is like the comedic film *City Slickers* starring Billy Crystal. If for some reason you haven't seen it, three friends from New York travel to a dude ranch to drive cattle out West, because they want to experience something drastically different from their NYC lives. They get an authentic experience destination through being an active part of a cattle drive, and end up having life-changing experiences, all while helping to sustain and even enhance the assets they came to explore.

This is what we all want in some way when we travel. We want to immerse ourselves in a new set of 8 Worlds. We want to get a sense of place—and we're often willing to pay good money for it.

So ask yourself and your community:

What do you love and not want to lose?

What are you willing to do to save it?

Chapter 3 Summary

4. Destination Stewardship through Geotourism

Geotourism aims to inspire travelers to become stewards of the places they visit. Unlike other forms of tourism, it encompasses a holistic approach that includes cultural, ecological, and community aspects to ensure sustainable and enriching experiences.

5. Economic and Community Benefits

Geotourism promotes local economies by prioritizing authentic, local experiences over homogenized, chain-driven tourism. This approach not only sustains local businesses and cultural heritage but also creates a deeper, more memorable experience for visitors. Examples include farm tours, local food sourcing, and integrating geotourism principles into community activities, which collectively boost local economies and preserve regional identity.

6. Long-term Sustainability and Local Involvement

Successful geotourism requires ongoing evaluation and involvement of local stakeholders. This ensures that tourism initiatives align with community values and ecological sustainability. Effective geotourism integrates with broader economic and community strategies, benefiting both locals and visitors while preserving the environment and local culture for future generations.