



While lesser-known ancient sites attract fewer tourists and get less wear and tear, places such as Stonehenge suffer from having too many

Sites for sore eyes

We are in danger of loving the world's ancient monuments to death

ANNIE WADDINGTON FEATHER

THEY were designed and built without computers and have survived intense battles, powerful natural disasters, adverse weather and incompetent archeologists.

Fascinating, beautiful but surprisingly fragile, ancient sites are under a new kind of attack from mass tourism. The World Monuments Fund 2010 watch list identifies more than 93 sites in 47 countries at risk not just from neglect and bad planning but from urban development and tourism.

And it is not just ancient sites under threat.

Traditional cultures have adapted to tourist needs, often to the detriment of the community.

Todd Elliot, a Jakarta-based analyst with the Concord Consulting Group, recently released a controversial assessment of Bali's future as a tourism destination on balidiscovery.com. In it he suggests the root of the problem — which includes rampant development, dwindling natural resources, a diminishing unique culture and increased communal tensions — lies with the millions of tourists who flock each year to the Indonesian holiday island.

In the first half of this year, 1.17 million overseas tourists arrived in Bali, a 9.52 per cent increase on the same period last year, according to the Central Statistics Agency. Lonely Planet estimates 1.5 billion people will be travelling each year by 2020.

If this prediction turns out to be correct, many areas will be faced with a delicate balancing act between the demands of economic growth and the need to maintain the culture of an area and preservation of unique sites.

The Great Wall of China boasts about 10 million visitors a year. Because of its size, this may not appear to be much of a problem; that is, until you look at the degree of wear and tear. For a while it was on the WMF's watch list. Sections have been lost to construction projects while others have been crumbling from overuse.

As Sula Rayska of Rayska Heritage, a British consultancy firm specialising in heritage projects, points out, "People always visit the most popular and best advertised. The lesser-known ancient sites attract fewer tourists and get less wear and tear, whereas places like Stonehenge and Hadrian's Wall can suffer from too many people."

Even so, smaller sites have their problems. Each year about 40,000 visitors flock to the Nine Ladies, a 4000-year-old stone circle known on Stanton Moor in Derbyshire's Peak District. Damage has been caused by visitors digging holes for campfires and even chipping off pieces of stone as souvenirs.

For places such as the tombs in Egypt's Valley of the Kings, tourist



The Great Wall of China boasts about 10 million visitors a year



The Library of Celsus at Ephesus in Turkey



Operators try to protect areas such as Kings Canyon

numbers are not only a logistical nightmare but a threat to the site in the form of increased humidity levels from visitors' breath and fungal growth.

With Egyptian tourism officials claiming they want to lure 14 million visitors by next year, the authorities have had to implement new ventilation systems and set a cap on visitor numbers to the site.

These procedures are being applied elsewhere, such as at the Hypogeum in Malta.

Other preservation schemes include building walkways and viewing platforms. The terrace houses in Ephesus, Turkey, for example, can now be viewed from

specially constructed glass and steel walkways.

Responsible tourism can include timing visits during off-peak hours or off-season and travelling to lesser-known places, WMF's Lisa Ackerman says.

"For instance, Pompeii is crowded mid-summer, but the ruins are open year-round. Herculaneum is often far less visited but suffered the same fate of destruction from the eruption of Vesuvius," she says. "We need to move people away from believing there is only one experience to have when you visit a country, a capital city, or famous spot."

Apart from wars, ancient sites



Hadrian's Wall

have long been battered and bruised by individuals. Sites in Turkey, Egypt and the Middle East had crosses carved into them by the first Christians, and early amateur archeologists, such as Heinrich Schliemann, butchered their finds. Even the British army is guilty; its soldiers used the Treasury at Petra and the Sphinx for target practice.

"We've all been trained to be respectful in museums and to refrain from touching the art or the walls; so too at historic sites. Tourism and heritage professionals need to do a good job of helping tourists understand the fragility of places," WMF's Ackerman says.

Many ancient sites have signs requesting people to stay out of some areas and, in some cases, refrain from taking photographs. Signage works to some extent, but you still need attentive site officials and tour leaders to make sure the rules are adhered to. "Smaller sites need watching because although they attract fewer people, there are also fewer people to watch and make sure they are not vandalised," Rayska says.

But many tour operators are doing their bit to drive home the responsible tourism message. Adventure trip specialist Toucan Travel asks travellers to "respect signage, take only photographs and leave no litter or graffiti, even if others have done so. Do not attempt to bring home any rocks or stones or other souvenirs of the location and don't purchase such

guides to speak to the group about the cultural aspects of the rock as well as the erosion, and the clients have time to actually think about their actions."

George's guides are knowledgeable and trained to think ethically, morally and respectfully; none has climbed the rock.

Mike Belton, owner of Amber Travel, Turkey-based specialist in small group activity and custom travel, also reiterates the need for tour operators to play their part.

"Although walkways have been erected over Pamukkala, visitors still need to be told to keep to them," he says.

"Clients of big operators are still walking around town centres and ancient sites in bathing costumes and showing tattoos.

"Who would go to their own local supermarket in a bikini or a pair of briefs bathers or, indeed, in their bra? We see it here in Turkey, and you get the same behaviour in Spain, Italy or Dominican Republic. It really upsets the local people, who are torn between their natural inclination to welcome visitors as guests and their understandable revulsion at such unsightly and inappropriate displays of flesh."

Appropriate clothing and footwear is not only culturally sensitive but prevents damage to the site. Stiletto heels have been cited as the cause of damage to some ancient sites in Greece.

New technologies can be used to improve advocacy efforts but some simple methods to increase responsible tourism awareness can be used.

Belton suggests reiterating the responsible tourism messages at several key points in the travel process. "Clients need to be told how to behave and dress appropriately for the different environments they will be in during their holiday," he says.

"This includes being told when booking, on the plane via an information video and then again on transfer buses."

Let's hope ancient sites survive this battle so they can be enjoyed by the generations to come.

items from vendors as this can encourage the ongoing destruction of local areas of interest."

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Checklist

The World Monuments Fund's Responsible Tourism Day will be held in London on November 10. More: wmf.org.

THE HUNGRY TOURIST

High tide for kava chameleons

In Fiji, a numbingly intoxicating, sleep-inducing drink is a way of life

CATHERINE MARSHALL

KAVA would make a snazzy cocktail: served in a black *bilo*, or coconut shell cup, and garnished with the gnarled tendrils of the kava plant, it could be named intoxicating pepper, the literal meaning of the botanical name of the core ingredient of this Polynesian drink, *Piper methysticum*. The trendy crowd would lapse into kava comas in no time flat.

But at the market in the Fijian city of Nadi, devotees — which is to say most people over the age of 16 — are buying their kava the traditional way. At Eli Boyala's stall they select newspaper-wrapped bunches of the spindly root and brown paper packets of finely ground kava.

"All the people come down [to buy it]," Eli says. "Monday to Friday, every day. Some people walk around here and say, 'I want kava, how much?'"

Eli, whose full name is Elizabeth, "after the Queen", knows her product. Dressed in red satin, she presides over mounds of powdered kava, filling and weighing paper bags, then sealing them with a stapler.

And although she'll tell you that Fijians don't drink for one year after the death of a relative and that kava is best enjoyed after sunset, she won't be drawn on whether she has a taste for the beverage herself.

What she will divulge is the fact her stock comes straight from her family's farm in the highland town of Bukuya.

"It's a very windy road, two hours by road to get there," she says. "My brother brings it down." And it's the long and winding road — "very much expensive", according to Eli — that is to blame for the high price of the product. While it depends on market forces on the day, about \$F15 (\$8.30) will buy you 500g of kava root.

Which is not a bad return on a

fibrous, odd-tasting tuber that holds a mystifying allure for locals and travellers alike, and requires little more than nature's elements to sprout forth.

"No water," says Eli. "Just the sun. We just plant it and it goes."

And even then the demand for kava is such that today, not long after lunchtime, Eli has already sold out of whole kava root, even though other stalls sag beneath a superfluity of plantain, galangal, cassava, Fijian papaya and tiny pineapples.

"If you buy one of these you'll have a happy day," says the pineapple vendor, hopeful of a sale. Surely he knows it's not pineapple but kava that buys a satiety that transcends hunger? While not alcoholic, kava induces a sense of sedation and happiness and — if consumed in sufficient quantities — a deep and dreamless sleep.

Home in villages such as Toga, and to 35 families, kava is the lifeblood of communal interaction and intercommunal hospitality. Here, the elders conduct a *sevu-sevu* (welcoming ceremony) for a group of visitors. They suspend a piece of purple-and-white

A fibrous, odd-tasting tuber that holds a mystifying allure for locals and travellers alike

patterned cloth above a *tanova*, a traditional vessel hewn from *vesti* wood, and fill it with powdered kava and generous scoops of water. To the sound of mellifluous chanting and singing, one of the men massages the poultice, releasing a stream of sludgy beige liquid into the *tanova*. It is up to him the level of sedation his guests will receive: the more he employs his fists, the greater the strength of this brew.

But no matter what the punch packed by this drink, for the elders offer modest, "low-tide" servings, which is just as well since it is rude to return a full *bilo* to whence it came. Besides which, the intrigue of kava is inducement enough to taste the liquid, despite its dishwater-like appearance.

The visitors accept the *bilo* with one thankful clap of the hands and, as they lift it to their lips, the villagers' murmurs of assent gather speed and reach a loud, congratulatory crescendo. The *bilo* is returned with three deferential claps and the villagers join in the applause.

This particular batch is mild, producing the vague taste of soil and the precise sensation of dental anaesthetic.

As numbness settles on the lips and tongue, the idea of a follow-up drink suddenly seems like a grand idea. Another small *bilo* of extra-strength kava, please. Or wait: make that one intoxicating pepper, high tide.



Eli with powdered kava roots

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