

Tourism Seen Through Different Eyes

When I thought of tourism, often the first thing that came to mind was an upper-class white family in oversized sunglasses, cameras hanging around their necks, and white sunblock smeared over their skin. They were often pictured laying on the beach at an island resort or mounting the steps to the bus that would guide them around the most popular sites of their destination. Tourism to me was always pictured through the eyes of the tourist. It wasn't until recently that the word tourism molded a new picture in my mind, a picture that was from an entirely different perspective than the one before. Though after conducting a month of ethnographic fieldwork in Peru, today when I picture tourism, I see it through the eyes of the locals. This is an equally, arguably more important perspective than the one I had previous to conducting this research.

Along the northeastern coast of Peru lies a pleasant fishing town named Huanchaco. I had the incredible opportunity to live in Huanchaco from the dates of June 4th-June 29th, 2018. While I was there I became particularly interested in what the locals thought of tourists and tourism in general. Over the course of the next few days, I began developing my research question. My curiosity led me to wonder if opinions on tourism differed based on a persons' occupation. For example, a shopkeeper whose income is fairly reliant on business from tourists might have a different opinion on the matter than someone whose income is independent of tourism. This question sparked an interest in me that would lead me to spend my remaining time interviewing various locals of different occupations. To better understand the significance

of cross-cultural interaction I asked basic questions regarding their opinions on tourism and tourists from specific areas.

Huanchaco is home to the 2,500-year-old practice of reed boat fishing, that can be traced all the way back to the Chimu Civilization. The way the boats are designed allows the fishermen to ride with the waves in a similar fashion to modern day surfing. Because of this, many believe that the reed boats are the original surfboards. This makes Huanchaco a popular year-round destination for tourists interested in the history of the boats as well as surfers from all over the world. Lining the coast of this crescent-shaped town are tiny wooden huts packed with souvenirs, surf shops open wide to the public with instructors on hand, long shops packed with gifts and clothing, as well as restaurants, bars, and cafes advertising different cuisine in hopes of attracting as many visitors as possible. I knew that I had chosen a research question that could keep me here for years and in order to make headway I had to start my research immediately.

My method for conducting the research was simple. I relied mainly on informal interviews, though I had originally planned to conduct observation and free lists as well. My biggest obstacle in the research process was the language barrier. I knew enough Spanish to maintain a simple conversation, haggle for better prices, get around town, and order in restaurants, but when it came to asking detailed and specific questions clearly, I was not so confident. My solution to this issue was to craft a series of questions I wanted to ask with the help of a Spanish speaker. I would first inquire as to a locals' occupation and how long they had been in that occupation. I would usually, if it felt appropriate, ask for the age of the informant(s) as well as their nationality. Once I had this foundational knowledge I would begin

asking my next research-based questions. These questions developed after speaking with several locals. I began noticing what they were most passionate about and figured that for future interviews, they might be a good place to start. The questions included “what does tourism mean to you?”, “from which countries do your favorite/least favorite tourists come from?”, and “why are they your favorite/least favorite?”. From these questions, I would usually be able to formulate new questions depending on their answers. This made each of my ten interviews unique (see Table 1 for more information on interviewee demographics). One thing I had to keep in mind during my research process was that my own nationality as American might skew the answers.

The first person I interviewed was a woman named Elaina. I judged her age to be late 30’s, early 40’s. I met her after wandering into a line of gift shops. She was perched on a stool outside of her shop which made her the first person I saw. She knew minimal English and I minimal Spanish, so the conversation started out as us exchanging sentences in our foreign tongue. We shared some laughs. She found my grammar mishaps particularly amusing but was quick to correct me and help me better my Spanish, which I appreciated. I discovered she had owned her shop in Huanchaco for 11 years. When I asked her what she thought of tourism she quickly asserted that she thought it was really good for her and the other shop owners. It was important for the economy and the success of her own business. She loves people from the United States most because they are friendly, respectful, and trustworthy. She could leave them alone in her shop without fear of them stealing. The Germans and French were her least favorite for their apparent lack of friendliness and spending.

As we talked, two other shopkeepers wandered over to us out of curiosity. They were two men around the same age as Elaina who had also been in the gift shop business for years. Mario had owned his shop for 20 years and Fernando had owned his for 25 years. It became clear to me that these people made a livable income off of the business their shops generated regardless of the competition. The two men felt the same about tourism as Elaina did, stressing its importance in regards to the amount of income accumulated by the tourists. They also shared in the hatred for German and French tourists due to their disrespect and, according to Fernando, racism. This would not be the last time I heard from an informant about the respect tourists have for their host country.

Jose was a 35-year-old English professor at the local Trujillo University. He approached me upon seeing me at the beach. He spoke to me in English with a slick Peruvian accent and asked me where I was from. As the conversation gained traction and I could tell he was interested in maintaining the conversation, I asked if I could interview him about tourism. He happily obliged. I learned that his main interests lie in foreign economies. He loves approaching people who are obviously not from Peru and asking them about their country's economy. Once I knew that he was interested in economics, I assumed that he would have opinions on tourism's effect on Huanchaco's economy, and he did. He said that people from Canada, the USA, and Europe bring a lot of money and cultural diversity to the economy. He expressed particular distaste for Venezuelan and Colombian tourists for their lack of wealth and spending, as well as Spaniards for their lack of respect. I probed the respect question further as this was not my first time hearing this word from an informant. I asked what respect meant to him. After a moment of pondering, he said that respect meant friendliness to one another as well as good

behavior. He proceeded to describe a situation where a female tourist from Spain sunbathed in the nude. He found this extremely disrespectful as this was not the way of life there in Huanchaco.

As the conversation continued, I noticed he spoke often about money. I reflected on my interactions with the shopkeepers and remembered that their income relied heavily on tourism. Jose was an English professor who didn't rely on tourism for his paycheck so I asked him how his opinions on tourism might differ if he did rely on it like the shopkeepers did. He said it was a very good question. He answered by physically pulling out his wallet and showing me his credit cards and cash and saying he has a lot of money and that was no concern. Even though I didn't get the answer I expected, I understood that he liked tourism for its added benefits to the Peruvian economy as well as his interests in foreigner's way of life. He viewed tourism from an educational perspective.

As the days went by, I interviewed two more gift shop owners, an anthropologist, the owner of the local Café Chocolate, and two nurses. Each person had a different perspective on tourism. The shopkeepers, two sisters working together, shared similar opinions with the others I interviewed before, the only difference lied in their opinion of which tourists they liked and disliked. Both liked people from the United States, but they also enjoyed French and German tourists because they are friendly. As for the least favorable tourists, one said she disliked people from China because they want to buy things for a fraction of the appropriate price. The other said she was not fond of people from Chile because they rob and never buy. At this point, I began to wonder if these opinions were based on one or two bad encounters with

specific tourists. Because I knew only basic Spanish, I was unable to ask them to elaborate on this new assumption, but I kept it in mind for later interviews.

The interview that stood apart from the others was with the owner of Café Chocolate, Lisa. She was a 39-year-old from Switzerland who had owned her café in Huanchaco for 5 years. I was able to have a formal interview with Lisa during the slower hours of the day at her café. This interview was particularly different because it was not only conducted in English, but it was also a chance for me to gain a perspective on tourism from someone who was not from the area but still relied on it.

Lisa got 50-60% of her profits from tourism and believed it was absolutely essential for not only the success of her business but the economy of Huanchaco as well. When I asked her about her favorite and least favorite tourists, she said her favorites are people from Europe, Canada, and the US because they bring the most profit. In fact, her menu was created to include foods tourists might be missing from home. Her menu had pies, pasta, sandwiches, and other dishes that were not Peruvian. She even made a point to exclude rice from her menu entirely, truly removing her restaurant from traditional Peruvian cuisine. Her least favorite customers surprised me. She said she disliked Peruvians because when they come to her café, they treat her poorly. They are entitled to things being perfect, from the temperature of the coffee to the pricing. I asked her why she thought they were like this, and she pointed out that because the food was cheaper in the market, they came to her a restaurant with higher expectations due to price. Lisa was the only restaurant owner I spoke with so I wondered if other restaurant owners or workers, regardless of nationality, would have similar experiences with the locals.

As for the nurses, they simply didn't treat many tourists outside of people from other South American countries. They did, however, say they liked tourists from the United States because they tend to be very social and friendly. When I asked what tourists they like the least, they didn't really understand the question. I did my best to explain it without putting specific ideas in their heads. They did eventually say that their least favorite people are Mormon missionaries. They never specified which countries these missionaries come from, however, due to my own background, I knew most come from the United States, Utah in particular. Even though I didn't learn much about tourism from these nurses, their statements gave me more incentive to believe that individual encounters determine generalized opinions of certain people and countries. I found this particularly humbling because I have personally been found guilty of judging and generalizing based off of a few specific interactions with a person. This realization made me think back to my research question about occupation. I began to wonder if people simply treat others differently based solely off of how they make a living. I could see how occupation in and of itself might affect how tourists treat their hosts and that might lead to differing judgements on the local's part.

The economy and politics in Huanchaco were mentioned a few times throughout the course of my study. It was first mentioned in an interview I had with a Peruvian anthropologist named Rafael. Even though he wasn't a native to Huanchaco, he was very familiar with the community. He said that the government does little to nothing to work with the locals and attract tourism, which is crucial for the bettering of the economy. He said that most of the tourist businesses there are run separately by families and if there was a structure to the tourism business, the economy would flourish. Lisa, the Swiss owner of Café Chocolate, had a

similar opinion. She mentioned that the government had done nothing to attract tourists and does not spend money wisely. The last time the town was really remodeled and fixed was when the pope visited a few months prior in January 2018. Lisa said that tourism has decreased in the last few years since the floods. In her opinion, since so many people in the town rely on tourists for income, the government needs to step in and utilize Huanchaco's rich history, advertise, and maintain tourist facilities. Without this effort, the economy will continue to struggle.

In regard to tourism's effect on economies in general, studies have shown that tourism not only benefits the economy of a community or country by adding revenue, it also allows the community to personally represent their culture to foreigners (Chambers 2010, 84). I asked a few informants if tourism has had an effect on their traditional culture and most agreed that there has been an effect, but they would not consider it negative because they benefit so much from the profits tourism brings to them today. Rafael had the most differing opinion, saying locals open up clubs and restaurants to modernize the city because they believe that is what the tourists want, and as a result, they sacrifice their own cultural identity. McIntosh et al. believes that this phenomenon can lead to disrespect because without the unique and accurate representation of cultural diversity, which is rooted in tradition, there is no understanding. To "modernize" cities to fit what the locals believe the tourists want is part of the reason tourists might appear disrespectful. Without an accurate representation of the culture they are in, tourists cannot be expected to know what is considered appropriate behavior (McIntosh, Hinch, and Ingram, 39-40).

The interaction between host and tourist is an extremely important part of tourism and the primary takeaway from my research was that tourism stereotypes are likely made from just

a few interactions with select individuals. This is a trend that is present in tourism all over the world, not just in Huanchaco. According to Bimonte and Punzo, specific interactions between hosts and tourists influence opinions which in turn changes the structure of interaction between the two groups in the future (Bimonte and Punzo, 1).

Various anecdotes from my interviews support this claim. For example, Jose's negative interaction with the female sunbather from Spain gave him a bitter taste towards Spaniards in general from that day forward. The nurses had a distaste for Mormons, so they clearly had encountered enough to make that opinion. Elaina and Fernando hated the Germans and the French because they act vain and racist, but the two sisters I interviewed loved them for their kindness. This indicates two very different encounters. Because Elaina and Fernando work in the same strip of shops, they likely encountered the same tourists, as do the two sisters who run their shop together. Had the same tourists interacted with both sets of shopkeepers, I would be interested to see how opinions might change.

When I reflect on my research question, I do not think I answered it. For one thing, I did not interview as many people as I had originally hoped leaving me with an inadequate sample size. I also did not interview anyone outside of Huanchaco except the two nurses who worked in Trujillo, a large city of 2 million inhabitants just 15 minutes away. A majority of my informants were shopkeepers which also affected the variety of answers I gathered. If I were to do this over again with my original question in mind, I would have specific occupations selected and interview an equal number from each occupation over the course of several months. With the results I got, I would change my research question to better match what I have learned. I would change it to include more details as to why their favorite and least favorite tourists are in

those categories so I could study the importance of the interaction between the host community and the tourist. I would also conduct interviews in a variety of cities. Some cities would have heavy tourist activity while others would have little to none. I would include as much diversity as possible. I would also improve my Spanish to the point where I could have detailed conversations in a variety of situations.

Overall, my research project went in a different direction than I expected, but the things I learned remain valuable. My original goal was to collect various opinions about tourism based off of occupation. My results nudged me in a direction that urged me to look into the interactions between tourists and their host countries and how that interaction affects the local community's opinion on tourists. However, differences in interaction may have to do with occupation, so I would not discard my original question. Another thing that crossed my mind is that my results only have relation to the Peruvian culture alone. Because Peruvians tend to be social and friendly people, they appear to like tourists who exhibit similar traits, such as Americans. However, if I were to conduct this survey in France for example, I would almost certainly get different results just because of the host country's cultural difference. American sociability may be frowned upon in France making Americans the most despised country as opposed to the most commonly loved. This makes me interested in conducting the same well-developed study in several culturally distinct countries around the world and comparing the results.

Conducting further research on this topic would benefit both the tourist and the host country. An understanding of the cultures in which one interacts with may produce a better relationship between varieties of people. This research will identify the most common problems

seen in the relationship between tourist and host and solutions to these problems could be developed to make future tourism a better experience for all. Personally, I have become much more aware of my own actions when I visit new places because I have this new-found awareness that I, in a way, am representing my country as a whole.

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Table 1: Demographics and Data from Locals: *The chart below depicts the main points of the research, information about each informant, and their answers to the questions. "N/A" depicts an unanswered question and ages which aren't specified depict my best generalized guess.*

Informant	Age/Gender	Profession	Opinion on Tourism	Favorite	Least Favorite
<i>Elaina</i>	40's Female	Shopkeeper	Important	USA	Germany, France
<i>Mario</i>	30's Male	Shopkeeper	Good	Brazil	N/A
<i>Fernando</i>	40's Male	Shopkeeper	Good	USA	Germany, France
<i>Jose</i>	35 Male	Professor	Important	USA, Europe	Spain, South America
<i>Rafael</i>	58 Male	Anthropologist	Necessary	N/A	N/A
<i>Carmen</i>	32 Female	Shopkeeper	Good	USA, Germany	China
<i>Lus Marina</i>	36 Female	Shopkeeper	Good	USA, French	Chile
<i>Lisa</i>	39 Female	Café Owner	Important	USA, Europe	Peru
<i>Rosa</i>	20's Female	Nurse	N/A	USA	Mormons
<i>Nixia</i>	20's Female	Nurse	N/A	USA	Mormons