

REFLECTIVE ESSAY: EVOLUTION OF CRUISING

By Brii Brennan

I have always been interested in environmental sustainability; I was aware of the importance of conservation at a young age while living on a dairy farm. I also attribute my understanding of health and well-being to growing up in rural Ontario but a desire for adventure. Before attending Thompson Rivers University (TRU), I was an Entertainment Hostess on Disney Cruise Line (DCL), where I travelled the globe with over 2000 guests and 1000 crew members, the smallest of all the fleet. As part of our onboarding process and safety training for each contract, we knew the environmental policies and protocols inside and out. As a result, during my time on board in 2013, DCL was declared the most environmentally responsible cruise line, according to the Cruise Industry Environmental Report Card.

All in all, I thought cruising was a sustainable option. Between first-hand experience with the environmental policies onboard and the impression rather than having thousands of people flying to every port of call, they were transported by sea in one vessel. However, my attitude and awareness shifted during my Tourism Management studies at TRU. It wasn't until I investigated how cruise ships can impact the physical location and the communities they visit and not just the carbon footprint from travel. I thought that having the guests transported on one cruise ship was similar to carpooling for the environment. Cruise ships are floating hotels or resorts that include all amenities a guest could need. I didn't consider that being large enough to contain those amenities also means large enough to cause environmental damage on the ports of call they dock

at during their voyage. Take Venice, for example; the years of cruise ships docking there have increased the speed of erosion and caused structural damage to the city. To mitigate the damage and protect the Venetian Lagoon, Italy has banned allowing cruise ships to sail directly into Venice; instead, they can dock at an industrial port outside the city as a temporary fix.

On top of the environmental impact that cruise ships have on the physical location by simply docking in the port, you also have the damage caused by the thousands of guests and crew leaving the ship to explore the destination. In addition, the added foot traffic on a small community can cause wear and tear, deplete their resources, and frustrate locals. While most communities rely on tourists for economic growth, they also tend to prefer hosting their guests in smaller manageable allotments. During my studies, I read about a town in Alaska that was so frustrated by the outpour of people when cruise ships docked that they would intentionally close all their businesses. That isn't to say they didn't want tourists to visit; they would leave written notes on their doors explaining they would love to welcome them but invite them to come back in small groups.

Like many others, I love to explore new cultures and communities around the globe but had to stop and examine my responsibility to conserve the natural environment now and in the future. Tourism would not exist if it weren't for the beautiful locations around the world, but the way we are exploring ruins them, that doesn't bode well for their future sustainability. While exploring the impacts that tourism has on the environment is important, it has led to several students questioning their choice of career path and inevitably changing it. However, I have taken that

new knowledge and want to utilize it to improve the future of tourism. There has always been travel, and always will be, but the current dilemma is how can you take a product that is destroying the environment and use it to protect the environment instead.

Before the pandemic shut down global travel, I had already started transitioning into local domestic travel opportunities for studying. Growing up in a small town, I have always had a passion for supporting locals, be it the local farmers' market or the agricultural fair. I was quickly drawn to creating a sustainable tourism option that supported the local communities while protecting the natural environment where most tourism companies operate.

With my mindset already looking at ways to promote being a tourist in your own backyard, it was challenging as most people want to go to an all-inclusive beachside resort or get a cheap flight to Europe for a week. I may not have been jumping at the opportunity to lay on a beach all day or hit up every must-see hotspot and buy cheap souvenirs; I still love to explore internationally. I am fascinated by different cultures, languages, food, local dive bars, and getting lost without worrying about itineraries. With that said, I couldn't turn a blind eye to the damage that mass tourism is causing; the environmental impact is catastrophic. I understand we can't undo the damage, but we can create a more environmentally sustainable future for tourism. Knowing that the way we have travelled is no longer an option if we want anything left to visit in the future.

The World Tourism Institute in Cape Breton, NS, has partnered with the local Destination Management Organizations to create a three-year tourism training and research project; their

goal is to aid the tourism industry in post-pandemic recovery. As one of my steps towards creating more environmentally sustainable tourism, I have applied to be a researcher on their project. I will also continue to look for other community-based initiatives to help reframe the way we approach tourism in the present.

Reinventing the way international travel works won't happen overnight, but the pandemic shutting down international travel creates opportunity and desire to travel domestically. It gives the suitable atmosphere to address how we travel on a smaller scale. I have shifted my global tourism interests to a community-based focus. An approach that takes ownership of its impact on the natural environment and communities while putting in place policies and procedures that create a better future for the tourism industry, even if that means scaling it down.