



Resort Planning

Description

Resort planning involves purposeful integrated planning of a specific area as a specific tourist destination. This includes the planning and provision of transportation, accommodation, visitor activities and all services required for visitors and employees. In developed countries, resort planning is now usually undertaken privately, but in the past was seen as a useful state activity to stimulate tourism. This is still the case in many less developed countries. Resort planning is often seen as an opportunity to avoid or mitigate adverse effects in advance, through planning and design, as well as an opportunity to plan a tourism development (from scratch) in consultation with a host community and stakeholders (see [stakeholder analysis](#) 🌱) and anticipate or counter opposition to that development.

Resort planning always incorporates an important design component - design of buildings, precincts, transport facilities, etc. Resorts are often planned (and developed) in multiple stages. They often involve a single or dominant developer or landowner and are therefore particularly amenable to a [master plan](#) 🌱.

How and when the tool is used

Resort planning occurs worldwide, in many contexts. It usually involves a natural setting, except for resort based around a casino or other theme - but even these may be in a natural or semi-natural setting too.

The approach is especially important in mountain and coastal areas. However, resort development does not necessarily involve nature-based tourism because, for example, a beach may be simply an attractive feature while the resort itself and its facilities may be the main attraction. In many countries it is the dominant tourism form in mountain settings because the resort is focussed around skiing which is capital-intensive and site-specific.

Resort planning is the oldest form of 'modern' tourism planning, for example, long-established resort settlements in European and North American Alps, and some Mediterranean beach resorts. Sometimes the resort may grow into a significant town in its own right, e.g. Aspen, USA. These are often 'gateway' towns and seen as very attractive for people to live in permanently and earn a living from other activities than tourism.

Resort planning is typically a very capital-intensive form of development. The dominant investment is usually private but may involve some public funding. For example, if the resort is based around an existing settlement then streets and public open spaces may be retained by a local authority. There may also be local authority involvement in infrastructure which that benefits an existing host community. The sharing of costs may be one consequence of joint public/private planning leading to resort development, typically through a publicly-funded master plan for an area or region, followed by private investment in an identified location or activity.

Resorts are always site-specific, and usually rural. It is vital that planning involves the wider spatial context given the relationship of the resort to the surrounding area, which is often critical in terms of physical and social impacts. Planning tools need to take [cumulative effects](#) 🌱 into account because of staged or multiple developments. Relatively uncontrolled resorts just outside regulated National Parks often cause significant problems of physical and perceived impacts, e.g. traffic congestion, density of accommodation development, poor design, etc.

Resorts often grow around a seasonal attraction such as beach or snow. They are often planned to offer year-round attractions, in order to avoid the low season. However, a low season can be a way of both the host community and the physical environment recovering from a seasonal impact.

Application

Adverse social and environmental impacts from chain or mass resort development are well-documented all over the world, and such developments are probably the stereotype of "bad" (undesirable) tourism with no benefits for host community. Resort planning is often accused of not having a vision to drive it, except profit. However, resort planning can bring considerable economic benefits to nearby communities, and provide opportunities for public-private cooperation in planning. There is great potential for creative transport planning in and around resorts, such as avoiding overuse of private cars.



An economic balance between resort tourism and older land use/activity is an important aspect of acceptability to the host community and economy. For example, tourism and agriculture in populated alpine areas, tourism and fishing in beach resorts. Resorts can be very disruptive economically if tourism employment displaces existing older activities, but sometimes the effect can be benign if seasonal resort employment is seasonally complementary to other agriculture/fishing employment.

In America, municipality taxes are sometimes imposed in resort locations, yielding income for infrastructure or open space protection. Resort development can offer opportunities for non-regulatory planning, e.g. transferable development rights.

The resort's relationship with the host community is crucial. This relationship has often been fraught especially where it exposes disparities of living standards very starkly. There are significant equality issues when resort development drives land and other prices so high that other people, including previous residents, cannot afford to live there, e.g. Aspen and Whistler in North America. This has been an issue in many countries including New Zealand. This has sometimes been solved by a requirement for affordable housing and taxes on expensive houses.

[Monitoring](#) 🍷 of impacts is crucial to understanding and managing the relationship with the host community. If the resort was established through a consent or permit process, there are likely to be ongoing monitoring conditions attached. Some well-known tourism indicators may be particularly relevant to resort communities, e.g. resident/tourist ratio, affordability of housing.

Our evaluation

When applying the methods of resorts planning to New Zealand, it is noted that resorts don't have to be huge or high-impact, e.g. many New Zealand luxury lodges are in effect small resorts. Resorts can also be high-yielding and are seen by some to be very desirable for New Zealand tourism. Controlled resort development offers huge potential for planned development that has high economic yield but avoids negative biophysical and social impacts. At best they could be models of 'green' or [ecotourism planning](#) 🍷 tourism development.

However, problems arising in Marahau (beside Abel Tasman National Park), Queenstown, Bay of Islands etc, suggest that New Zealand planners have to be very mindful of potential problems in resort development on the fringes of notable natural areas. Large resorts are much more difficult to get right than small ones, but they also concentrate visitor effects. It is unclear how widely the economic benefits can be shared.