What effect does tourism have on the Grand Canyon?

The Grand Canyon is in Arizona, USA. It is a colossal chasm 277 miles long, up to 18 miles wide and, at the deepest point, over a mile deep. It was formed by the Colorado River, which flows west through the canyon and averages about 300 feet width, 100 feet in depth and flows at an average speed of four miles per hour; it took 3-6 million years to form. The Grand Canyon National Park was made a national monument in 1908 and became a national park in 1919 and covers an area of 1,900 square miles. It is considered one the Seven Natural Wonders of the World.

Tourism to the Grand Canyon began near the end of the nineteenth century. Mining in the canyon area was not profitable, so some miners turned to tourism as a way of making a living, such as Pete Berry. He at first offered lodging in a cabin at Grandview, from 1893, and later built a hotel, a two-storey log building, in 1897. Grandview hotel remained the most popular tourist destination until 1901, when the Santa Fe Railroad reached the Grand Canyon village, providing a more comfortable way to travel than the bone-jarring stagecoach ride from Flagstaff to Grandview.

The Grand Canyon now receives over 6 million visitors each year, but does this vast amount of tourism have a positive or negative effect on the canyon’s natural beauty?

Human actions have influenced the Grand Canyon National Park in many ways, including air and water pollution, wildlife being endangered and quiet disrupted. The Grand Canyon has an enormously diverse wildlife, including about 89 species of mammal, 355 species of bird, 17 species of fish, 50 species of reptile, 9 species of amphibian and over 1,500 species of plant. Humans have introduced foreign plant and animal species into the park, which native species have to contend with for food, water, shelter and space. Wildlife is also affected by litter that is dropped in the park.
But human activities are not the only thing affecting the Canyon. The erosional and geographical processes that created the canyon are still acting on it. The main canyon was cut by the Colorado River, and the sides and the interesting formations on each side by its tributaries. These waterways are still slowly cutting further into the gorge; the occasional landslide can be heard or seen in the canyon.

On the other hand, streams have been contaminated with human-caused waste, for example raw sewage running into the streams. The river ecosystems in the park were altered even further when the Glen Canyon Dam was built in 1963: the sediment that had originally given the Colorado River its name (the first Europeans to visit the Canyon, who were Spanish, named the river “rio colorado”, which means “red river” in Spanish) is trapped by the dam in Lake Powell, and the river now runs clear. Air pollution from nearby urban areas, such as exhaust fumes from vehicles and burning fossil fuels, like coal, oil or gas, has floated into the Canyon.

However, tourism to the Grand Canyon National Park creates over $467 million (equal to approximately £317.5 million) in benefit to the US economy. Surely this huge profit outweighs whatever damage or cost that tourism to the Grand Canyon creates?

And there is also the question: is it really fair to prevent people from observing such a beautiful natural spectacle? The Grand Canyon may be the most impressive thing that many people will ever see; can it be right to stop them seeing it?

These Easter holidays, I went to the Grand Canyon myself. The first viewpoint on the way into the park is Desert View, where you can not only see your first view of the Canyon, but also the Painted Desert and Cedar Mountain behind it.

There are many options for tours of the Grand Canyon. Helicopter tours take off from the tiny Grand Canyon Airport; raft tours sail down the Colorado River; and there are also many minibus and jeep tour companies that drive along the rim. As well as commercial tours, there are free shuttle buses that drive along the rim in both directions from the Grand Canyon Village, stopping at the many viewpoints along the way.
You can also hike down into the canyon. The most popular route is the Bright Angel Trail, the trailhead located just west of Kolb Studio in Grand Canyon Village on the South Rim. There are regular resthouses along the trail, the first one conveniently located one-and-a-half miles along the trail, making for a two- to three-hour round trip.

Furthermore the Grand Canyon National Park management does all it can to preserve the wilderness of the park and provide sustainable service. For example, visitors are not allowed to feed animals in the park; the cabins of Bright Angel Lodge, where I stayed, are extremely eco-friendly; and, of course, littering is disallowed anywhere within the park.

On the whole, after considering many different sources of information and opinions, my conclusion is that tourism has affected the Grand Canyon in only a minor way, especially compared to other forces that act upon the canyon on a much larger scale. As there is only one village (and a small one at that) at the rim of the canyon, pollution is not more than can be managed. I think that tourism to the Grand Canyon is, overall, a good thing: it allows people to witness something amazing, at the same time as benefiting the whole country financially. Though other more knowledgeable people may have different thoughts, in my opinion, tourism to the Grand Canyon is a good thing.
**Bibliography**


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