

RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD TOURISM ON CATALINA ISLAND

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## **Abstract**

### **RESIDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD TOURISM ON CATALINA ISLAND**

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Catalina Island, located off the coast of Southern California, has been a tourist destination for over 100 years and continues to draw large numbers of visitors. This study seeks to determine the attitudes of permanent residents of Catalina Island toward past, current, and future development and tourism on the island. Local communities of destination areas are often excluded from having input toward tourism development which affects their daily lives. This thesis examines Catalina Island residents' personal accounts concerning their opinions about tourism, current and future tourism plans, and community involvement. This research employed a mixed method approach including, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and door-to-door surveys of over 100 Catalina Island residents. The study's findings show that while most residents are in favor of increasing tourism on the island, their support was mostly economically driven. A majority of the respondents reported that they rely on tourism for their livelihoods, but many expressed that they feel powerless and excluded in regards to community planning and development. Respondents were generally forthcoming with their concerns, but also shared that they feel vulnerable about speaking publicly due to their town's small size and one company's majority ownership of the island.

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## **Introduction**

Catalina Island is located 26 miles off the coast of Southern California and has been promoted as a tourist destination and resort area for over a century. Natural beauty, temperate weather, and easy accessibility from the mainland have helped make Catalina Island into a popular tourist destination. In the last several years, Catalina developers have invested millions of dollars into updating the most populous town in Catalina, Avalon, to increase tourism (Lovett, 2014). Media outlets have portrayed the rapid development on Catalina as being positive and a time of renewal for the island (Lovett, 2014; Mandans, 2015; Sahagun, 2014), but the modifications to Avalon have taken away from nostalgia and tradition, thus changing the landscape for residents. How do Avalon residents perceive tourism in their town? What are their attitudes toward the development happening on the island?

In the past, the tourism industry has concentrated on profit margins throughout the development process as the sole sign of success, failing to consider local community support even though tourism has direct consequences for those who live in tourist destinations. It has not been until the last thirty years or so that tourism planners and developers have started to consider or incorporate the opinions of local residents, local businesses, and local governments. Although there has been a progressive shift in tourism development planning, it's been gradual and case dependent. Often the local population's voices are muddled or ignored within the tourism development process (Murphy, 1985).

This study provides an insight into the views of people who encounter the impacts of tourism on a daily basis.

The Catalina Island residents are the main stakeholders in what is happening and going to happen where they live. Residents in tourist destinations will undoubtedly have discrepancies of opinion and varying support for tourism related activity in their community. A crucial part of this study is to identify resident's attitudes and concerns regarding tourism on Catalina Island.

I administered surveys and conducted interviews with 100 Avalon residents regarding their perceptions of the cost and benefits of living in a tourist destination. I have been to Catalina many times in the past and was thus familiar with the small town of Avalon. Choosing an area that is geographically limited with an easily accessible local resident population facilitated my ability to gain greater insight into how living in a tourist destination is viewed by the "locals".

### **History and Background**

Catalina Island is located 26 miles off the coast of Southern California. The island comprises 76 square miles. There are approximately 4,000 permanent residents on Catalina and 90% live in the city of Avalon. Geologically, Catalina is made up of two distinct rock units and was never connected to the mainland. The island is home to over 60 plant, animal, and insect species found nowhere else in the world (Maxwell, Rhein, & Roberts, 2014). Catalina's modern tourism-based economy developed over the island's rich and storied past.

For thousands of years the indigenous peoples of Catalina Island, the Pimungan tribe, lived a sustainable lifestyle off of the natural resources from the land and sea. The first recorded foreigners to land on Catalina were aboard a Spanish ship, and they claimed the island for Spain in 1542. The Spanish explorers did not find ample resources on the island and soon left to continue their expedition (Maxwell et al., 2014). It was not until the early 1800s when Europeans arrived again on the island that the newcomers began to extensively exploit the island's local resources for monetary value. The arrival of the newcomers and their exploitation of resources on Catalina decimated the Pimungan tribe. The European colonization on the island introduced new diseases to the local Pimungan's, who had little immunity. As a result, the previously flourishing population of the Pimungan tribe drastically declined. The abundance of sea otters that surrounded Catalina and the California coastline caused an influx of European fur traders who hunted otters to sell their pelts to merchants in Canton. Canton was the only port in China at the time open to foreign trade. The otter pelts imported from the West were referred to as "soft gold" by the merchants who paid high prices for the furs (Sowards, 2007). The European colonizers were taking a majority of the otters, seals, and fish which disrupted the trade and social networks of the tribe. By the mid-1820s, the few remaining Pimungans had either migrated or were forcibly relocated to the mainland where they were sent to the Mission San Gabriel in Los Angeles to be used as slaves (Culver, 2010).

Between the mid-1850s and early 1890s, the island changed ownership several times and, with the removal of the Pimungans, remained relatively sparse and

uninhabited. Catalina Island was an extractive economy where the settlers engaged in harvesting sea otters, catching fish, growing crops, raising cattle, and herding sheep. As these resources diminished or became financially unviable, tourism became Catalina's main economic driver. The local population coped with wrenching changes as the tourism industry supplanted their community and lifestyle (Culver, 2010). Many business investors saw potential in developing Catalina into a major tourist center. With the development of tourism on the island, a new era began for Catalina.

The real estate developer George Shatto bought Catalina from the James Lick's trustees in 1887 for \$200,000 and began the development of the town of Avalon with tourism in mind. As the population of Southern California continued to grow, suddenly visiting Catalina had value and could be promoted as attractive to city dwellers on the mainland. Shatto's vision of Catalina as an ideal urban getaway required visitor facilities and amenities. He rented large tents to vacationers, built a hotel, and established cross channel transportation to bring visitors to the island. These rapid developments caused Shatto to run into major financial difficulties as the transportation costs from the mainland increased (Culver, 2010). Shatto defaulted on his loan in 1892 and Catalina ownership reverted to its former owners, the James Lick trustees. The literature (Culver, 2010, Sitton, 2010) does not agree on how Catalina's next transfer of ownership occurred, but it was the Banning brothers, Judge Joseph, Captain William, and Hancock Banning who purchased the island in 1892.



In 1894, the Banning brothers founded the Santa Catalina Island Company (SCIC) with the goal of developing the island into a major tourist destination and resort. The SCIC is still operating today. At the time, Avalon was becoming a popular destination for sports fishing, and the vacation tents were filled with tourists. Shatto's earlier tourism development had made a name for Catalina as a place for recreation and leisure, and the people kept coming. The Banning brothers' new company funded the construction of new hotels and restaurants with the goal of transforming the town of Avalon into a visitor attraction, but residents began to vocally criticize the Banning monopoly over the island (Sitton, 2010). Residents complained about the state of Avalon's streets and water system, the Bannings' refusal to offer reduced fares between the island and the mainland to Avalon residents, and the company policy of prohibiting lessees from buying their residences. The residents of Avalon wanted more autonomy concerning municipal decision making and voted to incorporate. As a result, Avalon became a state-recognized city in 1913.

Only one year later, the new city of Avalon was struggling financially and had to rely on renegotiating terms with the SCIC to keep the infrastructure and utilities afloat. The arrangement of city and company working together was a compromise that seemed adequate, but then a disaster struck in 1915. A fire burned almost everything in Avalon to the ground, causing serious financial problems for the Banning brothers. With the lack of accommodations due to the fire, tourists stayed away from Catalina, hurting the economy. At the same time the era of automobile travel began, and sightseeing trips to

motor touring destinations were on the rise (Sitton, 2010). The combination of these events put the SCIC in dire financial straits. While the SCIC was looking for opportunities to restructure, a new buyer emerged. Catalina was once again to change hands and be further developed for tourism.

In 1919, William Wrigley Jr. of the chewing gum company acquired a majority interest in the Santa Catalina Island Company (Sitton, 2010). This purchase marked the beginning of what is considered to be the modern era of the development of Catalina. The beauty of Catalina impressed the Wrigley's, and they devoted their time and resources to the island's future, which they believed to depend on tourism (Maxwell et al., 2014).

Wrigley invested millions in the island, building infrastructure and tourist attractions. To bring attention and more tourists to the island, Wrigley made the island the spring training home of the Chicago Cubs, which he also owned. When William Wrigley Jr. died in 1932, his son Phillip took over and continued his father's vision of making Catalina a major tourist destination. The island became a favorite of the Hollywood elite during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, and was a popular spot for filming Hollywood movies. During World War II, Catalina was closed to the public and became a military base. After the war, Catalina again became a popular vacation spot (Sitton, 2010).

The Santa Catalina Island Conservancy was formed in 1972. The conservancy is a non-profit foundation organized to preserve Catalina in its natural state while promoting controlled public use for recreation. In 1975, the Wrigley's deeded 42,135 acres owned by the Santa Catalina Island Company to the Catalina Island Conservancy. This land

easement agreement gave the conservancy control of 88% of the island, including over sixty miles of coastline and secluded coves. The conservancy is the oldest and largest land trust in Southern California and promotes conservation, education, and recreation. The remainder of the land on Catalina is held by the Santa Catalina Island Company, public service agencies, and individuals (Maxwell et al., 2014).

Over its long history, ownership of Catalina has changed hands many times, from the native inhabitants to a chewing gum mogul. After a series of failed attempts at establishing an economy on Catalina via fishing, agriculture, grazing operations, and mining, the island was in need of a sustainable income source for its residents. With Catalina's inherent natural beauty and accessible location near a large populous mainland, tourism was deemed the best solution to generate profit for island settlers and developers. The island's history as a resort community for tourists extends over the last 120 years, and is still the driving force for Catalina Island's economy and development today.

## **Literature Review**

This chapter provides an overview of literature that has influenced the development of this study. My research on Catalina resident attitudes engages and applies previous research on three topics of multidisciplinary interest: attitudes and attitude formation among residents in tourist destinations; the real and perceived impacts of tourism development on resident communities; and the benefits and challenges of involving host communities with tourism planning.

### **Resident Attitudes Toward Tourism**

Before the 1980s, tourism research focused on the tourists' needs, behaviors, and motivations (Lankford, 1994), whereas local communities' perceptions and attitudes toward the industry were a lower priority (Murphy, 1985). The strategies of tourism planners have changed over the last few decades toward host community inclusion for several reasons. The shift of tourism management philosophy can be partly attributed to planners incorporating the attitudes of the residents in destination areas as a strategy to gain local support for projects (Harrill, 2004). However, Mason and Cheyne (2000) found that residents in host communities were likely to possess disparate opinions about tourism development in their region and that attempting to understand how these differences develop resulted in an increased amount of research into resident attitudes.

The research on how tourism is perceived by residents has identified demographics, community attachment, length of residency, economic dependence, and physical distance from tourism as factors influencing attitudes toward tourism (Harrill,

2004). The results of such studies have commonly suggested that residents' attitudes toward tourism are directly related to the perceived benefits and costs of the tourism industry that they experience (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002; Ko & Stewart, 2002). Andereck and Vogt (2000) found that attempting to investigate residents' attitudes and opinions about tourism development proved difficult because individual perceptions of what the term "tourism development" meant varied greatly amongst the general public.

McCool and Martin (1994) conducted a study concerning community attachment and resident attitudes toward tourism development in the state of Montana. The results concerning the connections between community attachment and attitudes were ambiguous. They found that people who lived in communities with higher levels of tourism development but who had not lived there long reported the strongest sense of community attachment. McCool and Martin explained this paradox with two working interpretations that I will simplify. The first explanation was that there were differences in the type of people that lived in tourism dependent communities and those who lived elsewhere, resulting in disparate attitudes. Newcomers that had deliberately made the choice to move to a tourism dependent community became quickly attached, having personally selected the location, and felt connected to the community by their choice. Conversely, McCool and Martin suggested, long-term residents that lived in areas with less tourism gained a sense of attachment over longer periods and by sharing similar lifestyles with community members. McCool and Martin also suggested another

explanation for their findings on community attachment: that some respondents' interpretation of "community attachment" may have been defined in terms of friendship, while others defined in terms of the physical environment. Because of this, McCool and Martin suggest that in their study "a highly attached newcomer [...] may have used the local physical environment as a frame of reference rather than interpersonal relationships that may have formed the context of the old-timers' response" (p. 34). Both explanations are viable and illuminating in regard to the uncertainty of resident's interpretation of what defines "community," which in turn contributes to attitude formation.

McCool and Martin's findings reinforce challenges in this area of study regarding the variability in resident perceptions of tourism. Resident attitudes toward tourism are related to demographics, but not always in predictable ways. Significant progress has been made to further resident attitude research, but the variables still present problems. The most disconcerting obstacle in attitude research is perhaps the broad interpretations of terms by residents that can impede the understanding of results.

### **Resident Perceptions of Impacts of Tourism on the Local Community**

According to Cook, Yale, and Marqua (2006), the most common impacts of tourism on local communities can generally be grouped into three categories: economic, environmental, and societal impacts. These categories are interrelated and are inevitable elements of tourism development. While tourism impacts are different for each community, research has identified some trends across a variety of tourist destinations.

**Economic.** Destination communities often increase tourism development to gain economic benefits; however, tourism development generates associated costs. These costs can increase in areas that are more susceptible to market fluctuations due to being economically dependent on tourism, as many island destinations are. Catalina Island's economy is totally dependent on tourism, and like many other tourism destinations, Catalina is trying to seek balance in regards to economic benefits and costs. Bosselman, Peterson, and McCarthy (1999) claim that the divergent results of economic impacts to host communities are due to the extensive variables of individual tourism destinations and are difficult or impossible to measure.

It is common for the literature to show that the actual outcomes of economic benefits and costs are difficult to predict and case dependent. Research conducted on economic impacts and tourism commonly suggests that some areas are more prone than others to negative impacts. Conlin and Baum (1995) state that island destinations are particularly vulnerable to economic impacts because they are dependent on tourism and the mainland to provide services. The lack of alternative forms of economic activity and reliance on the mainland for things such as transportation, equipment, and food contributes to the fragility of island destination economies. This near total dependence for income and services can accelerate negative impacts on the host community, yet many residents support tourism regardless due to tourism being the chief source of opportunity for income. In a 2016 study, Figueroa and Rotaro surveyed residents of Easter Island concerning their perceptions of tourism and the economy in their community. The survey

results showed that 96% of residents supported tourism because they recognized the economic potential tourism could provide for the future. Although Easter Island tourism threatens the environment and contributes to other negative impacts, residents believed that an increase in tourism was still the best viable option to boost the economy. In this case, residents perceived the benefits to the economy to outweigh the costs to the community.

The economic benefits of tourism development are often the pragmatic choice in areas without alternative economic options despite negative costs associated with the industry. Tourism destinations are challenged with trying to promote the positive and offset negative outcomes of tourism and sustain a prosperous economy. This can prove difficult in destinations that are entirely economically dependent on tourism, such as Catalina. As the literature indicates, each tourism destination is unique and vulnerable to economic, social and environmental impacts. Island destinations invariably demand added consideration in regards to tourism development and economy.

**Environmental.** Coastal regions, especially islands, are vulnerable to environmental damage due to development activities (Apostolopoulos, 2002). The growing concern for conservation and sustainable tourism has become significantly valued by both the public and private sector. Mathieson and Wall argued in their influential book *Tourism: Economic, Physical and Social Impacts* (1982), that the presence of tourism in a destination area can increase support for conservation and the preservation of natural areas, archaeological sites, and historic monuments. In the



absence of an attractive environment, there would be little tourism. On the other hand, tourism can also degrade an environment and attempts must be made to develop tourism discerningly to avoid deterioration of the natural landscape.

Over forty years ago, Catalina Island established a land trust conservancy to protect a large portion of the island from being developed. This management strategy was put in place not only to prevent environmental degradation but also to preserve the natural beauty of the island to attract tourists (Culver, 2010; Maxwell et al., 2014). This model of environmental preservation is not unprecedented, and has had success in other regions. For example, a 1999 case study conducted by Bosselman, et al. examined the conservation methods on Sanibel Island. Similar to Catalina's conservation approach, Sanibel Island off the coast of Florida devoted half of the 12,000-acre island to conservation to sustain the natural environment in 1976. The community of Sanibel has been the catalyst to protect a portion of the island from environmental degradation and development. The local public of Sanibel collaborated to reduce environmental impacts by implementing restrictions based on environmental and physical carrying capacity on the island. In turn, the island has been able to maintain economic benefits of tourism and protect the environment by working as a community to achieve common goals. Sanibel Island and Catalina are both important examples of destination areas that have successfully maintained the integrity of the natural environment while simultaneously attracting tourists.

**Social.** The tourism industry's social impacts on destination areas contribute to both positive and negative changes to residents' way of life (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). From a social perspective, positive impacts of tourism include an increase in recreational facilities, more entertainment options, and improved police and fire protection, all of which benefit residents. Negative impacts may include an increase in crime rate, pollution, crowding, and traffic congestion (Kreag, 2001). A great deal of the literature in this field discusses that even though residents may support tourism, they have a strong sense of the tourism industry's social and environmental impacts in their community.

King, Pizam, and Milman (1993) surveyed 199 households in Nadi, Fiji concerning the residents' perceptions of tourism's social impacts. The research revealed that although most of the interviewees were highly dependent on the tourism industry for income, the respondents were able to perceive both positive and negative consequences generated by tourism. The results indicated that residents strongly supported tourism in their area, while also recognizing that the tourists themselves were very different from their Fijian culture. Although the respondents acknowledged differences between their local culture and the visitors they came in contact with, they did not report negative feelings toward the tourists. The residents of Nadi expressed mostly positive feelings toward tourists and the tourism industry. According to King et al., the results indicate that residents in host communities, although economically dependent on tourism, possess concurrent positive and negative feelings toward the tourism industry.

Research has been successful in classifying some of the main social impacts of tourism. However, the social implications of tourism on host communities are immense and entirely case dependent in regards to how and on what scale individual tourist destinations experience tourism. Identifying the positive and negative impacts of tourism that residents benefit from or endure is an essential tool to mitigate problems while encouraging what is working.

### **Incorporating Community Voices into Tourism Planning**

Tourism planners and managers have recognized the importance of involving the community in the tourism planning process. According to Godfrey and Clark (2000), community involvement has been emphasized as a planning strategy to help minimize negative impacts of tourism for residents, defuse local issues that could stunt tourism growth, and promote political support for development projects. The literature also suggests that imbalances in power and authority can hinder community based participation in tourism planning. The establishment of community based tourism was intended to create a more sustainable industry but often falls short, mainly because of inequalities of power.

Reed's 1997 study of community based tourism planning and power relations in Squamish, British Columbia, found that community based tourism there was unsuccessful due to the lack of negotiation by prominent stakeholders. Squamish had previously relied on forestry as the main economic driver and was now looking toward tourism as an alternative for economic diversification. A hotel and ski resort were the focal point of

future development, and the regional Chamber of Commerce in Squamish supported the notion of community based tourism planning to gain input and collaborate with residents. Volunteers in the community formulated a detailed tourism development plan that included defined strategies for implementation. In short, the plan required approval by government, policymakers, elite stakeholders, private developers and community members. The process proved arduous to the volunteer community members. The stakeholders that held the most power ultimately made the final development decisions. Reed suggests that disparate power relations can prevent community collaboration or exceedingly alter the processes and outcomes of collaboration. Although some communities' residents are now being encouraged to actively participate in tourism planning, the end results may be predetermined by those who traditionally hold the power.

Clearly, every tourist destination and community is unique and requires individually adaptive planning strategies. To secure benefits that the community desires and avoid impacts that the community deems harmful is challenging. To achieve such goals, the community's input is imperative. The goal of my research on Catalina Island residents' attitudes and perceptions toward tourism in their community was to garner a better understanding of which impacts are perceived as beneficial or costly to individuals and the community. The literature reviewed above helped guide my decision-making and approach throughout my research process.

## Methods

This research draws on a mixed-methods approach, including formal written surveys supplemented by semi-structured interviews. These methods were employed to minimize bias and to provide cross verification of both qualitative and quantitative data.

### Written Surveys

**Participants.** The population of Catalina is approximately 4,000 inhabitants with most people residing in the island's biggest town, Avalon. This number fluctuates seasonally due to second home ownership and seasonal employment. The entire data collecting process was conducted in the town of Avalon. All of the participants in this research survey, besides three scheduled interviews, were selected randomly and were not financially compensated for their participation. The surveys were distributed door-to-door and were all administered in person. To ensure a random sample I surveyed every third house, condominium, apartment or business. After I discovered that many residents were not home, a participant recommended that I go to the commercial part of town because most residents were at work. I then went to retail stores, hotels, businesses, and the post office, finding the majority of my participants at these locations using the same random sample technique.

Most of the people I approached were willing and even eager to participate. I did encounter several non-English speaking people who did not want to participate although I did have surveys printed in Spanish. In most of these cases I was deflected to someone else in the family who spoke English and filled out the survey. In addition to the written

surveys, I also conducted three scheduled semi-structured interviews with the president of the Catalina Chamber of Commerce, a scientist at the Catalina Island Conservancy, and an 88 year resident that was recommended by several residents I spoke with. These participants were selected due to their experience and knowledge concerning the area and tourism.

**Apparatus and Materials.** I had 100 survey booklets in English and 50 in Spanish, a dozen clipboards, and boxes of pens to accommodate the participants. The main town of Avalon is geographically flat, yet there are many houses that are located among steep hillsides, so I rented a golf cart to administer surveys in these residential neighborhoods. I also had cards with a brief description of the study and my contact information; however, most participants were not interested in taking one.

**Procedure.** The survey was designed to take 10 minutes with close-ended questions, multiple choice and open-ended questions using Likert scales to measure levels of agreement/disagreement. The survey was structured with 30 questions about opinions concerning longevity of residence, tourism on Catalina, future plans related to tourism development, impacts on residents, and community involvement. The survey questions were adapted from Steven Martin's dissertation, "*Attitudes and behavioral intentions of Montana residents toward tourism*" (1994). (See Appendix A to view the Catalina Island survey used in this research).

The first couple of days of administering surveys were conducted door-to door in neighborhoods to find resident participants. I explained that I was a student at Humboldt

State University and that I was conducting a survey about resident attitudes concerning tourism. I informed the participants that the survey would take about 10 minutes; their identity would be kept anonymous and they were not obligated to participate. All of the surveys were taken directly on location and handed to me immediately after the survey was completed by the participant. Some participants wanted to fill out the survey themselves, while others requested that I ask the questions orally and fill in the data from their responses. Most participants had a great deal to say and each survey took longer than originally anticipated. The written survey acted as a platform for sharing additional information, often resulting in long informal interviews guided by each participant's personal interests concerning tourism.

The survey collection process took one week, resulting in 100 completed surveys. Although the survey was designed to take approximately 10 minutes to complete, most encounters with participants took at least a half hour.

In addition to the written surveys, I conducted three scheduled semi-structured interviews. Each interview was carried out at a planned time and place and was organized around a set of predetermined questions, but allowed for other questions to emerge from the dialogue (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). I anticipated conducting a larger number of semi-structured interviews as a part of my data collection process but had difficulty getting appointments with people who said they would be willing to talk to me. I did not pursue this technique after discovering the majority of my written surveys morphed into informal interviews. For the three semi-structured interviews I conducted

(each about an hour in length), I used my Catalina Island research survey as a template to prompt questions and guide the conversation.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

My first scheduled interview was with an employee of the Catalina Island Chamber of Commerce. Although, I intended to use my survey questions to guide the conversation, our discussion shifted to tourism impacts on natural resources. The second interview I conducted was with an employee of the Catalina Island Conservancy. This interview focused on environmental issues primarily concentrating on tourist recreation activities and how the Conservancy's main goals are conservation and sustainable ecotourism. The first two interviewees were seemingly careful about the information they provided and requested not to be quoted. My third interview was with a longtime resident and historian of Catalina who had over eighty years of personal experience living on the island. This person was born and raised on the island, and shared many of his experiences about the changes he has seen the island go through in his lifetime. He also showed me several old documents and pictures about the island that he kept in a very full filing cabinet. All three of my interviewees demonstrated considerable knowledge and experience when answering my research questions, but there was not much useable information garnered though these interviews.



## **Results and Discussion**

Out of the 100 participants who took the questionnaire, 40% identified as male and 60% as female. The median age was 50.5 years. Educational levels were at 34.2% possessing some college, 24.3% having a college degree, 18.0% with a high school diploma, 10.8% earning a postgraduate and higher, and 1.8% with an 8th grade education. Respondents' length of residence ranged from 1 year to 85 years with a median of 19.0 years. Catalina Island was the primary residence for 99% of respondents.

### **Quality of Life**

The majority of respondents reported benefiting from tourism on Catalina Island. When asked if the quality of life in their community has improved because of tourism, 81% of respondents agreed that it has. The remaining responses were 5% neutral and 14% disagreed. According to the residents, tourism development has mostly positive effects on their quality of life. A majority of the residents that I spoke with explained that they rely on tourism for their livelihoods and support tourism to improve or maintain their quality of life. As described to me by the locals, the rewards of living on this charming island are only possible because of the tourism industry. A local gentleman exclaimed to me, "We could not live here without tourism, we make a lot of money off of tourism and that's how we islanders live." For Catalina residents who depend on tourism for their livelihoods, more tourism means higher income. Residents also explained that tourism provides recreational opportunities and events that they can participate in.

Additionally, some residents mentioned that tourism dollars help keep the city clean and landscaped, creating an aesthetically pleasing environment.

While only a small percentage of residents reported that tourism does not improve their quality of life, those respondents often mentioned the concern they have about the lack of water. The strict water rationing is not only related to businesses being able to support tourism, but families feeling safe in regards to having access to fresh water. Many residents told me that they felt their quality of life was being jeopardized by tourism enterprises using too much water, but that they understood that tourism is their way of life on Catalina. Respondents were often conflicted about tourism's effects on their quality of life, a result that aligns with recent research in similar tourist locations.

A 2014 study by Ridderstatt, Croes, and Nijkamp explored the linkages between tourism development and quality of life for residents' on the island of Aruba. In short, the authors found that tourism development impacts quality of life for residents both positively and negatively. There is not just a one-way connection but an ongoing give and take dynamic between quality of life and tourism development. The authors suggest that the results of their study can contribute information for policy makers and other key decision makers to be aware of the quality of life impacts for residents and use this information to reduce negative impacts. This dilemma is not uncommon for tourist destinations, especially places that are dependent on tourism for their economy such as Aruba and Catalina.

### **Tourism Holds Future Promise**

At 88%, more than three quarters of the respondents agreed that tourism holds promise for Catalina. This response partially hinges on the respondents and entire host community having a majority reliance on tourism to earn a living. Almost all of the residents I spoke with wanted an increase of tourism to benefit the island but were reluctant to support development that will change the island too much. For example, in interviews several residents made it clear that although they believe that an increase in tourism is positive, they also believe tourism developments should not damage the natural environment and not be financially exclusionary by developing for only wealthy clientele.

Only 12% of residents strongly disagreed that tourism holds promise for the island. Both written responses and oral interviews concentrated mostly on new stores, restaurants, and a spa being built in Avalon without consideration of nostalgic buildings and spaces. The changes being made to Avalon have had some negative reactions from residents who have lived on the island for all or most of their lives. These reactions include resentment toward developers. One resident exclaimed, “The only promise tourism holds is the promise to screw over the islanders.” Sentiments like this were not uncommon with retired or long- term residents in general.

Many respondents felt that Catalina needs more attractions to increase tourism especially in the winter off season. Economic growth and occupation stability depend on the amount of tourism the island receives, so a seasonal decline in tourism can greatly

affect residents' quality of life. Seasonal demand variation is one of the most problematic characteristics of the tourism market and is a prevalent subject in tourism research. In a 2007 study on determinants of seasonal patterns in the Balearic Islands, Parrilla, Font and Nadal found that the most popular tactics to increase off season tourism have been the organization of special events and festivals, identifying new market segments, reduced promotional pricing, and adapting tourist attractions to seasonal demand by expanding them during peak periods and closing them during the lows. Catalina residents made suggestions similar to Parrilla et al., as ways to create year-round attractions and avoid an off-season tourism decline. Residents of Catalina suggested events such as concerts, organized hikes, wine tasting and reduced pricing as ways to attract visitors during the slower winter months. These types of seasonal tactics are good ideas to increase off-season tourism, yet can be difficult to implement, and may depend on factors that vary among tourist destinations.

### **Environmental Impacts**

About half of the residents surveyed felt that environmental impacts from tourism were minor. 51% of the residents' reported that they felt the environmental impacts from tourism were minor because of the Catalina Island Conservancy protecting 88% of the island, while 39% of residents felt that the environmental impacts from tourism are not minor, and 10% were neutral. Numerous residents noted that although the Conservancy protects much of the island's interior from environmental degradation from tourism, the town of Avalon endures the brunt of impacts. The most common environmental impact

identified by residents was the lack of a fresh water supply on the island. The divide in responses to the question of environmental impacts being minor is understandable because the Catalina Island Conservancy does protect a large portion of the island, but the circumstances of extreme drought on the island are severe. The results suggest that the residents surveyed were less inclined to perceive environmental threats because there is a large portion of land set aside that is off limits for commercial development. However, the lack of fresh water on the island and the necessity to support tourism and share their scarce natural resource with tourists was one of the main environmental concerns for Catalina residents.

Research on the environmental effects of uncontrolled commercial tourism-related growth in marine and coastal regions has found such environmental threats as water pollution, air pollution, tourist overfishing, threats to terrestrial wildlife, loss of habitat for plants and animals, increased garbage disposal, and industrial and urban sewage disposal (Hinrichsen, 1997). The Catalina Island Conservancy was established by the Wrigley family to combat and avoid the environmental issues that can occur in a vulnerable and isolated location such as a small island. For half of the survey respondents the Conservancy assuaged resident fears of environmental degradation caused by tourism, while the other half felt that environmental impacts caused by tourism are not minor regardless of the Conservancy.

Although most respondents ranked Catalina's environmental problems as minor, when asked how to increase tourism while conserving the natural landscape, they offered

a variety of suggestions. The most frequent suggestion was for the town of Avalon to offer a greater number of eco-friendly social events and activities such as festivals, concerts, and outdoor recreation events. Some respondents suggested educating and informing tourists about the land and status of natural resources. Some respondents objected to existing development projects that they perceived to be proceeding too quickly and without necessary infrastructure improvements. Additionally, many of the respondents did not offer a suggestion on how to increase tourism and conserve the landscape, stating that the Catalina Island Conservancy protects 88% and this trust protects the land from development.

### **Tourism and Friction**

A majority of residents reported that living in a host community did not cause extreme impairment or friction. When asked if the local population suffers from living in an area popular with tourists, 65% of residents disagreed, 10% were neutral, and 35% agreed that it did. When asked whether an increase in tourism will lead to friction between local residents and tourists, 73% of respondents disagreed, 15% were neutral and 12% agreed that it would. While most residents stated that they enjoyed living in a host community, they also reported drawbacks. Residents candidly explained that when people come for a limited time they are not invested in the area and can treat it poorly by littering, not cleaning up after their dogs, being loud or overtly obnoxious, and (worst of all) wasting water. One resident summed up her opinion by saying that “when people are away from their daily lives and in vacation mode, they can lose their manners.” Many

residents suggested that there should be more comprehensive tourist education pertaining to natural resources and appropriate conduct for visitors. Some residents suggested more informational signs, brochures, and guided tours that give more in-depth current information about the island rather than just history. Many residents told me that they understand that people are on vacation in their town, but some tourists are disrespectful or do not understand the severity of the water shortage problems that the island is attempting to mitigate. Regardless of the water shortage and some careless visitors, most residents perceived tourism as a benefit for the economic advantages it provides for individuals and the community. Grievances about some tourist behavior were the only problems that residents articulated. For the most part, respondents conveyed an appreciation for visitors and felt proud to share the charm and beauty of the island with others.

The question of whether tourism can lead to friction between residents and tourists also prompted respondents to tell me about another dynamic on the island that has led to some conflict. Although residents didn't identify friction between locals and tourists as a major problem, some mentioned friction within the community regarding the Hispanic population growing rapidly on the island, resulting in differences in culture and social norms with the once-dominant Anglo population. Both Hispanic and non-Hispanic people brought this issue up in conversation. I was unaware of this issue on the island and did not pursue this avenue of research. The situation requires a considerable amount of attention and exceeds the scope of my research.

### **Benefits and Threats of Tourism**

Residents responded with a variety of explanations when asked what benefits or threats they perceived from tourism development on Catalina. The main perceived benefits and threats were due to an increase of tourism on Catalina identified by the locals as relating to two main needs: money and fresh water. Increased tourism generates revenue, but also increases the use of natural resources, especially water. Residents and businesses need tourism's financial benefits to survive, but they understand that Catalina can't provide enough water for current demands, let alone more tourists. Many respondents were very vocal about the need to find a sustainable balance between these needs before developers make plans to expand.

At the time of this research, California had been in a severe drought for over four years and many communities in the state were dealing with water insecurity issues. With nearly one million visitors annually, Catalina required much more water than the approximately 4,000 full time residents consumed (Lovett, 2014). Strict water rationing would endanger Catalina's ability to attract or sustain visitors as a tourist destination, but conservation measures had gone into effect for residents, business owners, and tourists on the island. The drought threatened residents in various ways. For example, hotel owners I spoke with feared losing their businesses due to the inability to afford fresh water and not exceed the ration limits for their guests. They explained how it is difficult to convey the severity of the drought to vacationers that have paid good money to enjoy the island but "we have to ask them to take 2 minute showers or to not use the spigot to wash sand off



their feet, it is that bad”. The hotel owners also expressed that the recent rapid development of high end resorts and the full amenities that they offer is a concern for the security of their business, compounding the threats from lack of water with new competition from these resorts.

Many residents of Avalon explained that the recent updates to their town, including new shops and restaurants, are geared toward the wealthy and are pricing out middle income families. One resident stated that she disliked that “this new image of Avalon attempting to emulate an ambiance similar to an Italian Riviera resort, which we are not.” Many of the respondents pointed out that recent upgrades to Avalon, which they perceived as making the town more expensive and exclusionary, conflicted with the Wrigley family’s vision for Catalina, which emphasized maintaining the natural environment and keeping the island accessible for all.

### **Community Involvement**

The survey's community involvement questions were intentionally general to gain perspective about the respondent's propensity toward community involvement rather than focusing on particular issues. All of the community involvement questions were nonspecific to any tourism development happening on Catalina Island.

When asked if they would write a letter to their local newspaper opposing a tourism development in their community, 72.6% of respondents claimed that it would be very unlikely that they would write a letter to their local newspaper opposing a tourism development in their community, 10.2 % were neutral, 7.2% were likely. When asked if

they would speak against a tourism development project at their city council meeting, 83.6% of respondents replied unlikely, 9.2% were neutral, 7.1% were likely. When asked if they would speak in favor of a tourism development project at their city council meeting, 68.7% of respondents stated that it would be unlikely, 12.1% were neutral, and 19.2% were likely. When asked if they would write a letter to the local newspaper supporting a tourism project in their community, 71.7% said it was unlikely, 15.2% were neutral and 13.1% were likely.

A majority of respondents said they would not take any measures to get involved with tourism development in their community, not because they support development, but because they have no control over it. Respondents frequently mentioned the Santa Catalina Island Company which owns a majority of Catalina properties including hotels, restaurants, tourist expeditions, residential houses, and many other businesses. I soon discovered that the locals had many opinions about this large operation, which they call “the island company,” that has dominated the island’s development and daily structure since 1894. Due to a perceived risk of backlash, some of the residents spoke in whispers when discussing their attitudes about the “island company,” explaining that in such a small community they did not feel comfortable revealing information, however innocuous their comments were. Many of the residents explained that “the island company” is so imbedded into their daily lives it does not behoove them to speak openly or honestly with criticism. These concerns emerged again and again in interview and in the written survey responses regarding community involvement.

Respondents were asked whether they attend city council meetings and were invited to explain why or why not. In response, 51.5% of respondents said never, 30.9 % sometimes, 7.2% often, and 10.3 % always. The main reason given for not attending city council meetings was the small size of the community, and particularly the prospect of getting into disagreements with friends. Another common reason for not attending was respondents' belief that the Santa Catalina Island Company owns everything and makes all the definitive decisions regardless of residents' ideas or complaints. A few respondents claimed they feared repercussions from the Santa Catalina Island Company if they spoke their mind because the company has power and control over most of Avalon. More than half of the survey respondents said they watch the city council meetings on television, and that way they stay informed on issues without having to get directly involved in heated discussions. Other reasons for not attending city council meetings were lack of time due to work and family obligations. The few that attended the city council meetings stated that they are involved in the issues and want to stay informed.

These results suggest that a majority of Catalina residents support tourism development, yet are frustrated with the implementation of this development in various ways. Although residents will invariably disagree, a better understanding of their differences is a starting point to solutions. A primary aspect of this survey was to identify what Catalina residents believe to be the most important benefits and costs of tourism development in their community. The ultimate objective is to provide guidance to the

community in an effort to increase the benefits and reduce the economic, social, and environmental costs of tourism. The data collected can be used as a starting point for developers, policymakers, and future research in the field of tourism on Catalina Island. (See Appendix B to view Likert Scale Frequency Tables).

## Recommendations

The findings of this study have helped identify new areas for prospective studies on Catalina. The effects of climate change, developing for the wealthy, and cultural blending are current and practical topics for future research for the town of Avalon and the entire island.

At the time of this study, the main environmental concern of residents was directly related to the drought and the critical need to create sustainable solutions to generate fresh water for the residents and tourists. The subject of climate change was hardly discussed due to the immediate situation of water insecurity taking precedence over longer term planning. Research is needed to address and understand the immediate as well as long term consequences and impacts of climate change on Catalina Island. A comparative study with Catalina and other island host community attitudes toward acute short term and long term environmental problems could aid in developing solutions. Additional studies need to focus on the approaching environmental impacts of climate change such as drought, ocean ecology, and the coastline. The town of Avalon lies approximately 30' feet above sea level, and tidal influence can raise sea level significantly. With the predicted unstable weather variations, increase in ocean temperature, and sea level rise, climate change will undoubtedly impact Catalina.

Regarding the renovation of stores and hotels in the town of Avalon that were intended to update the area, residents are concerned that the cost of modernization has resulted in the exclusion of lower income tourists. Many residents stated that the town's

quaint charm was being lost to corporate greed, and predicted that rising costs would make travel and stay in Catalina impossible for all but the wealthy. Future research on Catalina should address tourism development geared towards wealthy clientele and explore the economic sustainability and social repercussions of pricing out middle and lower income families. This future research should incorporate a comparative study of a similar location by looking at the tourists' median household incomes, length of stay, return visits, and whether the visitors are traveling domestic or internationally. This information could be used to analyze the economic viability of exclusionary tourism and attempt to find ways to mitigate the restrictive effects toward people with lower incomes.

In regards to reports of community friction on Catalina, additional research is needed. The question was framed to explore friction caused by resident and tourist interaction. Many of the respondents spoke of cultural friction amongst residents on the island. Subsequent research could concentrate on an objective review of shifting racial demographics on the island while also incorporating a subjective survey of residents' opinions concerning culture and acculturation dynamics. A mail-back survey in both Spanish and English would ensure the privacy of the respondents, allowing participants to feel more comfortable to answer honestly without the feeling of surveillance or judgment by an interviewer.

## Conclusion

Research on residents' attitudes and perceptions toward tourism has gained recognition in the last few decades for numerous reasons. Planners, developers, and regional governments have found that incorporating resident input is an effective long-term management strategy. Understanding why residents support or oppose tourism can help the community and tourism planners select developments that can minimize negative impacts and maximize support among the local population. This is particularly relevant in light of recent changes to local structures and an increase of tourism development on Catalina. The media portrayal of Catalina's recent tourism development described it as positive for the economy, but did not address the local community's reactions to the changes being made in their town. Undoubtedly, Catalina residents know they live in a tourist destination, but that does not mean that they do not have opinions about what is happening in their community.

This research provides a glimpse of residents' attitudes toward tourism within the town of Avalon. The information garnered can apply to present and future tourism development projects. The nature of this study was intentionally broad to gain a fundamental understanding of residents' feelings toward tourism on the island today. Having many of the surveys become semi-structured interviews allowed the research to develop somewhat organically, revealing new discoveries that suggest future studies. However, the structured survey was also an important tool in gathering quantitative data covering similar subject matter. The main value in both approaches was to give the

residents the opportunity to share their opinions and reactions independently without fear of ridicule or adverse judgment. The knowledge gathered throughout this project generated a foundation of verifiable and legitimate concerns that are actually affecting the lives of people on Catalina.

Based on my observations, surveys, and interviews, most residents are favorable to tourism; however there are many different facets to being a host community and living in a tourism based economy. The most frequently reported and discussed threat from tourism development was the lack of a fresh water supply to maintain existing tourism, let alone increased tourism. The total reliance on the tourism industry highlights how environmental threats such as severe drought may leave the community of Avalon vulnerable to an economic collapse. Immediate action must be taken to address water issues in Avalon; without pre-emptive, collaborative, and adaptive strategies for water conservation and preservation, all types of tourism may be threatened, causing harm to the community and economy of Catalina Island. The “islanders” wanted to be heard, and my research intentions were to listen and report in a respectful manner. Overall, the majority of island residents that I spoke with have a positive view of the continuing development on Catalina Island.



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	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly	N/A
12. An increase in tourism in my community will lead to friction between local residents and tourists.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

CATALINA ISLAND RESIDENT SURVEY

1. Is your primary residence on Catalina Island?

Yes                      No

2. If yes, how long have you lived on Catalina Island?

3. If no, how long have you had a second home on Catalina Island?

4. If no, how many months do you spend on Catalina per year?

5. What time of year do you typically spend on Catalina?

Winter      Spring      Summer      Fall

Opinions about Tourism on Catalina Island

Tourism Plans

13. On a scale of 1 – 10, 1 being extremely unsatisfied and 10 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with the existing amount of tourism on Catalina Island?

14. How informed do you feel about the current development plans to increase tourism?

Uninformed                      Slightly informed                      Very informed

15. In your opinion, would a berthing facility for cruise ships improve tourism on Catalina Island?

Yes                      No                      Maybe

16. What would you recommend Catalina do to increase tourism and also conserve the natural landscape?

17. What benefits or threats do you perceive with tourism development on Catalina?

Community Involvement

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely
18. Write a letter to your newspaper opposing a tourism development in your community.	0	0	0	0	0
19. Speak in favor of a tourism development project at your city council meeting.	0	0	0	0	0
20. Speak or write a letter to your state legislator opposing a development project in your community.	0	0	0	0	0

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely
21. Be willing to serve on a tourism advisory board in your community to help plan tourism promotion and development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. Volunteer 4 hours each month to help improve the appearance of your community to make it more appealing to tourists.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely
23. Vote against a state legislator who wants to increase tourism on Catalina.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. Write a letter to your newspaper supporting a tourism development project in your community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25. Speak against a tourism development project at your city council meeting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely
26. Speak or write a letter to your state legislator supporting a tourism development project in your community.	○	○	○	○	○

27. Do you attend city council meetings?

Never    Sometimes    Often    Always

Why or why not?

---

28. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

29. What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

30. What is the highest level of education you have completed so far? (Circle one)

8<sup>th</sup> Grade    High School Diploma    Some College    College Degree    Post-Graduate or Higher

31. What is your occupation? Please indicate what you do, not who you work for. Please be as specific as possible. If you are a homemaker, student or retired, please indicate.

## Appendix B

### Likert Scale Frequency Tables Opinions about Tourism on Catalina Island Written Survey Results

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Response	Median Response
6. The quality of life in my community has improved because of tourism	13	1	5	20	61	4.15	5.00
7. The environmental impacts resulting from tourism are relatively minor	10	26	10	33	21	3.29	4.00
8. The local residents are the ones who really suffer from living in an area popular with tourists	42	22	10	15	11	2.31	2.00
9. Tourism holds great promise for Catalina's future	8	0	4	25	63	4.35	5.00
10. In recent years the island has become overcrowded because of tourists	15	42	12	26	5	2.64	2.00
11. My community should take steps to restrict tourism development	43	37	11	5	4	1.90	2.00
12. An increase in tourism in my community will lead to friction between local residents and tourists	44	29	15	7	5	1.95	2.00



**Likert Scale Frequency Tables**  
 Opinions about Tourism on Catalina Island  
 Written Survey Results

<b>Question</b>	<b>Very Unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Very Likely</b>	<b>Mean Response</b>	<b>Median Response</b>
18. Write a letter to your newspaper opposing a tourism development in your community	60	23	10	4	3	1.67	1.00
19. Speak in favor of a tourism development project at your city council meeting	48	21	12	15	4	2.06	2.00
20. Speak or write a letter to your state legislator opposing a development project in your community	51	25	13	7	4	1.88	2.00
21. Be willing to serve on a tourism advisory board in your community to help plan tourism promotion and development	49	18	14	13	6	2.09	2.00
22. Volunteer four hours each month to help improve the appearance of your community to make it more appealing to tourists	48	11	12	14	15	2.37	2.00
23. Vote against a State Legislator who wants to increase tourism on Catalina	57	23	9	6	5	1.79	1.00
24. Write a letter to your newspaper supporting a tourism development project in your community	52	18	15	10	5	1.98	1.00
25. Speak against a tourism development project at your city council meeting	63	22	8	5	2	1.61	1.00
26. Speak or write a letter to your State Legislator supporting a tourism development project in your community	52	24	12	8	4	1.88	1.00