Tourism in Iceland:
How is the exponentially increasing tourism industry impacting Iceland’s natural wonders?

Abstract
Since the collapse of Iceland’s economy in 2008, tourism has been a leading factor in its recovery. However, the exponential increase in tourism has come with some negative consequences. These consequences were observed and analyzed over the span of a week spent collecting data around the country. Observations were made regarding pollution, environmental degradation, and the urbanization of natural sites. The data collected was recorded in field journals and photographs were taken to support these findings. Interviews were also conducted with tour guides, locals, and business owners in order to gather inside perspectives on the issue. These interviews were conducted in a wide range of locations, spanning from areas of small populations, to the most populated cities. Through evaluation of this data, a correlation between an increase in tourism, and an increase in littered waste was found. This result is consistent with the expectations that were speculated before conducting research. In response to this issue, a government induced balance between economic growth and environmental conservation, in regards to tourism, is necessary to avoid further degradation.

Introduction
With the advancement of technology, the world grows more and more interconnected. As a result of this interconnectedness, more and more people are discovering locations that were previously unheard of. Also, with widespread usage of smartphones and social media, images and descriptions of these countries’ beauty are as easily available as those of traditional tourist locations. Of these locations, the country with the most prominent tourist boom is Iceland. Historically, Iceland has been a country with a small and isolated population. With the increase in tourism, they are experiencing cross-cultural interactions on a scale larger than ever before. Although these interactions enrich the culture of Iceland and drive its economic growth, there are several factors that negatively impact the people and environment of Iceland.

Methodology
Secondary information, from research papers and articles were gathered before going to Iceland. They discuss topics that describe environmental destruction due to tourism at renewable energy plants in the wilderness.

Results
- Effects of tourism are not heavily present in small towns or uncommonly visited areas
- Although signs are in place dissuading environmental destruction, tourists commonly disregard warnings and proceed with their actions
- At the most popular tourist sights, people littering and walking off of designated paths
  - The most common items littered include cigarette butts and food containers
- Surprisingly, several signs were in place prohibiting defecation in open areas, implying that this has previously been an issue
- To ensure the safety of tourists, many paths and wooden walkways are built throughout the land, detracting the natural beauty
- Although paths are put in place, several tourists stray from the paths and end up slowing the growth of native vegetation

Figure 1: Growth of tourism in Iceland [1]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of visitors</th>
<th>Proportional increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>488,600</td>
<td>2010-11 15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>565,600</td>
<td>2011-12 18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>672,800</td>
<td>2012-13 20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>807,300</td>
<td>2013-14 22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>997,300</td>
<td>2014-15 29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1,289,100</td>
<td>2015-16 39.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1,792,200</td>
<td>2010-16* 24.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Average yearly growth rate

Figure 2: Disregarded sign and the resulting pollution at Pingvellir National Park

Figure 3: Tourists garbage at Reynisfjara, also known as the black sand beach.

Conclusion
- Environmental degradation is occurring at several popular sites.
- Litter and the disregard of posted signs is a common sight.
- The government of Iceland must enact policies, such as fines for people who break rules, in order to dissuade people from causing further harm.

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References

Methodological Limitations
- Lack of quantitative data on environmental damage, interviewees being hesitant to answer questions, and locals’ neglect of negative environmental impacts.