



## A STUDY OF ECO-TOURISM AND THE FUTURE

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Ecotourism is responsible travel to fragile, pristine and usually protected areas that strive to be low impact and often small scale alternative to mass tourism. Its purpose is to educate the traveller, to provide funds for ecological conservation directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. Since the 1980's ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavor by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention.

Generally, ecotourism focuses on volunteering personal growth and environmental responsibility. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. One of the goals of ecotourism is to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment, and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats.

### **Terminology:**

Ecotourism is a late 20<sup>th</sup> century neologism compounded from eco and tourism. According to the definition and

principles of ecotourism established by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) 1990, ecotourism is “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people,” . Many terms are used under the rubric of ecotourism such as Nature tourism, low impact tourism, Green tourism, Bio-tourism, Ecological responsible tourism have been used in literature and marketing, although they are not necessarily synonymous with ecotourism.

### **Characteristics of ecotourism, which are;**

- Involves travel to natural destinations
- Builds environmental awareness
- Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Respects local culture and tradition.
- Supports human rights and democratic movement
- Conservation of biological and cultural diversity through eco-tourism protection and Promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity.
- to provide employment to local people.
- Sharing of socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous peoples by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism enterprises
- Tourism to unspoiled natural resources, with minimum impact on the environment being a primary concern.
- Local culture, flora and fauna are being the main attractions
- It discourages mass tourism, mass constructions of hotels, tourism resorts and mass activities in fragile areas.

### **Principles:**

Ecotourism in both terrestrial and marine ecosystems can benefit conservation, provided the complexities of history, culture, and ecology in the affected regions are successfully navigated. Ecotourism works best to conserve predators when the tourism industry is supported

both politically and by the public, and when it is monitored and controlled at local, national and international levels.

### **Regulation and Accreditation :**

A national or international regulatory board would enforce accreditation procedures, with representation from various group including governments, hotels, tour operators, travel agencies, guides, airlines, local authorities, conservation organizations, and non-governmental organizations(NGO's). The decisions of the board would be sanctioned by governments, so that non-compliant companies would be legally required to disassociate themselves from the use of the ecotourism brand.

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) could also be used as a form of accreditation. Feasibility is evaluated from a scientific basis, and recommendations could be made to optimally plan infrastructure, set tourist capacity, and manage the ecology. This form of accreditation is more sensitive to cite specific conditions.

Some countries have their own certification programs for ecotourism and runs the Certification of Sustainable Tourism (CST) program, which is intended to balance the effect that business has on the local environment. The CST program focuses on a company's interaction with natural and cultural resources, the improvement of quality of life within local Communities, and the economic contribution to other programs of national development. The CST uses a rating system that categorizes a company based upon how sustainable its operations are. The CST evaluates the interaction between the company and the surrounding habitat; the management policies and operation systems within the company; how the company encourages its clients to become an active contributor towards sustainable policies; and the interaction between the company and local communities. Based upon these criteria, the company is evaluated for the strength of its sustainability.

**Guidelines and Awareness:** Tour guides are an obvious and direct medium to communicate awareness. They can actively discuss conservation issues and informing eco-tourists about how their actions on the trip can negatively impact on environment and the local people.

## **Small scale, slow growth and local control:**

Local peoples have a vested interest in the well-being of their community, and are therefore more accountable to environmental protection than multinational corporations/MNCs though they receive very little of the profits. The lack of control, westernization, adverse impacts to the environment, loss of culture and traditions outweigh the benefits of establishing large scale ecotourism. The increased contributions of communities to locally managed ecotourism create viable economic opportunities, including high-level management positions, and reduce environmental issues associated with poverty and unemployment. There is a greater multiplier effect on the economy, because local products, materials, and labour are used. Profits accrue locally and import leakages are reduced.

## **Natural Resource Management:**

It can be utilized as a specialized tool for the development of ecotourism. There are several places throughout the world where a number of natural resources are abundant, but with human encroachment and habitats, these resources are depleting. Without the sustainable use of certain resources, they are destroyed, and floral and faunal species are becoming extinct. Ecotourism programs can be introduced for the conservation of these resources. Several plans and proper management programs can be introduced so that these resources remain untouched, and there many organizations including nonprofits and scientists working on this field.

## **Negative impact of Eco-Tourism:**

Eco-tourism has become one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry, Many of the ecotourism projects are not meeting these standards. Even it some of the guidelines are being executed, the local communities are still facing many of the negative impacts. A tremendous amount of money and human resources continue to be used for ecotourism despite unsuccessful outcomes, and even more, money is put into public relation campaigns to dilute the effects of criticism. Ecotourism channels resources away from other projects that could contribute more sustainable and realistic solutions to pressing social and environmental

problems. The money tourism can generate often ties parks and managements to ecotourism. But there is a tension in this relationship because ecotourism often causes conflict and changes in land use rights, fails to deliver promises of community level benefits, damages environments, and has many other social impacts. Indeed, many argue repeatedly that ecotourism is neither ecologically nor socially beneficial.

### **Environmental impacts of Eco-Tourism:**

The construction of water treatment plants, sanitation facilities, and lodges come with the exploitation of non-renewable energy sources and the utilization of already limited local resources. The conversion of natural land to such tourist infrastructure is implicated in deforestation and habitat deterioration. Apart from environmental degradation with tourist infrastructure, ecotourism also leaves behind garbage and pollution associated with the Western lifestyle.

### **Environmental Hazards:**

The industrialization, urbanization and agricultural practices of human society are having a serious impact on the environment. Ecotourism is now also considered to be playing a key role in environmental depletion including deforestation, disruption of ecological life systems and various forms of pollution, all of which contribute to environmental degradation. For example, the number of roads disrupts the grass cover, which has serious consequences on plant and animal species. Other Impacts of Eco Tourism are;

### **Impact on Local people:**

Most forms of ecotourism are owned by foreign investors and corporations/companies that provide few benefits to the local people. An overwhelming majority of profits are put into the pockets of Investors instead of reinvestment into the local economy of environmental protection leading to further environmental degradation. The limited numbers of local people who are employed in the economy enter at its lowest level and are unable to live in tourist areas because of meager wages and a two-market system.

## **Threats to indigenous cultures:**

Ecotourism often claims that it preserves and enhances local cultures. Evidence shows that with the establishment of protected areas local people have lost their homes, and mostly with no compensation. Pushing people onto marginal lands with harsh climates, poor soils, lack of water, and infested with livestock and disease does little to enhance livelihoods even when a proportion of ecotourism profits are directed back into the community. The establishment of parks can create harsh survival realities and deprive the people of their traditional use of land and natural resources. Ethnic groups are increasingly, being seen as a backdrop to the scenery and wildlife. The local people struggle for cultural survival and freedom of cultural expression while being observed by tourists. Local indigenous people also have a strong resentment towards the change.

## **Mismanagement of Eco-Tourism :**

While Governments/Regulatory Agencies are typically entrusted with the administration and enforcement of environmental protection, they often lack the commitment or capability to manage ecotourism sites. The regulations for environmental protection may be vaguely defined, costly to implement, hard to enforce, and uncertain in effectiveness. Government/regulatory agencies, are susceptible to making decisions that spend on politically beneficial but environmentally unproductive projects. Finally, influential groups can pressure, and sway the interests of the government to their favour. Management of ecotourism sites by private ecotourism companies offers an alternative to the cost of regulation and deficient of government agencies. It is believed that these companies have a self-interest in limited environmental degradation because tourists will pay more for pristine environments, which translates to higher profit.

**Conclusion:** Ecotourism includes programs that minimize the negative aspects of conventional tourism on environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, an integral part of ecotourism is the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and creation of economic opportunities for local communities.

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