

Tourism to Ecotourism: a Tour

Kanchan Lata Tripathi^{#1}

[#]Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Management Studies, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi- 221005, U.P., India.

Abstract

Tourism is an important, even vital, source of income for many regions and countries. Tourism brings in considerable amounts of income into a local economy in the form of payment for goods and services demanded by tourists. This paper articulates the concept of tourism and that of ecotourism, and their interrelationship, and explains the critical difference between tourism and ecotourism, which are commonly confused. The paper briefly describes about the history, forms & benefits of eco tourism. It also discusses about the characteristics of responsible and sustainable tourism. The criticisms of ecotourism are also briefly described.

Keywords — *Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Environmental Consciousness & Responsible Tourism.*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Oxford English Dictionary (2005), Tourism is travel for pleasure; also the theory and practice of touring, the business of attracting, accommodating, and entertaining tourists, and the business of operating tours. The service industries which benefit from tourism include transportation services, such as airlines, cruise ships, and taxicabs; hospitality services, such as accommodations, including hotels and resorts; and entertainment venues, such as amusement parks, casinos, shopping malls, music venues, and theatres. Whereas Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial (mass) tourism. It means responsible travel to natural areas conserving the environment and improving the well being of the local people [1]. Ecotourism focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth, and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Ecotourism is intended to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment, and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats. Ecotourism is a responsible tourism which conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people. [2] It...

- Builds environmental awareness
- Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Respects local culture

- Supports human rights and democratic movements

II. HISTORY OF ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism is a late 20th-century neologism compounded from eco- and tourism. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *eco tour* was first recorded in 1973 and *ecotourism*, "probably after *eco tour*", in 1982. [4]

- *Eco tour, noun.* ... A tour of or visit to an area of ecological interest, usually with an educational element; (in later use also) a similar tour or visit designed to have as little detrimental effect on the ecology as possible or undertaken with the specific aim of helping conservation efforts.
- *Eco tourism, noun.* ... Tourism to areas of ecological interest (typically exotic and often threatened natural environments), esp. to support conservation efforts and observe wildlife; spec. access to an endangered environment controlled so as to have the least possible adverse effect.

The tourist industry and governments, however, focus more on the product aspect, treating ecotourism as equivalent to any sort of tourism based in nature. [5] Nature tourism, low impact tourism, green tourism, bio-tourism, ecologically responsible tourism, and others have been used in literature and marketing, although they are not necessary synonymous with ecotourism. [5] The purpose of ecotourism is to engage tourists in low impact, non-consumptive and locally oriented environments in order to maintain species and habitats — especially in underdeveloped regions. While some ecotourism projects can support such claims, many projects have failed to address some of the fundamental issues that nations face in the first place. Consequently, ecotourism may not generate the very benefits it is intended to provide to these regions and their people, and in some cases leaving economies in a state worse than before. [7]

III. DEFINITIONS OF ECO TOURISM

Ecotourism is: "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." (TIES, 1990) The Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as "purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and the natural history of the environment; taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem; producing economic opportunities that make the

conservation of the natural resources beneficial to the local people (Epler Wood et al., 1991, 75)''.

The World Conservation Union's (IUCN) Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA) defines ecotourism as "environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features — both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996, 20)''.

IV. TOURISM AND ECO TOURISM

The main distinction between ecotourism and other forms of tourism are often not evident and are widely debated. Discrepancies are a result of the variety of different perspectives and criteria used to distinguish ecotourism. These include the motivations for initiating ecotourism (e.g. as a conservation strategy, a business venture, or as part of an environmental education campaign), the motivations of users (are they committed to the conservation ethic or otherwise?), the presence and scale of environmental, social and economic impacts. Ecotourism is neither a simple concept to define nor a straightforward phenomenon to implement and evaluate. Ecotourism should be regarded as being more than tourism to natural areas and should be viewed as a means of combining the goals of resource conservation and local development through tourism in a synergistic fashion. This means that care should be taken to ensure that the goals of tourism development do not interfere with the goals of protecting natural areas and biodiversity. [12] An eco tourist is different from a tourist in the sense that, he or she is mindful of his environment, in most cases contributing to the sustainability of such surroundings. Ecotourism is often misinterpreted as any form of tourism that involves nature. Self-proclaimed practitioners and hosts of ecotourism experiences assume it is achieved by simply creating destinations in natural areas. According to critics of this commonplace and assumptive practice, true ecotourism must, above all, sensitize people to the beauty and the fragility of nature. These critics condemn some operators as green washing their operations: using the labels of "green" and "eco-friendly", while behaving in environmentally irresponsible ways [3].

V. PRINCIPLES OF ECOTOURISM

The principles of ecotourism developed by the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) are presented hereunder:

Ecotourism-

- Avoids negative impacts that can damage or destroy the integrity or character of the natural or cultural environments being visited.

- Educates the traveler on the importance of conservation.

- Directs revenues to the conservation of natural areas and the management of protected areas.

- Brings economic benefits to local communities and directs revenues to local people living adjacent to protected areas.

- Emphasizes the need for planning and sustainable growth of the tourism industry, and seeks to ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental 'carrying capacity'.

- Retains a high percentage of revenues in the host country by stressing the use of locally owned facilities and services.

- Increasingly relies on infrastructure that has been developed sensitively in harmony with the environment - minimizing use of fossil fuels conserving local plants and wildlife, and blending with the natural environment.

VI. FORMS OF ECO TOURISMS

Tourism forms identified by the literature as being "sustainable" are numerous: ecological tourism (ecotourism), green tourism, soft, rural tourism and agro tourism, community tourism, solidarity and responsible tourism, all these opposing to the traditional, mass tourism. According to some specialists only tourism in natural reservations or national parks is considered to be ecological. A larger concept of ecological tourism refers to that form of responsible travel, developed in natural spaces, that contributes to environment protection and local population life conditions improvement and wellbeing. [13]

VII. RESPONSIBLE ECOTOURISM

Responsible ecotourism programs include those that minimize the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the 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. [8] For these reasons, ecotourism often appeals to advocates of environmental and social responsibility.

The term 'ecotourism', like 'sustainable tourism', is considered by many to be an oxymoron.[9] Like most forms of tourism, ecotourism generally depends on air transportation, which contributes to global climate change. Additionally, "the overall effect of sustainable tourism is negative, where, like ecotourism, philanthropic aspirations mask hard-nosed immediate self-interest." [10]. Ecotourism contributes enormously to the on-going process of protection of the land and its resources. First of all, it encourages local community, especially tourism students, to understand the negative impacts of conventional mass tourism at a

destination and attempts to minimize these impacts on both the natural and socio-cultural environments. Ecotourism equally contributes to the preservation of the environment by protecting natural areas from development for alternative uses such as agriculture. Therefore, it favors the practice of environmentally-friendly patterns of resource use and is an alternative to environmentally-damaging industries. Furthermore, ecotourism promotes heritage conservation for the future generations to come through the creation of numerous national parks, protected areas and nature reserves.

Even though ecotourism is known to be a form of "responsible tourism", much controversy about its use exists. This is so because some players merely use it as a label to attract higher-spending tourists to a destination. It has been argued as a negative force of social change in the isolated areas of the world. There is a very important relationship that lies between sustainable tourism and ecotourism. This is so, because both of them emphasize on the concept of the triple bottom line. The economic, ecological, social and cultural aspects are the first priority before embarking on any type of development. [11]

VIII. BENEFITS OF ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism can bring about economic, socio-cultural and environmental benefits for the government, private sector and local communities if well implemented. Revenue from tourist visits help create job opportunities for locals, which in turn, lead to more diversified economy for them. More importantly, ecotourism can support conservation and environmental management if properly carried out. For example, entry fees imposed on visitors can be channeled towards the maintenance and management of the areas. Ecotourism can also be a tool to raise awareness about the environment and to educate the public on conservation. [14]

IX. CRITICISMS TO ECOTOURISM

At the local level, ecotourism has become a source of conflict over control of land, resources, and tourism profits. In this case, ecotourism has harmed the environment and local people, and has led to conflicts over profit distribution. In a perfect world more efforts would be made towards educating tourists of the environmental and social effects of their travels. Very few regulations or laws stand in place as boundaries for the investors in ecotourism. These should be implemented to prohibit the promotion of unsustainable ecotourism projects and materials which project false images of destinations, demeaning local and indigenous culture. Actually it is argued repeatedly that ecotourism is neither ecologically nor socially beneficial, yet it persists as a strategy for conservation and development. Although eco tourists claim to be educationally sophisticated and environmentally concerned, they rarely

understand the ecological consequences of their visits and how their day-to-day activities append physical impacts on the environment. Ecotourism activities are, in and of themselves, issues in environmental impact because they may disturb fauna and flora. Eco tourists believe that because they are only taking pictures and leaving footprints, they keep ecotourism sites pristine, but even harmless-sounding activities such as nature hikes can be ecologically destructive. Aside from environmental degradation with tourist infrastructure, population pressures from ecotourism also leaves behind garbage and pollution associated with the Western lifestyle. [6] For example-In the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal, eco tourists have worn down the marked trails and created alternate routes, contributing to soil impaction, erosion, and plant damage. Where the ecotourism activity involves wildlife viewing, it can scare away animals, disrupt their feeding and nesting sites, or acclimate them to the presence of people. In Kenya, wildlife-observer disruption drives cheetahs off their reserves, increasing the risk of inbreeding and further endangering the species. [5]

Management of ecotourism sites by private ecotourism companies offers an alternative to the cost of regulation and deficiency of government agencies. It is believed that these companies have self-interest in limited environmental degradation, because tourists will pay more for pristine environments, which translates to higher profit. However, theory indicates that this practice is not economically feasible and will fail to manage the environment. In Ziffer's words (Ziffer, 1989) "If planning and decision-making do not involve local populations, then ecotourism will not succeed, and may even be detrimental to local communities".

X. CONCLUSION

Because of the increasing environmental consciousness among people Tourism now a day's gaining the interest of the society in the form of ecotourism. Despite the fact that ecotourism is known as a form of "responsible tourism", much controversy about its use exists. As some of the player just utilize it as a label to attract high paying tourist customers as the environmentally conscious tourist easily be ready to pay some extra cost for that eco-label.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ceballos-Lascurain, H. (1996). Tourism, ecotourism and protected areas. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.
- [2] Epler Wood, M., Gatz, F., & Lindberg, K. (1991). The Ecotourism Society: An action agenda. In: J. Kusler (Ed.), Ecotourism and resource conservation (pp. 75–79). Selected papers from the 2nd International Symposium: Ecotourism and Resource Conservation, Madison: Omnipress
- [3] Oxford English Dictionary (2005) (3rd ed.). "Tourism". Oxford University Press. September
- [4] Ziffer, K. (1989). Ecotourism: The uneasy alliance. Working Paper Series, Washington, DC: Conservation International.

Citations

- [1] "What is Ecotourism? | The International Ecotourism Society". www.ecotourism.org. Retrieved 2016-11-17.
- [2] Hunt, Carter A.; Durham, William H.; Driscoll, Laura; Honey, Martha (2015-03-16). "Can ecotourism deliver real economic, social, and environmental benefits? A study of the Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica". *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. **23** (3): 339–357. Doi:10.1080/09669582.2014.965176. ISSN 0966-9582.
- [3] Singh (2008). *Indian Cultural Heritage Perspective for Tourism*. Gyan Publishing House. p. 114
- [4] Oxford English Dictionary Second Edition on CD-ROM, Version 4.0, draft entries December 2001, Oxford University Press 2009. Citing: "1973 Ecol. Interpretative Map, Ottawa–North Bay (Canad. Forestry Service) (heading) Ecotour of the Trans-Canada Highway, Ottawa–North Bay", and "1982 (title) Ecological tourism (ecotourism): a new viewpoint (U.N. F.A.O. & Econ. Comm. for Europe)
- [5] Tuohino, A.; A. Hynonen (2001). *Ecotourism—imagery and reality. Reflections on concepts and practices in Finnish rural tourism*. Nordia Geographical Publications. pp. **30**(4):21–34.
- [6] McLaren, D. (1998). *Rethinking tourism and ecotravel: the paving of paradise and what you can do to stop it*. West Hartford, Connecticut, USA: Kamarian Press.
- [7] Fennell, David A. (1999). *Ecotourism: An Introduction*. London, England: Routledge. p. 30. ISBN 9780203457481. OCLC 51036894.
- [8] Randall, A. (1987). *Resource economics, Second Edition*. New York, USA: John Wiley and Sons.
- [9] Nievaart, Suzanne. "Ecotourism is an oxymoron. Sustainable tourism as alternative?". docslide.us. Retrieved 26 August 2015
- [10] Stabler, M.J. (eds.) (1997, page 45) *Tourism and Sustainability: Principles to Practice*. CAB International: Wallingford
- [11] <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/tourism/the-introduction-to-ecotourism-tourism-essay.php>
- [12] <http://planet.botany.uwc.ac.za/NISL/Gwen's%20Files/Biodiversity/Chapters/Info%20to%20use/ecotourismtheorypracticeRoss.pdf>
- [13] <http://feaa.ucv.ro/AUCSSE/0036v2-024.pdf>
- [14] http://www.lawyerment.com/library/kb/Society_and_Culture/Environment/1480.htm

Bibliography

- [1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecotourism#cite_note-1
- [2] <http://www.ecotourism.org/book/ecotourism-definition>
- [3] The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) is a program of the International Tourism Collective, a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting ecotourism. Founded in 1990