

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW ON THE APPLICATIONS OF ECOTOURISM IN BIOLOGICAL CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism, as a field of study and practice, remains in a formative stage with ongoing debates surrounding its definition, planning, and implementation. The lack of a universally accepted definition reflects the diversity of perspectives and objectives within ecotourism discourse. This review contends that rigid definitions may be unnecessary if the focus remains on the underlying principles and objectives of ecotourism. Broadly, the concept encompasses three key themes: natural conservation, environmental education, and sustainability—incorporating both economic and social dimensions. Each of these elements offers distinct benefits but also presents challenges, particularly when commercial interests outweigh ecological and ethical considerations. The credibility of ecotourism hinges on transparent practices, ethical marketing, and the prevention of consumer exploitation. This article critically explores the foundational themes of ecotourism, analyzing its ecological, educational, and sustainable dimensions. It also reflects on the evolving dynamics of the tourism industry and discusses future directions for ecotourism research and practice.

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism involves responsible tourism, environmental conservation and the improvement of local people [1]. Ecotourism is a kind of tourism. Its aim may be to educate the tourist, support ecological preservation of communities or promote respect for various cultures and for human rights, to benefit directly the economic growth and empowerment of local populations [2]. Ecotourism has been viewed by environmentalists since the 1980s as a crucial effort, so that future generations may enjoy locations largely undisturbed by the use of human resources. This is used as a working definition of ecotourism by a number of academic programmes [3]. In general, ecotourism deals with the interplay of natural environment biotic components. Ecotourism focuses on travel, personal growth and environmental sustainability. socially responsible [4]. Ecotourism often includes trips to places where the main attractions are flora, wildlife and cultural heritage [5]. Ecotourism is designed to provide tourists with an insight into the environmental effect of mankind and to promote a deeper understanding of our natural environments. The ecotourism initiatives responsible include programmes designed to decrease harmful environmental effects of traditional tourism and improve local people's cultural integrity [6]. Thus, the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation and economic development possibilities for local people is an essential element of ecotourism as well as the assessment of environmental and cultural concerns [7]. Ecotourism frequently appeals to environmental and social responsibility activists for these reasons. For many, the word

'ecotourism' is an oxymoron, as is 'sustainable tourism [8].' As with most types of tourism, air transport, which contributes to global climate change, is typically dependent on ecotourism [9]. Furthermore, the overall effect of sustainable tourism is detrimental, as humanitarian ideals like ecotourism disguise immediate self-interest in general. That said, several big airlines are already providing carbon offset programmes, which travellers may utilise to erase these effects.

ECOTOURISM BENEFITS

Ecotourism is tourism which preserves and maintains the well-being of local people in a responsible way [10]. The advantages include:

- ✓ Construction of awareness of the environment.
- ✓ Providing immediate conservation financial advantages.
- ✓ Providing local people with financial advantages and empowerment.
- ✓ The native culture is respected.

Encouraging human rights and democratic movements like:

- ✓ Conservation by the ecosystem of biodiversity and cultural variety.
- ✓ Promoting sustainable biodiversity utilisation by supplying employment to local people.
- ✓ The engagement in eco-tourism management through informed permission and participation in all socio-economic advantages with local populations and indigenous people.
- ✓ Tourism to natural resources with low environmental effect is a major issue. Tourism to natural resources
- ✓ Minimizing the environmental effect of tourism itself.

- ✓ Accessibility and absence of luxury waste.
- ✓ The primary attractions are indigenous culture, nature and animals.
- ✓ Local people who economically and frequently more than mass tourists benefit from this kind of tourism. Protection of the ecosystem may occur since ecotourism may assist support protected areas operation (i.e. national parks) Protected places, such as national parks, frequently have to use (and pay) park guards, and employees are also needed if Safari hotels are planned [11].
- ✓ In many countries ecotourism is a big business in the national economy and is not merely a marginal activity to support environmental conservation [12]. Ecotourism, for example, accounts for a considerable share of the gross domestic product and economic activity in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nepal, Kenya, Madagascar and areas such as Antarctica [13]. The ecotourism of whale-shark swimming in Tan-awan, Oslob, Philippines, accounts for up to US\$ 5 million per year that is utilised to halt overfishing and harm to the natural ecology [14].

A study on ecotourism advantages in Antarctica 2002 was undertaken by combined US and Australian tourism research teams to examine the immediate impact of ecotourism on tourist knowledge and attitudes and comportaments in Antarctica cruise involvement [15]. You also examined the longer term effect on tourist knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of the Antarctica cruise [16]. The general environmental behaviour and the related intents index climbed 10 per cent immediately after participating to respondents who were wanting to considerably increase [17]. However, the retrospective responders did not demonstrate any significant increase in behaviour compared to the pre-visitation team three months after their visit [18]. Ecotourism may be beneficial to conservation in both terrestrial and marine environments provided that historical and cultural difficulties are negotiated effectively in the impacted areas [19]. The factors determining conservation results are identified [20] by Catherine Macdonald and her colleagues: whether: animals and habitat are adequately safeguarded; conflict between human beings and the fauna is avoided or mitigated appropriately; the local population is well informed and educated in terms of ecotourism [21]; effective cooperation with stakeholders is possible in this area [22]; They argue that environmental tourism is best served to protect predatory, both politically and publicly backed by the tourism sector and monitored and regulated locally, nationally and globally [23].

WHO BENEFITS?

The majority of ecotourism is held by foreign investors and companies who provide local people little advantage [24]. Instead of investing in the local economy or environmental preservation which leads to additional environmental deterioration, an overwhelming majority of earnings are transferred into the wallets of investors [25]. The lowest number of local people working in the economy cannot live in tourism regions due to poor salaries and a double-market structure [26]. In certain situations, local animosity leads to deterioration of the ecosystem. As an extremely popular instance, the Maasai nomads murdered animals in Kenya in national parks and aid now the National Park to protect wildlife by displacing them from the customary grounds and showing opposition to unjust compensation rules [27]. Furthermore, their lack of economic opportunity implies that the environment is degraded as a livelihood [28]. The existence of wealthy eco-tourists promotes the growth of harmful markets in wildlife souvenirs, including the selling of coral on tropical islands and animal goods in Asia, which contribute to illegal organisms and animals. Sea turtle reserves in Suriname utilise quite much of their cash to protect them from such damaging actions [29].

The aim of ecotourism is for tourists to interact in low-impact, non-consumption and locally focused surroundings to conserve species and ecosystems - in undeveloped countries in particular [30]. Although some of the ecotourism initiatives, like those found in the USA, can support such assertions, many programmes have failed to solve some of the basic problems faced by nations

[31]. As a result, the same advantages that ecotourism intends to give to these places and their people while leaving economies in a worse condition than before may be generated through ecotourism [32, 33]. The following case studies show that ecotourism has an increasingly complicated ecological and economic influence, both positively and negatively, on many parts of the world [34].

CONCLUSION

Ecotourism can be defined as a form of tourism centered on visiting natural, often remote or rural areas, with a strong emphasis on conserving biodiversity and respecting cultural heritage. It promotes the protection of ecological systems while also preserving cultural diversity. Importantly, ecotourism contributes to the sustainable use of natural resources by generating employment and income for local communities. As such, it plays a vital role in achieving long-term sustainable development by aligning environmental conservation with socio-economic benefits

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