

HOW CAN ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES PROVIDE GREATER ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

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Abstract: Present-day tourism approaches are aimed at providing the benefits to tourism, specifically to ecotourism, natural environments, and local residents. Such terms have been variously labeled like “eco”, “responsible”, and “sustainable”. They attempt to make tourism industry profitable for both local environments and indigenous communities. Local community involvement in ecotourism and participation in different practices will definitely ensure community-based ventures and if properly managed local revenue will increase. This paper mainly addresses the economic advantages of ecotourism practices to facilitate local business development. Qualitative research method was used containing face-to-face interview with 15 respondents. International members of our interview were highly aware of tourism and worked in this field. This was very helpful to figure out the importance of ecotourism, especially when negative impacts of human activities toward nature have become much concern.

Key words: Ecotourism, sustainability, environmental preservation, local community, local business.

Introduction: Ecotourism is an essential sub-division of sustainable tourism. The Brundtland Report (1987) brought to the forefront major problems of environmental sustainability on the international political agenda and did the groundwork for a holistic approach to sustainable development. With this new way of sustainable development tourism has been recognized as a major tool for economic growth, poverty reduction, and job creation (UNWTO, 2011). Tourism strives to minimize negative effects and instead tries to contribute positively to

existing environmental and social challenges. From an economic perspective, ecotourism can be real a boom for local areas. With a rising foreign exchange and investment, ecotourism offers various new jobs for local labor and a wide range of markets are filled with local products. Compared to non-economic profit financial benefits which come from ecotourism and sustainable tourism activities are fairly modest. Considering all aspects of ecotourism and sustainable tourism, it can be noticed that development in self-esteem, better management of sustainable tourism practices, increase in the need for learning different other languages, and stimulating the local community to feel pride and learn new skills in communicating with tourists are the base for support from both international and local government companies, universities and researchers and non-governmental organizations (Stronza, 2001). Ecotourism can strengthen the link between both natural and cultural heritage to achieve economic benefits and create job opportunities, which is very important in sustainable tourism (Wunder, 1999). One of the criteria of ecotourism is to involve more local people who can have direct income for people living in the very place and at the same time the one who provides efficient natural conservation by minimizing local pressures and external threats. The Ecotourism Society (TIES) stated that ecotourism means traveling to natural areas, alleviating negative impact, building environmental awareness, providing financial profit for the local people, and respecting local culture and human rights (Honey, 2008).

Ecotourism is the responsibility of traveling to undisturbed places and helps to protect the beauty of the environment, increase local communities' awareness of sustainable tourism benefits, and motivate them to learn more about a certain destination (TIES, 2020). Sustainable tourism and ecotourism practices put less pressure on nature especially, in terms of using both natural and manmade resources (Mikhail, 2021). Poon (1993) indicated positive features of ecotourism stating that ecotourism practices provide a particular amount of money that can help to conserve the natural beauty of the area. The attractions of the natural areas are tightly linked to the local culture and different types of tourism activities can provide a noticeable amount of income in economic activity (Stueve et al, 2002). Wearing and Neil

(1999) suggested that when there is little hope to save unused land unless they manage it to generate profit from its natural condition.

Income from tourism practices can be gained through revenue-sharing schemes, labor, and entrepreneurship. This can provide finance for the improvement of essential services. According to WWF studies in Belize, establishing Hol Chan Marine Reserve resulted in 63% approval of residents of San Pedro. In total 44% of residents received direct economic benefits from ecotourism practices (Walley, 2011). An active involvement of local people can improve the area development, reduce leakages, and lower costs. When the local people start to gain benefit from sustainable tourism practices, they will definitely be motivated to appreciate and protect the flora and fauna of the destination and deter them from conducting unfavorable actions such as hunting animals and cutting trees. The World Tourism Organization stated that many countries are paying more attention to actively changing their mind from conventional sun-sea-sand places to supplementary features of their motherland's tourist sites, such as Mexico's natural and historical resources, while Fiji is promoting its flora and fauna and its local traditions. Positive results in people's standard of living motivate them to take further actions in the tourism industry principally with the stimulation of economic growth in peripheral destinations. Parks can provide opportunities for people who have willing to enjoy nature and recreate. For most tourism industries natural ecosystems are an essential product and therefore they are always of great interest, and highly protected (Woodley, 1999) to maintain the area's attractiveness to nature lovers (Ceballos Lascurain, 1996). This will help to provide moral and financial support. In return, revenues from tourism may induce more governmental and donor agency funding at a destination (Lindberg et al., 1996). Local people can benefit from government encouragement, as the community can be pretty active in sustainable tourism practices, and active support protection at the site. Meanwhile, tourism can be an important tool for promoting more community empowerment and local pride (Whelan, 1991). Local community support is an integral part of balanced ecotourism (Nunkoo and Gursoy, 2012). Local residents may receive substantial economic

benefits when ecotourism practices are well-planned (Deery et al., 2012). Many researchers state that understanding between different stakeholders is important in the creation and maintenance of collaborative networks in ecotourism activities (Khanra et al., 2021). Because of these reasons, many people have noted that sustainable tourism plays an important role in creating national parks and community conserved areas (Loon et al., 2001; Lindberg et al., 2003).

Literature review: Ecotourism is an essential sub-division of sustainable tourism. The Brundtland Report (1987) brought to the forefront major problems of environmental sustainability on the international political agenda and did the groundwork for a holistic approach to sustainable development. With this new way of sustainable development tourism has been recognized as a major tool for economic growth, poverty reduction, and job creation (UNWTO, 2011). The etymology of ecotourism is still debatable among the authors. Orams and Hveegaard (1994) claimed that the term first appeared in the late 1960s, however, in Higgin's (1996) work this term goes back to the 1970s. Ceballos-Lascurain disagreed stating that the term was first used in 1980 in the work of Thomson (1995). Fennel (1998) mentioned the term "eco-tours" can be traced back to the Canadian government that organized them in the 1970s.

The first formal definition of ecotourism was by Ceballos-Lascurain (1987) who placed an emphasis on the tourist's nature-oriented experience and today's definitions are mostly directed to the principles of sustainable tourism. During the 1960s and 1970s environmental concern about the ecological impacts of tourism began to expand with the realization that the industry could either moderately alter or completely transform destination regions in other ways with tourism development activities having a great impact on the environment (Pearce, 1985, 1982, 1989, 1991). Tourism development is a classic case of the struggle that exists between preservation and conservation (Jones, 1972). In the 1990s ecotourism became very popular as a reaction to increasing interest in the wild nature and responsible for to travel natural destinations that contribute to environmental preservation and improvement local community life conditions (Danut-I et al., 2016). When nature-

based activities are managed properly the local communities will have the opportunity to generate money and tour operators are also can have their shares in this process. Locals demonstrate their cultures and traditions to visitors and they can pass them to the young generation. This helps to preserve this cultural heritage over the centuries. There are many benefits of ecotourism tour activities including motivation to learn the local language, tasting local food, buying local products, and participating in different agricultural practices (Sangpikul, 2011). The quality of nature is an important factor to manage ecotourism. The tourism industry tries to make a contribution protecting and conserving natural resources (Matysek and Kriwoken, 2003). Tour operators in the tourism industry are important contributors as environment, and cultural protectors, since they can directly influence consumer choices, supplier practices, and destination development patterns (Gopal, 2014)

In general, ecotourism tours can differ from one country to another relying on the tourism development level and capacity of natural resources, the geographical location of the country, and business sector responsibilities (Harrison and Schipani, 2007; Rigatti, 2016). The local business participation in sustainable tourism is highly profitable for both nature and communities. Buckley (2004) noted the flora and fauna of the particular place, water resources, high mountains, and dense forests are prior tourist attractions as a great number of people are willing to visit parks, national parks, and reservoirs when the tourist season starts and they can be destinations for both the local people and international guests. A lot of parks use icon attractions that are very popular worldwide. Today the tourism industry accounts for about \$ 550 billion per year (WTO, 2012) and conservation is worth \$300 billion. NEAT (2000) indicated ecotourism, adventure, and nature tourism contribution and made up one-third of the world economy.

Results: To analyze the qualitative data, a thematic method was used that involved searching through the entire dataset to identify recurring patterns and reports. This method helped to describe not only the data but also to analyze the transcript of the interviews. After collecting data from the transcript, it was possible to identify topics (patterns in the data) that were interesting and important. The

interviewees were conducted with international tourists from different countries and with different backgrounds. The author used a convenience sample to approach tourists and to ask them whether they had previous traveling experience and knowledge of eco and sustainable tourism from their previous travels to various countries. In the interview participated eight male and seven female interviewees totaling 15 respondents who were aged between 25 and 37 years. The reason of choosing these respondents was their willingness to freely participate and contribute to this research on eco and sustainable tourism. While searching for the appropriate candidates for the interviews, several were chosen because they had worked in the tourism and hospitality sector for many years. These four themes' discussion is based on the respondents' answers to the given 10 questions and they supported the topic with valuable information:

1. Enjoying nature to preserving the uniqueness of the environment

Ecotourism is based on the diversity and beauty of nature. Healthy ecotourism activities can motivate people to see the value of the natural resources they have. When the locals make profits economically from ecotourism operations they will definitely be encouraged to protect the biodiversity of the place. Experiencing ecotourism practices is quite different compared to other types of tourism. This will offer a person both enjoy traveling and at the same time contribute to preserving the area.

2. Increasing economical awareness of indigenous communities from ecotourism practices

The positive attitudes of the local people toward ecotourism practices are an important determinant of being actively involved in sustainable tourism practices

3. Guest satisfaction is a way of making profits

Today the tourism industry is no longer just a tool for providing a comfortable place, enjoyable scenery, and to eat delicious foods. People working in this sector are now thinking about environmental and natural preservation that are important for visitors as well. Customer satisfaction can definitely provide several benefits including repeat purchases, customer loyalty, and word-of-mouth recommendations.

When performance meets the expectation the customer will be satisfied, and if not this will directly impact on future ecotourism activities. Sometimes the results are not optimal because of poor management.

4. Local products as an image of the place and generating the profit

Local communities are an important part of their own development. Being different can mean creating and improving a brand image. Indigenous communities have by their nature special opportunities to develop ecotourism with their local products, food, and traditions. They may attract visitors with their extraordinary cultural “shows” and performances, with unusual tasting foods.

Discussions: The results from the collected data show that all the respondents of the research demonstrated a high level of interest and concern for eco and sustainable tourism . As Blamey (2001) noted, today environmental changes are getting worse because of adverse human activities, ecotourism is more appropriate solution for raising awareness about nature and obtaining economic benefits. Since ecotourism is focused on the natural environment, it helps to minimize the negative impact on nature (Tourism Canada, 1995). The organization of ecotourism practice attracts more attention to the place in order to learn more about the destination, which is very important, as well as to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of local residents.

When considering the interviewees’ replies, responses were similar to each other, and the fact, mentioned by Tourism Canada (1995) about the importance of active physical activities that were closely related to the study of natural conditions was popular and entertaining all around the world. Our study confirmed the point of view that people around the world demonstrate their worries about both social unfairness and environmental issues. Most of the respondents were ready to support different programs devoted to wildlife conservation and this encourages community efforts.

This research has shown that ecotourism can be a useful tool for protecting natural environments and increasing knowledge about different natural resources. One of the results from the research indicates that most of the respondents would

like to travel with their families. This information gives us the point that families that might consist of both youngsters and elders and take ecotourism trips at the same time provide the opportunity to teach the younger members of their family to raise awareness about the importance of ecotourism, various unique cultures, and environmental knowledge. WTO emphasizes that ecotourism is will become the main tool for protecting the environment and raising environmental awareness for both local residents and visitors. Moreover, it is significant to mention that this organization has developed specific guidelines for the development of sustainable tourism.

Conclusion: In conclusion, we can consider that the tourism industry helps to touch locals and their nature. This is because ecotourism respects and strengthens the culture and traditions of indigenous people through ethical and responsible development. Hence, many countries are attempting to develop ecotourism to achieve growth through responsible use of natural and cultural resources (Dufty, 2002). The interaction of tourism activities, tourists, and local residents is often referred to as the scale of socio-cultural impacts. Accordingly, as the tourist flow increases in the area the local residents will definitely earn more. This will lead to creating a wide range of new service types. All of these can help both travelers and for the enjoyment of hosts.

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