

# **BA (P) GEOGRAPHY DISCIPLINE**

## **SEMESTER VI**

### **GEOGRAPHY OF TOURISM**

#### **Unit 3: ECOTOURISM**

##### **Introduction**

The term ecotourism was first heard in 1980 and broadly defined as “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves, the well being of the local people”<sup>37</sup>. In 1999 Martha Honey has proposed an excellent version; ‘Eco Tourism’ is travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be of low impact and of (usually) small scale. It helps to educate the traveller, provides funds for conservation and directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities besides fostering respect for different cultures and for human rights. Nature tourism is based on visitation of natural areas. It is closely related to ecotourism but does not necessarily involve conservation or sustainability.

Sustainable nature tourism is close to ecotourism but does not meet all the criteria of ecotourism. These types of projects are common in natural areas and often contribute to conserving them. Cultural, ethno and cultural heritage tourism concentrates on local traditions and people as the main attraction.

There are many possible ways that ecotourism contributes to conservation.

Firstly ecotourism can generate funds for protected area.

Secondly, it can create employment for surrounding communities, thus providing economic incentives to support protected areas.

Thirdly, it can advance environmental education for visitors.

Fourthly, it can provide justification for declaring areas as protected or increasing support for these areas.

Fifthly, ecotourism programs aims to limit the negative impacts of nature tourists.

The UN declared 2002 the International Year of Ecotourism, and the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Tourism Organisation held the World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec City, Canada.

More than 1,000 participants from 132 countries discussed ecotourism, and came up with the Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism: "Ecotourism embraces the principles of sustainable tourism, concerning the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism. It also embraces the following specific principles, which distinguish it from the wider concept of sustainable tourism: contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage; includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, and contributes to their well-being; interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitors; lends itself better to independent travellers, as well as to tours for small-size groups."

### **Objectives of Ecotourism**

The success of ecotourism activities are based on six basic objectives.

1. Ecotourism must limit environmental impact and contribute to the conservation and management of biosphere reserve.
2. Ecotourism must direct sufficient economic benefit to local people in ways that complement rather than overwhelm traditional practices.
3. Successful ecotourism should improve the well-being and cohesion of the community.
4. Ecotourism should increase the participation of local people in the decision making process
5. Ecotourism should increase the local support for biosphere reserves.
6. Ecotourism operators must be profitable.

### **Characteristics of Ecotourism**

According to Chesworth (1995), Ecotourism has six characteristics. These are:

- a) ecotourism involves travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas and/or archeological sites,
- b) it focuses on learning and the quality of experience,
- c) it economically benefits the local communities,
- d) ecotourists seek to view rare species, spectacular landscapes and/or the unusual and exotic,
- e) ecotourists do not deplete resources but even sustain the environment or help undo damage to the environment, and
- f) ecotourists appreciate and respect local culture, traditions, etc.

Therefore, Ecotourism is special form of tourism that meets three criteria:

- (1) it actively facilitates environmental conservation
- (2) it includes meaningful community participation
- (3) it is profitable and can sustain itself. It has become the name of the game to survive, stand and develop.

### **History of Ecotourism**

The term ecotourism was first coined by Hector Ceballos-Lascurian in 1983 while he was in the process of developing PRONATURA, an NGO in Mexico<sup>38</sup>. Recently, however, the term has been traced further back to the work of Hartzler who explain the intricate relationship between tourists and the environments and cultures in which they interact. Hector Ceballos Lascinan initially used the term 'ecotourism' to describe nature based travel to relatively undistributed areas with an emphasis on education. He later defined ecotourism as "Travelling to relatively undistributed or uncontaminated natural area with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural manifestations both past and present found in these areas".

Sir Cripsin defined ecotourism as "Travel to see the diversity of life and culture without causing damage to either". The President of the World Travel and Tourism Council Geoffrey Lipman defined ecotourism as a "market segment" and as an environmentally conscientious practice<sup>41</sup>. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) coined one of the most well recognised definitions in 1991 for ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas to conserve the environment and improve the well being of local people". This means that those who implement and practice ecotourism activities should follow the following principles:

- Minimize impact
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Raise sensitivity to host's countries and create awareness about political, environmental and social climate.
- Support international human rights and labour agreements.

The Australian Commission on National Ecotourism strategy calls it "nature based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable". Since the publication of the excellent book "Ecotourism and

Sustainable Development” Martha Honey’s definition is quickly becoming the standard. Most serious studies of ecotourism including several university programmes now use this as the working definition.

Her seven defining points are,

1. Involves travel to natural destinations
2. Minimizes impact
3. Builds environmental awareness
4. Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
5. Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
6. Respects local culture
7. Supports human rights and democratic movements

## **THE BENEFITS OF ECOTOURISM**

To quote CREST founder Dr. Martha Honey during our Keynote session at TBEX Cancun in 2014, we earnestly believe that ecotourism is “simply a better way to travel.” Here’s a look at how this transformational approach to travel benefits conservation, increases cross-cultural understanding, and ultimately turns travelers into environmental advocates:

### **BENEFITS TO WILDLIFE**

To see how ecotourism benefits nature and wildlife, let’s look at endangered species such as African Elephants. Ivory from Elephant tusks is worth \$1500 a pound on the black market, which has led to a dramatic increase in poaching.

But Elephants are worth 76 times more alive than dead. When you consider the revenue from wildlife photography tours, luxury safari camps, and other ecotourism offerings, a single Elephant is worth \$1.3 million over the course of its lifetime!

Other heavily poached species, such as **Lions** and **Rhinos**, have shown to be similarly valuable alive. Ecotourism offers a long-term alternative to exploitation, generating sustainable revenue and ensuring better overall health of the ecosystem.

## **BENEFITS TO THE ENVIRONMENT**

Nature reserves and national parks help prevent deforestation and pollution, while also protecting the habitat of endemic species.

The revenue that ecotourism provides can help replace profits from exploitative practices such as mining or slash 'n' burn agriculture. It can also help ensure the long-term financial viability of the area.

Naturalist guides also help travelers understand the value of a pristine ecosystem, and teach them about the importance of conservation. This ultimately help to create a more mindful and conscious legion of travelers.

## **BENEFITS TO LOCAL PEOPLE**

When managed properly, ecotourism can offer locals alternative revenue streams. In wildlife-rich countries such as **Rwanda**, former poachers are often employed as guides or trackers, capitalizing on their knowledge of the animals and their habitat.

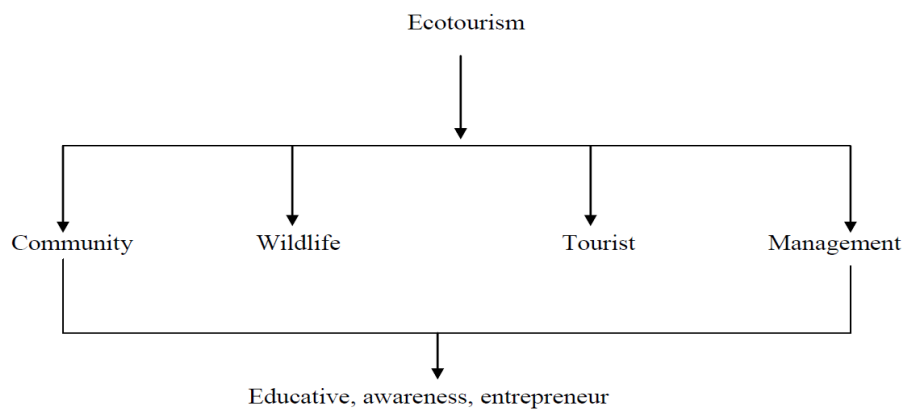
In **Costa Rica**, unemployment has fallen to less than 10% since the country started building its ecotourism infrastructure in the 1970s. The country now enjoys the highest standard of living in Central America.

Involving local communities in tourism management empowers them by ensuring that more revenue is reinvested locally. Ecotourism also offers indigenous peoples an opportunity to remain on ancestral land, conserve it, and preserve traditional culture.

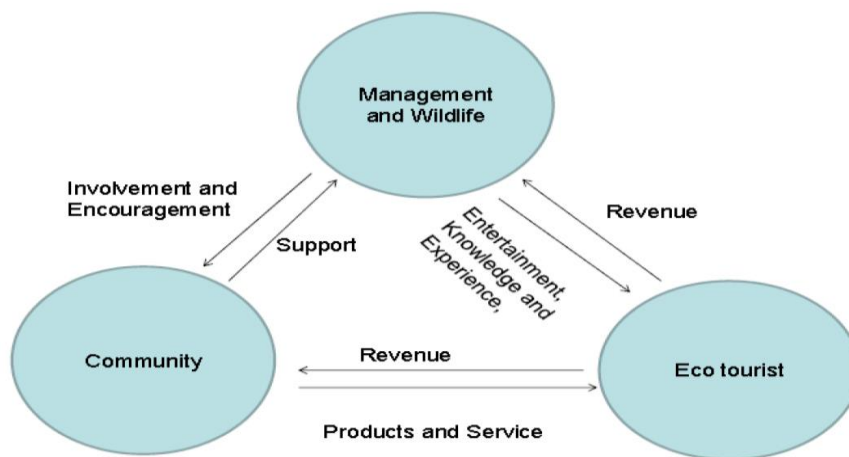
## **BENEFITS TO TRAVELERS**

In the words of United Nations Secretary General Talib Rifai, the Year of Sustainable Tourism provided “a unique opportunity to advance the contribution of the tourism sector to the three pillars of sustainability– economic, social and environmental– while raising awareness of the true dimensions of a sector which is often undervalued.”

Sure, being a responsible traveler takes a greater level of commitment to being conscious and mindful of the impact we have on the destinations we visit. But ecotourism also offers us incredible, transformative experiences, allowing us to develop closer personal relationships to the nature, wildlife, and local people we encounter during our adventures.



**Fig. 1:** Ecotourism flow chart



**Fig. 2:** Flow chart describing the purpose of Ecotourism

### Visitation Rates to Nature-based Destinations

Country	1990	1999 Increase	Total % Increase	Average Annual
South Africa	1,029,000	6,026,000	486%	19.3%
Costa Rica	435,000	1,027,000	136%	9.0%
Indonesia	2,178,000	4,700,000	116%	8.0%
Belize*	88,000	157,000	78%	6.0%
Ecuador	362,000	509,000	41%	3.5%
Botswana*	543,000	740,000	36%	3.1%

\* Visitation rates available only from 1990 to 1998.

World Tourism Organization, *Tourism Highlights 2000, 2000*

### ECO-TOURISM DESTINATION IN THE WORLD

1. Costa Rica
2. Norway
3. Kenya
4. Galapagos Islands
5. Antarctica
6. Iceland