



Eco-Tourism - Planning and Developmental Strategies:

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is: "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people."

Ecotourism is entirely a new approach in tourism. Ecotourism is a preserving travel to natural areas to appreciate the cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care not to disturb the integrity of the ecosystem, while creating economic opportunities that make conservation and protection of natural resources advantageous to the local people. This paper focussing on concept of Eco-tourism and Planning and Development strategies for ecotourism

KEYWORDS : Eco-Tourism, Principles of Eco-Tourism, Benefits of Eco-Tourism, Strategies for Planning , Management Tools and Techniques in Ecotourism, Components of Eco Tourism & Development, Eco-Tourism & Environment uidelines for Eco Tourists

Introduction :

Hector Ceballos-Lascurain popularized (and he would say coined) the term 'ecotourism' in July 1983, when he was performing the dual role of Director General of Standards and Technology of SEDUE (the Mexican Ministry of Urban Development and Ecology) and founding president of PRONATURA (an influential Mexican conservationist NGO). PRONATURA was lobbying for the conservation of the wetlands in northern Yucatán as breeding and feeding habitats of the American Flamingo.

Ecotourism, responsible tourism, and sustainable development have become prevalent concepts since the mid-1980s, and ecotourism has experienced arguably the fastest growth of all sub-sectors in the tourism industry. The popularity represents a change in tourist perceptions, increased environmental awareness, and a desire to explore natural environment.

What is an Eco Tourism?

One of the most promising types of tourism is Eco tourism, undoubtedly tourism has great positive impacts on economy, society, culture and environment, at the same time, the environmental qualities of tourism have become a subject of worldwide concern. Thus concepts such as ecotourism, sustainable development and green tourism etc. have been proposed.

The definition of Ecotourism in 1992, the Ecotourism society defined ecotourism as " purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to the local people"

The advantages to develop ecotourism in contrast to mass tourism, ecotourism permits tourists to seek educational self-fulfillment in the form of travel, and tries to transform that activity in to something that benefits the greater good specifically, to fund environmental preservation, rural development and even cultural survival.

Principles of Ecotourism

Ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following ecotourism 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 countries' political, environmental, and social climate.

Benefits to Eco Tourism

With so many delicate landscapes under threat, it makes sense for those communities to turn to ecotourism, which allows them to bring in tourists under controlled conditions and thus continue to make money but still protect the area. One of the biggest benefits of ecotourism is that, with no negative impact being made upon the environment, the communities are reaping the financial rewards without having to shoulder any burden of stress upon the land. Tourism has been good for many economies, but often at a high price to the environment and those people who are dependent upon it.

Another of the benefits of ecotourism that is harder to measure is the opportunity it provides to educate tourists in a unique, hands-on capacity. People who live in cities and suburbs may be sympathetic to the needs of various rural communities worldwide, but it's a very different thing to look at pictures or film versus actually going to a place and experiencing its effects in person. Not only will they spend the money to get that experience, they will encourage others to do the same and many will even be prompted to get more politically involved. If fragile ecosystems are given more support at the governmental level, they are far more likely to survive and thrive for generations to come.

A Chance to Reduce Poverty

It is easy to criticize ecotourism as little more than an opportunity to encourage a kind of voyeurism among the rich. There are also valid concerns that it can still do a level of harm that should be avoided. However, more studies indicate that the benefits are far outweighing potential, or real, drawbacks. Where ecotourism has a strong hold, development is kept at bay, and development is what can kill an ecosystem and drive local or indigenous people into poverty. In fact, studies are showing that ecotourism is reducing poverty and doing more to protect local environments and even improve their conditions. Because people who travel to such far-reaching places want to see something as pristine as possible, the drive is on to reclaim any land that had started to degrade. The more there is to see, the more Eco tourists will come. But with a tight hand kept on the management of the tourists, the impact on the system is still negligible.

Looking Forward

Ultimately, good conservation requires a concerted and ongoing effort by everyone from locals to government to international policymakers. It takes small steps like establishing ecotourism as an industry to help everyone see what's necessary and what is possible.

Many people become easily discouraged by the excess of development and environmental degradation such as deforestation. Efforts like ecotourism show locals and governments alike that land can be reclaimed and is worth conserving for generations to come.

Benefits to local communities

Ecotourism enterprises are planned and managed at a local level. Community members stay involved at all stages of the process, empowering them while encouraging travelers to their areas. The projects create jobs locally, reducing the need for young people to leave home to look for work in the cities. Almost everyone in the village can become involved by working as guides, selling crafts, providing food and accommodation, or taking part in cultural performances. Ecotourism also brings a better standard of living through improved facilities, such as clinics, drinkable water sources, new roads and electricity.

Environmental Conservation

Ecotourism helps create a better appreciation of the world's natural resources, such as landscapes, wildlife and coral reefs. This stimulates a desire to protect the natural environment through the creation of national parks, wildlife preserves and marine parks. Funding for conservation work is generated by tourists through sources such as park entrance fees, camping fees, local taxes and safari tours. Ecotourism can also assist in the battle to protect the ecosystems of developing countries by providing alternative sources of employment, which limits the damage caused by over-fishing and land clearance for farming and logging.

Cultural Preservation

Eco tourists have much greater interaction with native peoples than traditional tourists who barely venture out of their westernized hotels. Home stays and eco-lodges allow visitors to experience local lifestyles and customs first-hand, and this interest helps to preserve the region's heritage. Dying crafts are revitalized and traditional festivals, ceremonies and art forms -- including dance and music -- are sustained.

Human Rights

Ecotourism not only educates visitors about environmental responsibility, it can also help raise awareness about political and social issues in developing countries. Historically, mass tourism has helped to support corrupt and undemocratic regimes, but with ecotourism, money goes directly into local communities, rather than government coffers. Additionally, as visitors witness the poverty and repression that many third-world countries suffer, it creates a growing global pressure for Western governments to act on human rights issues.

Strategies for Planning in Eco tourism

Planning is a general term signifying a proposed method of action or procedure to achieve a pre-determined goal or an objective. There are certain basic factors which are to be taken in to consideration in the planning process.

1. There must be an objective and that objective must be clearly understood and accepted by all those who are to be involved.
2. There must be a programme leading to the objective.
3. There must be a measurement of progress towards the objective set.

Key factors of successive planning are :

- Objectives
- Programmes
- Measurement of the Objective

Management Tools and Techniques in Ecotourism

Ecotourism has been described as "a complex phenomenon, involving integration of many actors including tourist, residents people, suppliers and managers and multiple functions". Moreover these actors or stake holders, are engaged in a symbiotic relationship revolving around the idea of tourism as a means of economic development and as a means of promoting conservation of natural resources.

The various elements Ecotourism Conceptual Framework (Fennel and Eagles,1990)

- Tour Operator

- Resource Management
- Community Development
- Marketing
- Visitor Management
- Visitor Attitudes
- Resource Tour

The complete frame work is composed of two components namely service industry and visitor

Ecotourism Organization and their Missions : The basic components of the Eco tourism organization and their missions involve

Resource System Planning

- Natural Resource Inventories
- Cultural Resource Inventories
- Environmental Impact Assessment
- Resource Sustainability Studies

Human System Planning

- Needs Assessment
- Social Impact Analysis
- Attitudinal Surveys
- Economic Impact Assessment
- Market Segmentation Studies

Ecotourism Management Decisions Stakeholder Involvement

Ecotourism Development

- Product / Experience
- Distribution
- Price
- Communication

Evaluation

- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Equity

What does Ecosystem stand for?

Ecological system or ecosystem is an open space built by physical and biological components of an environment. Ecosystem is result of an active interaction between living and non-living components. Ecosystem is where community of plants, animals and their environment function as a whole, and relationship between organism and environment thrives blissfully.

Ecosystem and its types

Ecosystems differ in their size and types. Earth itself is an immense ecosystem. Likewise there can be an ecosystem in a sea, forest, river and even in a small pond, as ecosystem is where organism and environment meets together. Categorized by their nature, there are mainly four types of ecosystem.

Aquatic Ecosystem: located in water area, aquatic ecosystem can be of two types: marine ecosystem and freshwater ecosystem. Marine ecosystem contains 97% of all water of the earth, while freshwater ecosystem has more than 40% of all species of fishes. Some very important functions which Aquatic ecosystem disposes are purifying water, sheltering wild animals and recharging ground water.

Arctic Tundra: Arctic Tundra has the coldest ecosystem on the earth. The treeless plain, Arctic Tundra are desert like plains and dotted with ponds. Located far in the north of Alaska, Greenland, Russia, Canada and Europe, Arctic Tundra is inhabited by mammals like, Arctic foxes, Arctic hares, Polar bears, Musk oxen and porcupine; birds like Snowy owls, Falcons, Snow geese, Snow buntings, Tundra swans and Gulls and fishes like cod and salmon.

Boreal Forest: Located between between the Arctic Tundra in the north and steppes and hardwood forests in the south, Boreal forests are vegetation zone surrounding northern hemisphere. Conifers like pine, larch, spruce and fir dominate the whole region inhabited by faunal species like bears, foxes, raccoons, owls, eagles, wolves and lynxes.

Urban ecosystem: urban ecosystem consists of people along with living and non-living things, and the space constructed by them. In an urban system, ecological factors like plants, soil, animals, etc are affected by human. Likewise human decisions are affected by various ecological factors, for example where parks, schools and buildings have to be made.

Ecological imbalance: imperiling the whole Ecosystem

With the increased industrialisation and scientific approach to our life, the natural resources and rich natural heritage which were being preserved for centuries have begun dwindling greatly. Any kind of imbalance in nature results into severe danger to our ecosystem.

Its treatment with nature has posed today many serious challenges and problems like climate change, vector-borne disease, decay in wildlife and its resources and food and water shortage. Exploitation of natural resources prevalent all over the world has erupted into severe ecological degradation, which is definitely the biggest threat to proper functioning of our ecosystem.

Need to restore and conserve the ecosystem

Restoring the ecosystem by establishing the finer balance between organism and environment is the best way that being a responsible human we can do. Until and unless, the steps to preserve the decaying charm of our ecosystem are not initiated, our ecosystem is not going to support us having a better and healthy environment.

There is stark need today to assist nature by not disturbing its integrity, and help it gaining its lost delicacy. By protecting our native natural resources like wildlife, rivers, forests, etc, one can contribute greatly in preservation of our ecosystem. The radical changes have to be born in our thoughts to save and accumulate the natural resources – the very root of our life.

Guidelines for Eco Tourists

- The tourists should be aware of the impact of their activities on the environment. An environmental protection strategy should address the issues of awareness, sensitization on environmental issues, and care about the places they visit. Tour guides are an obvious and direct medium to communicate awareness. With the confidence of ecotourists and intimate knowledge of the environment, they can actively discuss conservation issues. They should be given adequate information so that they can help in preserving local environment and resources.
- Travel in groups of not more than four. Larger groups make a larger mess. Don't make a noise, remember you left the city to experience something different.
- View birds and animals from a distance. Animals find quick movements and loud noises stressful. If you scare them by making a noise they will tend to avoid the area, spoiling it for animal lovers.
- Camp wherever possible at campsites used by others instead of trying to clear the ground for a new campsite. Make no open campfires and discourage others from doing so.
- Where water is heated by scarce firewood use as little of it as possible. Avoid carrying canned food and leaving tins behind.
- Leave camp sites clean and remember to take back all non-biodegradable litter to the road head/town for proper disposal.
- Bury only biodegradable food waste. Proper disposal of tampons and napkins requires that they be placed in plastic bags and taken out. Do not bury them because they don't decompose readily and animals may dig them up.
- Do not use detergents and soaps at streams and springs.
- Do not take away cuttings, seeds and roots of plants.

Conclusion:

Fastest growing sector in tourism industry, ecotourism is said to be moving ahead with the growth rate of 15-20% every year. New in its concept, Eco travel or Ecotourism is about exploring places superfluous in their cultural, natural and historical richness. Witnessing and appreciating the beauty and significance of nature and culture of a place along with getting some time to spend it according to one's wish in stark peacefulness of nature are the very best characteristic of eco travel.

ral beauty put travellers at complete ease with surroundings and in accordance with mental and physical calmness. Eco travel is not all about beholding and surveying the nature based places, but it also let you indulge into various nature based eco activities like wild animals spotting, birding, angling, trekking, rock-climbing, mountain-biking, river rafting, para-gliding, hills and lakes viewing, boating, nature walk and etc. Experiencing these recreational and informative activities are the best treat that an eco tour, unlike other trips, can offer to tourists, which acts as an emerging dimension in tourism industry.

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