IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ECOTOURISM PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Before any research paper addressing sustainable development can help, their needs to be an examination of the various definitions that have been used. For this reason then, this article will discuss a few of the different definitions of Environmental Ecotourism Planning that are available before delineating the definition that most suits the discussion for this paper.

In the present scenario, due to Environmental activities, environmental degradation is in an alarming rate and it results in various environmental issues. Science and advanced technology can however only help the process of global sustainable environment in a limited way but they cannot deliver it. The success of the technology lies in its implementation part.The communication perspective opens the door to other kinds of tools that environmental Ecotourism Planning can use in order to improve Sustainable Development.

It stands to reason that there are many differences between the developing world and the developed world when it comes to issues of sustainability and sustainable community development. The physical environment, economy, and social make up of these two regions of the world are very different and therefore are subject to different problems, requiring individual methods of approach and research Ecotourism creates an impact on natural ecosystems but more importantly, it offers a way to promote conservation in ecologically fragile regions; benefit the economies of local communities; provide the public with a nature-based education experience.

Sustainable development is an important aspect of ecotourism development that involves harvesting our natural resources without depleting or permanently harming them.

Keywords: Environmental Eco-Tourism, Planning, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, many of eco- tourism planning are in a way that will damage the environmental sustainability. Sustainable eco-tourism planning is to help the preserves to survive without altering eco-tourists basic mission and unique status in the global environmental scheme.

What is ecotourism?

There are lots of names for these new forms of tourism: responsible tourism, alternative tourism, sustainable tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, educational tourism and more. Ecotourism probably involves a little of all of them. Ecotourism, which encompasses a range of activities including scientific tours, student internships, trips for nature lovers, bird-watching trips, and filming expeditions, is a relatively new phenomenon. Everyone has a different definition but most people agree that ecotourism must: (a) conserve the wildlife and culture of the area. (b) benefit the local people and involve the local community (c) be sustainable, that is make a profit without destroying natural resources (d) provide an experience that tourists want to pay for.

So for example, in a true ecotourism project, a nature reserve allows a small number of tourists to visit its rare animals and uses the money that is generated to continue with important conservation work. The local people have jobs in the nature reserve as guides and wardens, but also have a voice in how the project develops. Tourists stay in local houses with local people, not in specially built hotels. So they experience the local culture and do not take precious energy and water away from the local population. They travel on foot, by boat, bicycle or elephant so that there is no pollution. And they have a special experience that they will remember all of their lives. Here is another definition of ecotourism: "A form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures.

The ecotourist visits relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity.

The ecotourist practices a non-consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labour or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic well-being of the local residents.

The visit should strengthen the ecotourist's appreciation and dedication to conservation issues in general, and to the specific needs of the locale.

Ecotourism also implies a managed approach by the host country or region which commits itself to establishing and maintaining the sites with the participation of local residents, marketing them appropriately, enforcing regulations, and using the proceeds of the enterprise to fund the area's land management as well as community development." Ziffer, K., 1989: 6.

This type of tourism can only involve small numbers of people so it can be expensive. But we can apply the principles of ecotourism wherever we go for holiday. Just remember these basic rules: (a) Be prepared. Learn about the place that you're going to visit. Find out about its culture and history. Learn a little of the native language, at least basics like 'Please', 'Thank you', and 'Good Morning'. Think of your holiday as an opportunity to learn something. (b) Have respect for local culture. Wear clothes that will not offend people. Always ask permission before you take a photograph. Remember that you are a visitor. (c) Don't waste resources. If the area doesn't have much water, don't take two showers every day. (d) Remember the phrase "Leave nothing behind you except footprints and take nothing away except photographs." Take as much care of the places that you visit as you take of your own home. · Don't buy souvenirs made from endangered animals or plants. (e) Walk or use other non-polluting forms of transport whenever you can. (f) Be flexible and keep a sense of hum our when things go wrong. (g) Stay in local hotels and eat in local restaurants. Buy local products whenever possible and pay a fair price for what we buy.

Choose our holiday carefully. Don't be afraid to ask the holiday company about what they do that is 'eco'. Remember that 'eco' is very fashionable today and a lot of holidays that are advertised as ecotourism are not much better than traditional tourism.

The Principles for Sustainable Tourism (Tourism Concern/WWF)

(a) Using resources sustain ably: The conservation and sustainable use of resources - natural, social and cultural - is crucial and makes long-term business sense; (b) Reducing over-consumption and waste: Reduction of over-consumption and waste avoids the costs of restoring long-term environmental damage and contributes to the quality of tourism; (c) Maintaining Diversity: Maintaining and promoting natural, social and cultural diversity is essential for long-term sustainable tourism, and creates a resilient base for the industry; (d) Integrating Tourism into Planning: Tourism development which is integrated into a national and local strategic planning framework and which undertakes environmental impacts assessments, increases the long-term viability of tourism; (e) Supporting Local Economies: Tourism that supports a wide range of local economic activities and which takes environmental costs and values into account, both protects those economies and avoids environmental damage; (f) Involving local communities: The full involvement of local communities in the tourism sector not only benefits them and the environment in general but also improves the quality of the tourism experience; (g) Consulting Stakeholders and the Public: Consultation between the tourism industry and local communities, organizations and institutions is essential if they are to work alongside each other and resolve potential conflicts of interest; (h) Training Staff: Staff training which integrates sustainable tourism into work practices, along with recruitment of local personnel at all levels, improves the quality of the tourism product; (i) Marketing Tourism Responsibly: Marketing that provides tourists with full and responsible information increases respect for the natural, social and cultural environments of destination areas and enhances customer satisfaction; (j) Undertaking Research: On-going research and monitoring by the industry using effective data collection and analysis is essential to help solve problems and to bring benefits to destinations, the industry and consumers.

Defining The Experience

There are almost as many terms to describe types of travel as there are travel companies. A couple of buzzwords that you often hear these days are "Eco-Tourism" and "Adventure Travel" . To further confuse the issue there is also "Sustainable Tourism", "Responsible Tourism", "Nature Based Travel", "Green Travel", "Multi-Sport Adventures" and "Cultural Tourism". The following are Untamed Path's definitions based on common usage.

Eco-tourism

Perhaps the most over-used and miss-used word in the travel industry. But what does it mean? The Ecotourism Society defines it as "responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of the local people". A walk through the rainforest is not eco-tourism unless that particular walk somehow benefits that environment and the people who live there. A rafting trip is only eco-tourism if it raises awareness and funds to help protect the watershed. A loose interpretation of this definition allows many companies to promote themselves as something that they are not. If true eco-tourism is important to you, ask plenty of questions to determine if your trip will help "conserve and improve" the places you visit.

Adventure Travel

Another term which is heavily used by marketing departments. While travel to another country is often adventurous it is not necessarily "Adventure Travel". Most dictionaries define adventure similarly: "an unusual experience including some level of risk and uncertainty". "Adventure Travel" includes this idea of risk and oftentimes some unconventional means of transport. A dugout canoe journey deep into the Amazon basin with it's attendant difficulties meets this definition. While a city tour of Paris might have some level of uncertainty it is not by definition "Adventure Travel". If you love true adventure you probably already know this and can see through the hype to find the real thing for yourself. There is sometimes a distinction made between "Soft" and "Hard" adventures. Soft adventures have a lower level of risk, greater comfort in accommodations and are less physically rigorous. Hard adventures often have very basic facilities, higher risk factor and greater physical challenge (ie: mountain climbing, backpacking or river expeditions).

Sustainable Tourism

Any form of tourism that does not reduce the availability of resources and does not inhibit future travelers from enjoying the same experience. If the presence of large numbers of tourists disturbs an animal's mating patterns so that there are fewer of that species in the future then that visit was not sustainable. Kayaking school on a free flowing river is an example of sustainable tourism. Big game hunting in Alaska is not.

Responsible Tourism

Responsible Tourism, which operates in such a way as to minimize negative impacts on the environment. A wilderness camping trip using "Leave No Trace" ethics would be considered responsible tourism while dune buggy tours would not.

Nature-Based Tourism

A more generic term for any activity or travel experience with a focus on nature. Large jungle lodges fall into this category as do cruise ships to view penguins in Antarctica. These types of trips may or may not be environmentally sustainable or responsible. -

Green Tourism

Often used inter-changeably with eco-tourism and sustainable tourism but more accurately described as "any activity or facility operating in an environmentally friendly fashion". A lodge with composting toilets, gray water system, and solar powered lighting is probably "green". There are varying degrees of "greenness"; an awareness of where resources are coming from and where wastes are going is at the heart of the idea.

Multi-Sport Adventures

These trips have a focus on physical outdoor activities. Rafting, mountain biking, climbing, surfing, diving, etc. all offered in the same package. Not necessarily sustainable or eco but might be since many companies want to protect the areas where these activities take place.

Cultural Tourism

Interacting with and observing unique cultures is the focus of this style of trip. The concept of learning from other cultures to broaden ones perspective is usually a core value. An artisan showing you how to weave a tapestry and learning from them about their traditional dress would be a form of cultural tourism. Buying crafts in the market with no more interaction than the exchange of money does not provide the insight into another culture that is the central theme of cultural tourism.

Clearly all of these definitions are debatable. What one person or company calls "eco" another calls "sustainable" and so on? The main distinction between these terms is the motives and ethics behind them. Is the environment being cared for? Is there genuine effort to help the local economies? Are resources being left intact for future generations? Is

the local culture being honored and valued and not just photographed? These questions will cut through the semantics and allow you to see what is really being offered.

At Untamed Path we've blended many of these ideas together to create our own unique form of travel. We place a high priority on preserving the places we visit, both environmentally and culturally. We enjoy active outdoor pursuits so many of our trips incorporate these sports but never at the expense of the natural world or the people who already live there. However, we don't make claims to be something that we can't live up to and are constantly reassessing our trips for ways to improve their ecological and cultural soundness. All of our trips contain elements of adventure travel, eco-tourism, multi-sport and cultural travel. We operate in a focused responsible and sustainable fashion and always, have fun.

Ecotourism is a multifaceted science. It incorporates the vast tourism industry with the environment and is more interested in educating the tourist than in earning the maximum profit. While the word "ecotourism" seems to be rather self-explanatory, it is actually a confusing term with numerous definitions. In attempting to define ecotourism, one must first recognize the difference between tourism and ecotourism.

There exists a case of stewardship for the land and indigenous people in ecotourism; it is not about exploiting the local people or their culture, or even changing it in order to accommodate the tourist or visitor. Instead, ecotourism is about preserving the natural environment and giving the locals fair employment. Ecotourism empowers the local population to take an active role in environmental programs. In turn, the ecotourist must "take only pictures and leave only footprints" on the environment that he or she explores. The visitor has a social responsibility to the people in ecotourism. The tourism industry has destroyed numerous irreplaceable environmental areas, such as coral reefs and forests, because of the tourist's demand for modern luxuries when traveling. The ecotourist recognizes the adverse effects of such tourism and minimizes or eliminates any such consequences on the natural areas he or she uses.

Tourism means revenue; it is big business and brings money that can be multiplied many times over into communities. In so many cases, the business loses sight of important principles because of the desire to increase revenue. Ecotourism is also concerned with making money, but only in an environmentally friendly manner. Proceeds of the ecotourism enterprise go back into the community in the area's land management and conservation, as well as

programs such as alternative-energy research. In ecotourism, it is more important to educate the tourist than to make a profit.

Ecotourism provides a unique opportunity to educate the tourist in a natural environment. Hands-on activities, informative displays, and educational seminars offer the visitor a better understanding of the local environment. Ecotourism, by eliminating the "wear and tear" on a site that conventional tourism encompasses, is concerned with the preservation of such natural habitats and archeological areas. Furthermore, it offers the opportunity for people to view remarkable natural wonders without worrying about damaging the area.

Not only is ecotourism not concerned with bringing in throngs of tourists, it would be defeating the purpose to bring mass tourism to natural areas. Ecotourism, instead, offers purposeful travel to natural areas for a limited number of tourists. As previously mentioned, an ecotourist must be a friend to the environment, so the relatively few people who are willing to sacrifice "luxury" for the environmentally friendly vacation are candidates for the ecotourism industry.

The Challenges of Successful Ecotourism

As mentioned, the benefits of ecotourism are becoming increasingly attractive. However, planners and managers must also face the problems that may arise. These issues tend to be complex. Ecotourism, by its very nature, builds up expectations and raises the risk of hit-and-run tourism; this is described as an influx of nature-lovers and culture-addicts to the latest wild spot, followed by its abandonment once discovered and degraded. Moreover, ecotourism attractions can be located in the most remote and rural areas. Therefore, ancient cultures and economies may be harmed or disrupted. These challenges, among others, need to be met. Planners and managers must be prepared and educated on the impacts of tourism. Their optimal strategy must involve minimizing these costs while maximizing the many benefits.

Ecotourism encompasses many aspects and faces many challenges. It is not only about safeguarding the environment, but employing and informing the locals, as well as educating the tourist. Ecotourism is a softer, gentler version than the tourism we have come to know. It might not bring in as many people as other forms of tourism, but the true recipients of the benefits of ecotourism are the traveler, the host population, the tourism industry and, of course, the environment.

Many elements are involved when designing an optimal ecotourism strategy. Sustainable development is an important aspect of ecotourism

development that involves harvesting our natural resources without depleting or permanently harming them. A niche market must also be determined in order to effectively match people and their interests with the ecotourism attractions at each particular site. However, with the existence of such tourists, each site must, to some degree, restore itself by natural means with or without the assistance of human management. This idea is discussed when looking at the ecological carrying capacity. The final important element of ecotourism development is known as site design, which takes all elements discussed thus far into consideration when designing satisfactory ecotourism facilities with as little ecological impact as possible.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is an emerging doctrine that demands a long-term view of economic activity. The concept has evolved within the past few years and has rapidly become a way of paying for natural conservation and increasing the value of the natural land that is left. Sustainable development not only ensures that consumption of tourism does not exceed the agility of the host destination to prosper, but also provides for the freedom, education and welfare of the host community. It has become common knowledge that it is unethical to save nature at the expense of the local people. The host community should be given the opportunity to act as partner in the sustainable development of its land, not as enemy of it.

Niche Market

When planning, implementing and marketing an sustainable ecotourism destination, it is important to look at the demographics and psychographics of the target market, so that the programs can be effectively matched with the people who enjoy such activities. Looking at the demographics of the eco- tourists who most frequently participate in ecotourism is an important first step when designing an eco-tourism program.

Carrying Capacities

Sustainable carrying capacity can be defined in several different ways. Ecologists often define it as "the maximal population size of a given species that an area can support without reducing its ability to support the same species in the future. It is a `measure' of the amount of renewable resources in the environment in units of the number of organisms these resources can support." In sustainable ecotourism, carrying capacity could be the "measure of what is actually happening to a park's resources or the visitor's experience."

Large-scale tourist developments produce considerable pressures on the environment and on the local population. These include destruction of the traditional landscape; congestion in the transport system; and air, land and water pollution. In dealing with carrying capacities, we need to consider more than just the number of people an area can hold, but also the effect it has on local populations, their infrastructure, and the environment. It's difficult to put limits on every natural area's attendance, but through proper ecotourism ethics, we can regulate the impacts. It is essential we recognize the amount of stress that each environment can handle then act accordingly to preserve it for future sustainable use and enjoyment.

Ecotourism Site Design

The site design of any ecotourism area will include many different elements. These elements have to do with creating ways to prevent any environmental problems with the ecosystem and to keep visitors traveling to a certain ecotourist spot. It requires holistic, ecologically based strategies to create projects that do not alter or injure, but instead help repair and restore existing site systems, such as plans end animal ommunities, soils and waters.

The basic objective of sustainable ecotourism is to help visitors appreciate the natural and cultural uniqueness of a site by bringing them closer to it. In order to achieve this, the site design must be human-scaled and intimate, so that sensory features--such as sights, smells, and sounds--are appreciated and preserved

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tourism has proved to be an engine of growth in many economies in the word. It provides for the generation of income, wealth and employment, and helps in the sustainable development of remote areas. Although beginning to be understood for its potentials to provide for development in the world, tourism still remains a sector that needs serious attention.

Tourism has proved to have negative impacts as well as the positive ones .It is criticized for contamination indigenous culture. This takes the form of changing values resulting in social a ladies like drug addiction, child prostitution, etc. A far more widespread negative impact is caused by mass tourism in environmentally fragile areas like mountains, hills, deserts and coastal regions. Due to heavy tourist traffic in some area, the cultural and environmental assets of the community are under threat. Although this phenomenon is not widespread, there is a need to take note of the possible negative

influences of tourism so that timely preservation action can be taken and irreparable loss avoided. The movement towards sustainable ecotourism is at once a threat and an opportunity to create more sustainable tourism: by diverting tourist traffic to ensure the carrying capacity of any destination is not exceeded:; by planning for regeneration of natural resources; and by generating awareness in the host community whereby they are prepared and formed to deal with the negative impact of mass tourism.

As in most cases, a middle path is the most creative way to maximize the sustainable economic potential of tourism, while at the same time minimizing the negative social influence and threats to the environment. Only ecotourism where the tourism, the service providers, the host community and authorities are well informed and prepared to homes tourism as an engine of growth can yield sustainable results.

Ecotourism, in partnership with research, has the potential to significantly affect nature conservation in many positive ways. The question of sustainability remains unanswered because many sites with nature-based tourism are relatively new and the long-term impacts have yet to be measured. The challenges of removing trash from remote wilderness lodges, of bringing in electricity with low-impact electric wires, or of minimizing the introduction of exotic species require the test of time to determine their success.

In the not-too-distant future, our wilderness areas will be small islands of biodiversity amidst seas of domesticated landscape. As the planet's sustainable natural, relatively unaltered ecosystems become increasingly rare, ecotourism allows more people to see isolated populations of wildlife, while benefiting local economies. Ecotourism has an impact on natural ecosystems, but oreimportantly, it offers a way to promote conservation in ecologically fragile regions.

Key factors required for successful sustainable ecotourism (a) forging strong inter ministerial co-operation between the ministries of planning and investment, science technology and environment, tourism, education and training, agriculture and rural development, and (b) being committed to management that facilitates and ensures input from all stakeholders: tour operators, protected area managers, government, NGOs, local communities etc;

(a) Establish a national Sustainable (Eco) Tourism Task force to develop a National Ecotourism or Nature Tourism Strategy; (b) Create an environment conducive to the establishment of a private sector Ecotourism Association, independent Ecotourism Commission and Community Ecotourism Association; (c) Intervene in the market eg: fees to protected areas, limits on numbers, regulations and

Codes of Conduct for the industry (developed with the industry); (d) Consider each natural area individually (eco and env impacts of tourism, what the area has to offer, local community needs and interaction with the environment, local infrastructure etc); (e) Focus on the local and regional level - it is easier for nature tourism/ecotourism to be developed successfully at these levels; (f) Start small and go slow; (g) Believe that small is beautiful and quality is paramount; (h) Invest in awareness raising, education and training for tourists, tour operators, local guides, protected area managers, local communities, local authorities; (i) Aim to maximise local benefits for conservation and economic development; (j) Aim to maximise local participation and involvement at all levels; (k) Aim to maximise use of local products, materials; (l) Aim to focus on recycling, waste management, alternative technologies and fuels. Manuals have been produced that provide practical information on such topics, we have a few and will be getting more; (m) Constantly monitor and evaluate and develop a feedback mechanism for modifying growth and minimising impacts and setting limits.

Thus following suggestion can help us for sustainable ecotourism

(a) Enhance international cooperation, foreign direct investment and partnerships with both private and public sectors, at all levels; (b) Develop programmes, including education and training programmes, that encourage people to participate in eco-tourism, enable indigenous and local communities to develope and benefit from eco-tourism, and enhance stakeholder cooperation in tourism development and heritage preservation, in order to improve the protection of the environment, natural resources and cultural heritage; (c) Provide technical assistance to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to support sustainable tourism business development and investment and tourism awareness programmes, to improve domestic tourism, and to stimulate entrepreneurial development; (d) Assist host communities in managing visits to their tourism attractions for their maximum benefit, while ensuring the least negative impacts on and risks for their traditions, culture and environment, with the support of the World Tourism Organization and other relevant organizations; (e) Promote the diversification of economic activities, including through the facilitation of access to markets and commercial information, and participation of emerging local enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises.

Support efforts to attain sustainable tourism that contributes to social, economic and infrastructure development through the following measures: (a)

Implementing projects at the local, national and sub-regional levels, with specific emphasis on marketing tourism products, such as adventure tourism, eco-tourism and cultural tourism; (b) Establishing and supporting national and cross-border conservation areas to promote ecosystem conservation according to the ecosystem approach, and to promote sustainable tourism; (c) Respecting local traditions and cultures and promoting the use of indigenous knowledge in natural resource management and eco-tourism; (d) Assisting host communities in managing their tourism projects for maximum benefit, while limiting negative impact on their traditions, culture and environment; (e) Support the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources, in accordance with commitments that countries have under biodiversity-related agreements to which they are parties, including such agreements as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, as well as regional biodiversity agreements.

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