

# A REVIEW OF ECOTOURISM AND ITS ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT

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## **Abstract:**

As per the definition of the International Ecotourism Society, "Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people". Ecotourism should protect wildlife and cultural values of native society, benefit the native inhabitants and involve their society, be sustainable and generate profit without abolishing natural resources, and provide an experience which travelers wish to pay for. It could also contribute to the local economic development and provide the environment with non-consumptive revenue sources and fundraising to conservation. Moreover, its social impact would be to benefit local inhabitants through community empowerment. Tourism grounds damages but Ecotourism tries to minimize it, because you are supposed to stay with local people in their houses, travel by bicycles, elephants, boat or on foot to avoid pollution, and jobs in the natural reserves have to be performed by native people from wardens to top level management. Hence Ecotourism creates more passionate and effective proxies of conservation.

**Keywords:** *Ecotourism, Economic Enhancement, Environmental Conservation, Social Development.*

## **I. Introduction**

Going on a tour to diving destinations, tumbling waterfalls, scenic boat riding, trekking through dense jungles, going on a safari, watching various and beautiful species of animals, birds and plants, lying on the smooth sand of the beach and observing the sun fall attracts each and every one. The International Ecotourism Society (2007), reports that world tourism arrivals have increased by 23% and are predicted to double by 2020 and it says that it has progressively become the main danger affecting the very resources on which tourism depends upon. Therefore, I want to know the relevance of Ecotourism in today's world in the context of climate change, endangered species, and globalization. Furthermore, I would also like to identify the advantages and disadvantages of Ecotourism based on economic, environmental, and social and cultural perspectives.

What is Ecotourism? For the first time, the term Ecotourism was used by Mexican environmentalist, architect, and international Ecotourism consultant Hector Ceballos-Lascurain

in 1988 (Beeton, 1998). Since then, intense debates have been held about what it means and how tour operator is using it. This type of tourism is also named as wildlife tourism, responsible tourism, alternative tourism, nature tourism, educational tourism, sustainable tourism, and many more. Ecotourism is an umbrella term that includes all these types. There are different definitions which are contributed by various campaigners for Ecotourism, but most of them agree that Ecotourism should: protect wildlife and cultural values of native society, benefit the native inhabitants and involve their society, be sustainable and generate profit without abolishing natural resources, and provide an experience which travelers wish to pay for (Baxter, 2016). Accordingly, Ecotourism is a type of tourism in which tourists visit undisturbed natural areas anticipating to focus on environmental sustainability, personal development, the well-being of the local people and respect to diverse cultures and human rights.

To illustrate on a true Eco tour, you are supposed to stay with local people in their houses, not in special restaurants or hotels. You could travel by bicycles, elephants, on foot and by boat to avoid pollution. Jobs in the natural reserves have to be performed by native people from wardens to top level management. The number of tourists may be small, so they will have a unique experience. As a consequence, Baxter states that, whenever you want to go on your vacation, only apply these simple steps; be prepared, don't waste resources, have respect for local culture, use non-polluting types of transportation, and remember the phrase "leave nothing behind you except footprints and take nothing except photographs" (Baxter, 2016, p.2).

Why is Ecotourism relevant? Ecotourism is such a vast phenomenon which is relevant to today most world's hottest topics or issues such as; worldwide endangered species, global warming or climate change, globalization, the economy of developing countries, and many other issues. However, this paper is only going to focus and show the relevance of Ecotourism in conjunction with the first three global issues, respectively.

### **1.1. The relevance of Ecotourism with Endangered Species**

There are a lot of endangered species of mammals, birds, and frogs worldwide, which need to be preserved, therefore, Ecotourism is highly relevant to today's world. In order to protect these species, the local population, who typically depend on hunting of endangered species for their source of income, have to be granted with alternative jobs, which could easily be provided by Ecotourism. More than that, these species need to be fed, which could be possible by the money which comes from Ecotourism. According to Buckley, Morrison, and Castley researchers at the school of environment, Griffith university, Gold Coast, Australia say that, most of the endangered species depend on Ecotourism because their environment conservation is being funded by it, and say that the primary objective of conservation is to protect biological variety. They wrote that these protected areas, worldwide, gain up to 84% of funding from Ecotourism (2016). More than that, successful Ecotourism programs aid in driving the spotlight on animal conservation, promoting awareness and drawing dollars to the cause. The participation of locals in such Ecotourism projects is of paramount importance to be successful in. Yet, in most cases, they might not receive any benefit. On the other hand, Ecotourism is not able to answer many of the endangered species' problems of which campaigners believe it can. Sometimes it may

create problems by itself as well, for instance, the interaction of animals with humans and their domestication and its influence on the animal's aptitude to escape predators. But the negative bearings of Ecotourism might disputably be less severe than other tourism programs because they are not entirely benign. As a result, the endangered species mostly rely on Ecotourism.

### **1.2. The relevance of Ecotourism with Climate Change**

Ecotourism also has a relationship with climate change, which could be either reduced or contributed by it. A change in the weather temperature worldwide is referred to as climate change, which is mostly caused by gas emissions and cutting down and burning of forests. Likewise, Ecotourism deals with the same issues. Soriya senior Ecotourism advisor SNV – Netherlands development organization, says that, when it was compared to other factors, tourism at the global level contributes 5 to 14% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which is pretty high. But if Ecotourism approach is applied and adopted, it would be a solution to climate change (2008). Ecotourism is an extremely climate delicate sector. Tourists travel when the weather is nice and normal, otherwise, it would be difficult for them to travel. On the other hand, we see our home- the Earth has experienced enormous weather threats like droughts, floods, storms and many other natural catastrophes, because of the current climate change phenomenon. All of these disasters have numerous negative influences on tourism. Ecotourism can partially respond to the matter by raising environmental awareness, reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emission, providing funds to conservation, and many more. Thus, the entire applied approach of Ecotourism could partially handle global warming.

### **1.3. The relevance of Ecotourism with Globalization**

Globalization is also relevant to Ecotourism. If we consider the process of globalization, there are pros and cons for Ecotourism, especially in developing countries. We see that almost all developing countries benefit from globalization for instance gain benefits from open trade, foreign direct investment, and privatization. Specifically, globalization benefits developing countries by increasing the number of tourists participating in Ecotourism who visit from protected areas. O'Neill, a lawyer in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA wrote, "Increase in the number of participants in Ecotourism by globalization has led

to a variety of benefits for developing countries” (2002, p. 519). The benefits which are gained by mass Ecotourism are the funds which come from entrance and concession charges, the opportunities of employment such as lodge owners, park guards, tour guides, and emphasize on education to endorse environmental awareness. However, globalization has negative impacts on Ecotourism as well. As mentioned above, globalization has simultaneously caused the increase of tourists, with which Ecotourism disagrees, because mass tourism is seen as ecologically destructive and harmful to native values. O'Neill says, the concentration and increasing size of economic power (Globalization) among Ecotourist operators in developing countries, affects almost each form of wildlife

tourism (2002). Hence, the ideal conflict of these two issues is still a controversial topic, especially for developing countries.

Ecotourism is a new, nature-based tourism, that has its clear objectives of dynamic, sustainable development and its activities are significantly organized and directed with consideration to the original settings of the environment. Its positive impacts are significantly more than the negative impacts from the perspectives of environment, economy and culture. You will clearly understand when you read the following positive and negative impacts of each.

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1. The impacts of Ecotourism on environment

Ecotourism contributes to the environment with non-consumptive revenue sources and fundraising to conservation. Well-designed Ecotourism programs educate and increase the awareness and understanding of both local and tourists' knowledge by getting various conferences and cultural exchanges. Furthermore, Ecotourism generates funds for conservation like revenue generated from selling and providing local goods and services and direct donation. According to Winnie, a researcher at Hong Kong University, Ecotourism could be an alternative source of revenue instead of mining, logging, wildlife hunting and other consumptive jobs to the local community (2004). On the other hand, the environment suffers some risks from Ecotourism as well, risks from environment degradation and increases disturbance to residents and species. For instance, demarcation of wildlife natural area, trekking through the forest, building their eco-lodges inside protected areas, and many more. But depending on ecology, type of activities, and manners of the tourists, environmental degradation might be varying. In overall, the solitary contributor to the natural environment is Ecotourism.

### 2.2. The impacts of Ecotourism on local economy

The economic benefit is the major focus of Ecotourism which enhances the local economy and contributes to government revenue. Economic benefits of Ecotourism to the nation's economy would be net income and

contribution to the Gross Nation Product (GNP) and Gross Domestic Product, foreign exchange earnings, and contribution to government incomes through several taxes and responsibilities. In particular, Ecotourism enhances indigenous economy by soaring the rate of employment such as the recruitment or employment of local people in the hostel, as tour guides, and catering services. However, if the residents were only recruited a minor fraction of the whole staff, potential revenue would be extremely less from the recruitment. Yacob, Shuib, Mamat and Radam researchers at the university of Putra Malaysia wrote, the benefits of Ecotourism to a local economy are the income or money earned by local Ecotourism operators, local enterprises, local handmade goods, and local employment. There isn't a solid negative impact of Ecotourism with respect to the economy, but there is still a problem in which only one-third of the tour costs are spent by tourists in the host country. The rest portions of the money are taken by international airlines and travel operators (2007). To recap, Ecotourism plays a vital role in stimulating and enhancing economic growth of locals.

### 2.3. The impacts of Ecotourism on local communities

The social impact of Ecotourism benefits local inhabitants through community empowerment. Weaver and Lawton, researchers at the university of South Carolina, Columbia, USA, imply that, Ecotourism is the panacea to a society which seeks to involve local people in decision-making not only to focus their attention

on Ecotourism but also to empower them as a civilization. It helps to enhance cultural awareness by sharing opportunities among residents and ecotourists. Ecotourism is also a good source for locals that can be utilized as a political tool to achieve sympathy and endorsement for their needs (2007). In addition, Ecotourism enhances rural progress and capacity building within the society which includes education, primary health, roads, and many other facilities. The inhabitants may also feel a sense of pride while serving their guests. Other than

Ecotourism's positive benefits, there are also some negative effects due to the rise of Ecotourism activities. These negative effects include amendment of cultural folk objects into commodities to sell it to tourists, the interruption of the pre-existing relations between indigenous and higher occurrences of crime. Moreover, for tourist attractions, they are expected to pose for cameras and perform dances etc. This is really supercilious but it is depressing to the local people as it prevents them from pursuing their customs or lifestyle (Kennedy, 2012).

### III. Result and Discussion

Our very first intention in this paper was to explain and elaborate the relevance of Ecotourism in today's world with respect to globalization, endangered species, and climate change. Resultantly, we came up with the stance that Ecotourism is an extremely vital incentive for local inhabitants to protect threatened species. Moreover, global warming could be reduced by Ecotourism through enhancement of environmental awareness and providing funding for conservation. On the other hand, it could also cause the increase of greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, the encounter of Ecotourism with globalization has confused policy makers in developing countries because of its clashing principles.

Secondly, we observed its impacts on the environment, economy and local society. Ecotourism in the context of its economic impacts on indigenous communities is entirely advantageous, with regard to its foreign

exchange earnings, local employment, revenue from several taxes and responsibilities. Besides, it has a perceived positive influence on environmental preservation by deforestation, avoiding hunting and revenue contribution, but the increase of tourists could degrade natural environment and disturb the inhabitants and species as well. In addition, the effects of Ecotourism on local communities are mostly positive which involves them in decision-making, enhances rural advancement and capacity building. Despite its miscellaneous benefits, it also harms culture by gradually changing traditional behaviors. We find this issue interesting and astonishing, hence we would suggest each reader to do further intensive research on the topic. That's why Beeton says (1998, p. 1), "The debate, which will probably continue in academic circles forever, makes Ecotourism a great essay topic for students".

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