



ECOTOURISM AND WILD NATURE UNDERSTANDING

Tourism is changing rapidly as nature, heritage, and recreational destinations become more important, and as conventional tourism is forced to meet tougher environmental requirements. This presents a challenge to government and private enterprise to develop new approaches to the tourism market. Successful tourism must benefit local populations economically and culturally to give them incentives to protect the natural resources which create the attraction. Strategies must be economically feasible if private investors are to support the projects.

Ecotourism is cultural tourism (a cross-cultural experience), nature tourism (assisting with conservation programs), a travel-learn experience (discover how we are coping with modernity), a little bit of soft adventure (just being here is an adventure), and benefiting the well-being of indigenous peoples.



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Eco-tourism focuses on local cultures, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on our vulnerable planet. It is typically defined as travel to destinations where the flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Responsible ecotourism includes programs that minimize the adverse effects of traditional tourism on the natural environment, and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, initiatives by hospitality providers to promote recycling, energy efficiency, water re-use, and the creation of economic opportunities for local communities are an integral part of ecotourism.

Ecotourism is considered the fastest growing market in the tourism industry, according to the World Tourism Organization with an annual growth rate of 5% worldwide and representing 6% of the world gross domestic product, 11.4% of all consumer spending - not a market to be taken lightly. Around the globe, eco-tourism is quickly becoming one of the most popular forms of vacationing.

Ideally, true ecotourism should satisfy several criteria, such as:

- conservation (and justification for conservation) of biological diversity and cultural diversity, through ecosystems protection;
- promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, by providing jobs to local populations;
- sharing of socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous people by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism enterprises;
- increase of environmental & cultural knowledge;
- minimization of tourism's own environmental impact;

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- affordability and lack of waste in the form of luxury;
- local culture, flora and fauna being the main attractions.

In the field, well-planned and managed ecotourism has proven to be one of the most effective tools for long-term conservation of biodiversity when the right circumstances (such as market feasibility, management capacity at local level, and clear and monitored links between ecotourism development and conservation) are present.

It is an enlightening, participatory travel experience to environments, both natural and cultural, that ensures the sustainable use, at an appropriate level, of environmental resources and, whilst producing viable economic opportunities for the tourism industry and host communities, makes the use of these resources through conservation beneficial to all tourism role players.

Among the benefits of the ecotourism are direct revenues generated by fees and taxes incurred and voluntary payments for the use of biological resources. These revenues can be used for the maintenance of natural areas and the contribution of tourism to economic development, including linkage effects to other related sectors and job-creation. Sustainable tourism can make positive improvements to biological diversity conservation especially when local communities are directly involved with operators. If such local communities receive income directly from a tourist enterprise they, in turn, increase their evaluation of the resources around them. This is followed by greater protection and conservation of those resources as they are recognized as the source of income. Moreover, sustainable tourism can serve as a major educational opportunity, increasing knowledge of and respect for natural ecosystems and biological resources. Other benefits include the provision of incentives for maintaining traditional arts and crafts, traditional knowledge, and innovations and practices that contribute to the sustainable use of biological diversity.

In considering the role of tourism in the sustainable use of biological resources and their diversity, it is important that the potential adverse impacts of tourism are fully considered. These are roughly divided into environmental impacts and socioeconomic impacts, the latter generally being those imposed on local and indigenous communities. Although such impacts on biological resources may be less easy to quantify and analyze systematically, they may be at least as important as, if not more important than, environmental impacts in the long term.

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Direct use of natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, in the provision of tourist facilities is one of the most significant direct impacts of tourism in a given area. Land use for accommodation and infrastructure provision, the choice of the site, the use of building materials are all essential factors. Deforestation and intensified or unsustainable use of land also cause erosion and loss of biodiversity. Direct impact on the species composition and on wildlife can be caused by incorrect behaviors and unregulated tourism activities (e.g. off-road driving, plant-picking, hunting, shooting, fishing). Moreover, tourists and tourist transportation means can increase the risk of introducing alien species and the manner and frequency of human presence can cause disturbance to the behavior of animals. Construction activities related to tourism can cause enormous alteration to wildlife habitats and ecosystems.



Tourism has for many years been focused on mountain and coastal areas. Pressures from tourism activities on biological resources and their diversity are enormous and includes: erosion and pollution from the construction of hiking trails, bridges in high mountains, camp sites, chalet and hotels. Tourism activities have a major impact also on the marine and coastal environment, the resources they host and the diversity of those resources. Most often, those impacts are due to inappropriate planning, irresponsible behavior by tourists and operators and/or lack of education and awareness of the impacts by, for example, tourist resorts along the coastal zones.

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Tourism is also a water-intensive activity with a large production of waste. The extraction of groundwater by some tourism activities can cause desiccation, resulting in loss of biological diversity. Moreover, the disposal of untreated effluents into surrounding rivers and seas can cause eutrophication and it can also introduce a large amount of pathogens into the water body. Disposal of waste produced by the tourism industry may cause major environmental problems.

Socioeconomic and cultural impacts of tourism include influx of people and related social degradation, impacts on local communities and on cultural values. Increased tourism activities can cause an influx of people seeking employment or entrepreneurial opportunities, but who may not be able to find suitable employment, thus causing social degradation. When tourism development occurs, economic benefits are usually unequally distributed among members of local communities. In the case of foreign direct investment, much of the profit may be transferred back to the home country. Therefore, tourism can actually increase inequalities in communities, and thus relative poverty.



Tourism has a highly complex impact on cultural values. Tourism activities may lead to intergenerational conflicts and may affect gender relationships. Traditional practices and events may also be influenced by the tourist preferences. Tourism development can lead to the loss of access by indigenous and local communities to their land and resources as well as sacred sites.

Sustainable tourism is therefore in everybody's interest. Given that a high percentage of tourism involves visits to naturally and culturally distinguished sites, generating



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large amounts of revenue, there are clearly major opportunities for investing in the maintenance and sustainable use of biological resources. Along with the efforts to maximize benefits, efforts must be made to minimize the adverse impacts of the tourism industry on biological diversity.

The main principles of the ecotourism, which distinguish it from the wider concept of sustainable tourism are:

- conserve biological (and cultural) diversity, by strengthening protected area management systems (public or private) and increasing the value of sound ecosystems;
- promote the sustainable use of biodiversity, by generating income, jobs and business opportunities in ecotourism and related business networks, and
- share the benefits of ecotourism developments equitably with local communities and indigenous people, by obtaining their informed consent and full participation in planning and management of ecotourism businesses.
- Lends itself better to independent travellers, as well as to organized tours for small size groups.



Ecotourism certification and good practice

There are a number of serious problems with certifying and accrediting ecotourism and sustainable travel, starting with the lack of consumer demand, but are also proofs that certification for sustainability of tourism will increase competitiveness and market access of small and medium sized enterprises.

The challenge of certification of travel comes from the varying set of rules and regulations found in each business category that encompasses tourism. Like most traditional certification programs, most "eco" labels cover only hotels and lodges.

There are, however, an increasing number of programs that certify tour operators, naturalist guides, beaches, parks, golf courses, and boats. Today certification and ecolabelling are among the hottest topics within the travel and tourism industry. Around the world, there are some 260 voluntary initiatives, including tourist codes of conduct, labels, awards, benchmarking and best practice.

Performance criteria for ecotourism certification:

Environmental

- Waste solid and waste water (consumption, reduction, recycle, disposal);
- Energy (consumption, reduction, efficiency);
- Water (consumption, reduction, quality);
- Noise (reduction);
- Air quality (quality improvement);
- Transport (public transport green alternatives);
- Specific standards for impacts specific to diving, golf and other.



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Economic

- Creation of local employment;
- Supply chain management through green and sustainable purchasing policies;
- Creation of networks of green business with given destination;
- Use locally sourced and produced materials and food;
- Use organic food.

Social accountability

- Community (relations, welfare);
- Community (participation, organization, involvement);
- Personnel fair treatment.

Cultural

- Emphasis and conservation of the local / regional culture, heritage and authenticity;
- In keeping with aesthetics of physical development / architecture.

Quality

- Customers satisfaction;
- Health and safety;
- Service and facilities provided (environmentally friendly and/or for environment / wildlife observation);
- Employee capacity building / education / qualification;
- Overall business competence.

Destination resource protection

- Habitat / ecosystem / wildlife maintenance and enhancement;
- Environmental information / interpretation / education for customers;
- Overall environmental protection.

Based on this criteria and from the experience of the participants at the ecotourism activities, it was settled a **Code of good practice** in the field. It is a very important tool both for the operators and tourists.

Some of the 'rules' of this Code of good practice are:

- Enhance the effort to conserve the natural integrity of the places visited;
- Respect the sensitivities of other cultures;
- Be efficient in use the natural resources;

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- Ensure waste disposal has minimum environmental and aesthetic impacts;
- Develop a recycling program;
- Support principals who have a conservation ethic;
- Keep abreast of current political and environmental issues, particularly of the local area;
- Network with other stakeholders (particularly those in the local area) to keep each other informed of developments and encourage the use of Code of good practice;
- Support ecotourism education / training of guides and managers;
- Employ tour guides well versed in and respectful of local cultures and environment;
- Give client appropriate verbal and written interpretation and guidance with respect to the natural and cultural history of the areas visited;
- Use locally produced goods that benefit the local community, but do not buy goods made from threatened or endangered species;
- Never intentionally disturb or encourage to disturbance of wildlife or wildlife habitats;
- Keep vehicles to designated roads and tracks;
- Abide by the rules and regulation of natural areas;
- Commit to the principle of best practice;
- Maximize the quality of experience for hosts and guests.

Providing specific guidelines for both the organizations and visitors, such as the Code of good practice will help reduce any negative impacts that might occur. By adhering to the principles from the Code of good practice the natural and cultural heritage can be protected, but also local community is helped to protect the area and ensure sustainability. Local community can live on and prosper in the way they have done in the past, before the tourism development begun. The more involved they become in the organization of the ecotourism, the more beneficial it will become for them.



In Romania, rural tourism allows you to discover the wonderful countryside and people of Romania, with its array of cultural treasures and diversified wildlife.

The richness and variety of its tourist attractions, natural but also cultural and historical ones, bring Romania a leading position in Europe.



The ecotourism in Romania can be considered as a journey back in time. If a tourist wants to take a break and afford itself a few days away from the stress of modern world come, he can come to enjoy the unspoiled life of the Romanian village. Staying as a guest in a local house in a Romanian village will offer you a unique insight into a totally different way of life.

Due to its mountains, forests and water range, Romania still preserves the pure nature aspects and wildlife.



Few countries can offer the variety of attractions for tourists as Romania. From beach holidays at the Black Sea Coast to viewing rare birds at the Danube Delta to snow skiing or soaking in curative mineral waters in mountainous Transylvania, Romania's physical features offer a multitude of attractions for tourists.

Add on centuries of accumulated history, preserved medieval villages, unique rural culture, and beautiful palaces and monasteries, it is clear why the ecotourism became one of the most important ways to visit and to understand Romania.

The entire territory of the country also presents an interest from the point of view of ethnographic and folklore heritage, each rural zone having its own traditional customs.

Ours Nature Active Parks are situated in the mountain areas, another sanctuary for the wildlife - plants, prey birds, large carnivores. One third of Romanian territory consists in

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mountains - The Romanian Carpathians. Although they are not very high (2544m – in Fagaras Mountains), the Carpathians are very diverse. The flora of the Carpathians includes more than 1350 species, among which many are endemic. Deep forest cover more than one third of the country's surface. The fauna of the Romanian Carpathians is also extremely rich and diverse. Here is to be found the highest concentration of large carnivores anywhere in Europe (about 6000 brown bears – more than half of Europe's bear population, about 3500 wolves (over a third of Europe's wolves), along with 2000 lynx (35% of Europe's lynx).

The Carpathians create wonderful scenery, with green valleys nestled between foothills ascending to wild crags or precipitous gorges. The mountain villages encountered on the way, the small summer shelters built by peasants for hay harvest, the secret shepherds' paths through forests and meadows, all these bring a unique, pastoral fragrance.



All the activities promoted by our Nature Active Parks means a 100% contact with the wild nature. Underlining this aspect is important from two points of view:

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1. the activity and the presence of the tourists in the has to affect as less as it possible the environment with all its components;
2. it is important for tourists to have a minimum knowledge about the flora and fauna, to be able to notice some details connected with the presence of a wild animal or to be able to locate itself in the area.

The nature has its own language and an ecotourist has to know some 'words' in this language to be able to have a real communication, to understand and to speak, in a perfect harmony.

The ecotourism may become a problem of attitude and behavior of the people in contact with nature.



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**SO, LETS PRESERVE AND ENJOI THE NATURE MAKING TOURISM IN
BUCOVINA'S NATURE ACTIVE PARKS !**

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