

MODULE 8 – Ecotourism

LECTURE NOTES

Key Topics

- Ecotourism, Economy, and Conservation
- Ecotourism opportunities and restrictions in sub-Saharan Africa
- Tourism in Liberia
- Critical Components of Ecotourism
- The Ecotourism Product
- Characteristics of an Ecotourism site
- Planning Ecotourism Ventures
- Ecotourism and Use

Ecotourism, Economy, and Conservation: Definition

Ecotourism is defined by the International Ecotourism Society as ‘responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.’

Ecotourism merges aspects of nature conservation and socio-economic development goals.

Tourism is a huge contributor to the global economy, with the number of instances of travel for tourist activities close to 2.5 billion as of 2018. Currently, of the five geographic sections of the world monitored for tourism, Africa has the least number of tourists annually.

Why is tourism a good option for conservation and economic advancement?

- it employs natural and cultural assets as capital
- it provides incentive to preserve and conserve natural and cultural assets
- it is a labor-intensive activity that allow gender equality by providing tasks for everyone
- it is often the only non-extractive economic option in rural and isolated natural areas
- it is the leading export in over half of Less Developed Countries (LDCs)
- it is growing 2 times faster in LDCs that that of the global average
- Sustainable tourism grows 3 times faster than the tourism industry overall

Ecotourism opportunities and restrictions in sub-Saharan Africa

- Africa’s tourism potential will continue to grow through attracting **new markets and developing new products**.
- **Niche products** not only attract new tourists but they also engage tourists to stay longer.
- Many of today’s younger travelers, especially from developed nations, grew up with access to travel and have an **expanded interest in adventure, culture, and “real experiences”** compared to previous generations.
- Further, with more travel by Africans in Africa, there are new opportunities—and great potential—for **regional tourism growth** in Africa.

Special considerations for tourism in sub-Saharan Africa

When considering tourism ventures in sub-Saharan Africa, the following obstacles have to be addressed:

- Improving the **conservation and interpretation of natural areas** and their associated biodiversity and of paleontological/ archaeological/historic sites in many places
- Giving more emphasis to developing **urban tourism**
- Improving **tourist facilities, services, public health and safety and infrastructure** in many places
- Encouraging **more involvement and participation in tourism by local communities**
- Ensuring **that land is available** where and when needed in an equitable manner for tourism development
- Providing more **education and training of personnel** to work effectively in all aspects of tourism and achieving greater public awareness about tourism
- Improving **the institutional framework** for financing tourism development and managing the tourism sector.

Tourism in Liberia

- There are no reliable statistics of the number of visitor arrivals, length of stay and tourism expenditure in Liberia.
- Preliminary figures obtained from Liberian Immigration Services in 2019 show that a total of **66,064 foreign visitor arrivals** were recorded for a 18 month period (Jan 2018 to Sep 2019). That amounts to an average of 37,751 per year, 3,146 per month or 181 per day, **50% from Ghana and the United States.**
- Tourism in Liberia is centered around **nature and culture**. The Liberia Tourism Brand video labels Liberians as the **'friendliest people'**, and associated videos center on local people welcoming tourists to the country.
- Liberia is rich in beautiful and striking wildlife, but their **forest habitat make it difficult to see wildlife** and to predict reliably when the species can be seen/encountered. Endemic species such as the **Timneh, pygmy hippopotamus** and **Gola Malimbe**, striking species such as **Red Colobus monkey, Leopard, and Zebra Duiker**, unique species such as **Rufous Fishing Owl, Pel's flying squirrel, and 3 Pangolin spp.** can be found in Liberia's bountiful forests.
- Conservation reaps the benefits of forest cover and difficult access (hunting is more difficult), but it is a limiting factor for ecotourism.
- Due to **uncertainty surrounding the Liberian tourist experience**, especially with regards to biodiversity, investments and infrastructure remain poor.
- Tourism areas still exist across Liberia: Sapo National Park, Gola National Rainforest Park, Lake Piso, Nimba Mountains, Kpatawee Waterfalls,

Critical Components of Ecotourism

Tourism has the potential to:

- Contribute to biodiversity conservation.
- Sustain the wellbeing of local people.
- Provide learning experiences for visitors.
- Promote responsible action on the part of tourists and the tourism industry.

This is possible if tourism:

- Is delivered primarily to small groups by small-scale businesses.
- Uses lowest possible amounts of non-renewable resources.
- Stresses local participation, ownership and business opportunities, particularly for rural people (accomplished through targeted training).

READING: "The Ecotourism Training Manual for Protected Area Managers" (Chapters 1-6)

The Ecotourism Product

The main principles of the Ecotourism product are:

- **Direct Experience:** Focus on giving visitors the opportunity to personally and directly experience nature.
- **Interpretation:** Provide opportunities to experience nature in ways that lead to greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment.
- **Sustainability:** best practices in environmental sustainability.
- **Contribution to Conservation:** Contributes directly to the conservation of natural areas
- **Local Community Benefits:** Provide ongoing contributions to the local community.
- **Cultural Respect:** Be sensitive to local cultures.
- **Customer Satisfaction:** consistently meet consumer expectations.
- **Responsible Marketing:** marketing and promotion are honest and accurate so that realistic expectations are met (this is especially important in today's world where bad reviews can drive away business).

Benefits of Ecotourism

Ecotourism can provide **employment** opportunities, **generate revenue** for local communities, provide countless opportunities to **educate the public on environmental issues, justify the creation of protected areas, contribute to biodiversity conservation, enable cultural exchange, and improve visitor awareness** of the site.

Characteristics of an Ecotourism Site

An ecotourism site should have the following, if it is to increase chances of success:

- Natural attractions (Landscapes, wildlife, etc...)
- Viable, well protected ecological systems
- Trained on-site staff
- Entrance fee system
- Education opportunities
- Visitors center
- Interpretive trails / information
- Amenities (e.g., water, sewage, & garbage disposal systems,)
- Communication systems
- First aid support
- Appropriate transport
- Regulations and behavior codes
- Nearby food/lodging
- A supportive local community

PRACTICUM: Nature Interpretation

Guiding and Storytelling

Guiding requires local knowledge and context. Great guides are **usually local residents** who have **knowledge and experience** related to the places and information you will feature on your tour experience, and can speak truthfully about historical impacts and context. Authentically local guides are priceless assets to a tourism venture.

PRACTICUM: Difficult Cross-Cultural situations

Sustainability in Ecotourism

Material Consumption

Due to its inherent dependence on large volume of visitors, Ecotourism has the potential to drain as many resources as hotels, and other general tourism activities. The conservation aspect of Ecotourism encourages minimization of resource use. It promotes the use of natural areas and materials that are non-consumptive (multiple uses possible), instead of consumptive (one time use and then discarded).

- Consumptive use is typically defined as the direct use or removal of wildlife or natural products through activities such as hunting and eating wild animals, harvesting timber products, and using sand for construction.
- Non-consumptive use assumes a separation of ecotourism and the direct consumption of wildlife or natural products. It encourages a resource to be used more than once, and to remain and serve another person or activity.

Cultural Consumption

The essence of a culture is difficult to capture, and requires many measurements and angles. Ecotourism ventures use advertisement to bring in visitors, and advertisements are inherently short. As a result, rich and diverse cultures are often reduced to a single theme in order to make it easier for tourists to process and 'consume'.

- This often also results in communities changing to appear more like the simplified image.
- It can also result in part of the community being altered in order to match the advertised products, while activities and aspects of the community that were not captured in the snapshot are hidden away.
- It is also possible that when communities experience repeated exposure to other cultural behaviours this takes away from their adherence to their own cultures for the sake of appealing more to the visiting tourist.

Wildlife Impacts

Despite contributing to biodiversity by generating funds for conservation and habitat protection/maintenance, **ecotourism can have a negative impact on wildlife** due to increased demand for resources, disturbance, and noise-, water-, soil-, and air-pollution.

READING: Turner, "Communities, Wildlife Conservation, and Tourism-Based Development: Can Community-Based Nature Tourism Live up to Its Promise?"

Discussion cue: Is Ecotourism truly the economical and conservation merging activity it is perceived as? How are economical benefits distributed?

Planning Ecotourism Ventures

Do a SWOT analysis to determine the strong points to push, weak points to address, opportunities to take advantage of, and threats to create contingencies for.

Ventures should be evaluated for success based on possession of features which are **unique, aesthetic** (nice to look at or experience), and **accessible, can have various uses and be used for interesting activities, involves the communities, promotes biodiversity, have cultural or historical value, and contributes to product development** for additional income (besides tour guide fees, food, transport, and lodging).

Management Planning

Consider the Stages of Destination Management Planning flowchart. Following a SWOT analysis, **create a strategy and action plan** for your ecotourism activity.

PRACTICUM: Design an Ecolodge (Final project)