

Ecotourism essay example

[Sport & Tourism](#), [Ecotourism](#)



Introduction

Tourism connotes the visitation of places. Tourism can be in two levels; domestic and international tourism. Domestic tourism involves the leisure activities that citizens of a given nation may engage in within the boundaries of their country whereas international tourism involves travelling to another country. Modern tourism advocates for responsible tourism and conservation of the environment. Consequently, various concepts of tourism have emerged aimed at environmental conservation. One such concept, that this paper seeks to address, is eco-tourism.

Ecotourism

Ecotourism is in many ways a special form of tourism. It involves visitation to undisturbed natural places often considered pristine and appreciated for their pleasant yet rare scenery and presentation. It suffices for different purposes. Unlike typical tourism activities that are mainly centred on the pursuit of leisure by tourists, the priorities and objectives in ecotourism are as diverse as they are different. According to The International Ecotourism Society, ecotourism is the responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the wellbeing of local people. This definition has two major dimensions. From the definition; one can tell that ecotourism is concerned with the responsible performance and management by tourists who engage in the activity. It looks beyond mere leisure by tourists and considers the impact and influence their activities during their visitation has on the local communities. This is a new aspect to tourism that has not been examined previously. It also opens avenues and opportunities for the betterment of the local communities that play host to the natural attractions.

Nature based tourism

The term nature based tourism has gained currency in the twenty first century primarily out of the need for conservancy even as tourists enjoy their activities. The need to approach tourism activities with a guided response to the environment led to the development of terms such as ecotourism, adventure tourism, wildlife tourism, nature retreats and extractive tourism. All these inform elements or phases of nature based tourism. The Australian tourism authority defines nature based tourism as any tourism activity that relies on experiences traceable to natural attractions. On the other hand, some scholars have defined nature based tourism as leisure travel undertaken for the purpose of the enjoyment of natural attractions and indulgence in a variety of outdoor activities.

The activities in this regard include hiking, fishing, beachcombing, bird watching, among other natural activities. From the onset, nature based tourism resonates around the exploitation and utility of natural attractions for recreational purposes and convenience. In addition, nature based tourism attempts to lean on the concept of nature in tourism. It derives from the fact that natural resources could exist in a unique and particularly impressive manner to the extent that they attract the attention of tourists. It is illustrative to note that the use of natural resources in nature based tourism does not necessarily deride them from other uses. The concept of nature based tourism entertains the complementary running of activities simultaneously so that in overall as nature based tourism takes course, other uses of natural resources continues.

Differences between ecotourism and nature based tourism

The differences between ecotourism and other nature based tourism primarily lie in the fact that while ecotourism gives particular interest to the overall wellbeing of the community visited, the same cannot be said of all other nature based tourism. In fact, the guiding thread that forms the common link between all nature based tourism is the fact that all are centred on nature. Ecotourism departs from other nature based tourism at some point. It pays excessive consideration to the wellbeing of the society. However, it should be appreciated that ecotourism and other forms of nature tourism general overlap and could be similar in several aspects only to differ on a number of concepts. Some of the other nature based tourism forms include the following: adventure based tourism which refers to the indulgence in adventurous activities often with a natural element to it, sustainable tourism which consists of all tourism activities that seek to limit the overall harmful effects an activity has on the environment, responsible tourism which seeks to engage in tourism activities responsibly and cultural tourism which engages in cultural practises in the natural setting among others.

Principles of Ecotourism

Ecotourism is guided in general by a number of principles that were expounded from The International Ecotourism Society definition of ecotourism. Martha Honey in her expansion states the seven principles that characterise ecotourism. These include; travelling to natural destinations, minimization of impact, building environmental awareness, the support and encouragement of human rights, empowerment of local people, financially

benefiting the local people and conservancy measures and respect for local cultures. The paper expounds on these principles.

Ecotourism advocates believe that the best tourism sites are the natural attractions. In fact, it is their hope and wishes that the natural attractions are left intact and without any form of changes. They appreciate the uniqueness and beauty of natural scenery in the same breadth. They believe that the tourism activities should occasion the least impact on the environment. It envisions a situation where the natural attraction is left entirely intact without any blemish whatsoever. Ecotourism concerns itself with the safekeeping of the environment and preservation of natural resources and would minimise the impact of any activity to these features. In that regard, ecotourism avoids any depletion activities such as overfishing, hunting, among others. Instead, tourists are encouraged to experience and enjoy through other passive activities such as site seeing activities.

Ecotourism also build environmental awareness. It is the objective of The International Ecotourism Society that the entire globe is conscious about environmental preservation. In the same vein, tourists should appreciate the role of the ecology and the need to preserve the ecological balance. In addition to environmental consciousness, ecotourism is cognisant of people rights and democratic practises. It endeavours to promote democratic practises as well as the enjoyment of human rights and freedoms. It is its objective that human beings must not only be just to the environment, but shall be fair to fellow human beings as well. Finally ecotourism operates on the concept of promoting an empowered people and conservancy motives. To this extent, ecotourism contemplates the application of resources from

tourism activities towards the empowerment of local dwellers and the conservancy organizations.

Examples of ecotourism

There has been a deliberate attempt by The International Ecotourism Society to implement ecotourism programs across the world. This has been done through the creation of accreditation programs both at International and National levels. Costa Rica, Sweden, Estonia, Kenya and Australia make the list of countries that have already set foot in the ecotourism program development. It is essential at this point to mention some of the natural attraction sites that make the list of ecotourism activities. They are Llano del Muerto waterfall in El Salvador, Lebanon Cedars, Lecandon Jungle in Mexico, Fernando de Noronha in Brazil, Masai Mara in Kenya, Wolin National Park in Poland and the Jaldapara National Park in India. These features are distinct for their natural place in the world's ecology. Some of them are home to the world endangered species or the wonderful beasts of the jungle. Other could be responsible for the world climate conditions and a destruction would upset the climatic conditions occasioning global warming amid other effects. This features contrast sharply with other tourism interest outside ecotourism. Examples could be seen in non-ecological tourism activities such visitation to monuments, pillars, bridges and beaches which serve more of recreational objectives. The latter type of tourism is predominant in the development nations such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom. However, surprisingly, it is these nations that account for the highest numbers of eco-tourists.

Impact of nature based tourism

Nature based tourism managed to change the tourism discourse from its previous orientation to leisure towards a natural attraction orientation in-keeping with the objectives of maintaining the ecological set up. However, the impact it has had is both positive and negative. Nature based tourism has awakened the local communities from their slumber. It has reminded the world of the call to maintenance of the environmental set up and the need to empower the locals. In the long run, it has occasioned an increased utility of natural resources. In other words, one could say that ecotourism has had the effect of unlocking dead capital found in the natural attraction sites. This dead capital, which has been converted into revenues from tourism activities has had tremendous impact on the livelihoods of communities in the areas in question. However, the utility of natural resources has also to some extent contributed to the depletion of the resource and to effectively upset the natural ecological balance. For instance, the influx of tourists to a given area has led to the construction of lodges, pillars, points and additional infrastructure for their consumption and utility. This has in the long run eroded the ecological balance that existed before. Scholars have also questioned the sincerity of ecotourism in its intended quest for maintenance of the ecological balance. To them, the fact that tourism activities do exist in the first place has the impact of titling the ecological balance.

Benefits of ecotourism

The benefits of ecotourism cut through political, economic and socio-cultural spheres. This is because ecotourism and to a large extent tourism does not occur in a vacuum. The political consequences can be seen in light of the

empowered citizenry who have become more conscious of their democratic rights and freedoms. Ecotourism has also promoted advocate process that insist on the education of the local people. The result is a politically enlightened society. Economically, the ecotourism activities have had the effects of empowering communities and conservancy advocates. The economic empowerment has had the effect of improving the living standards in areas involved. In the long run, the quality of life has been improved for the better. Socio-culturally, ecotourism has promoted the spread of cultural practises of particular communities or at least enabled the communication of the cultural ideals to the globe. This has occurred through tourists visiting these areas and adopting or borrowing some norms. In addition, the preservation of the cultural identities and practises has been enhanced through the protection of the natural attraction sites. This is not to forget tourists who has through ecotourism become more conscious of the environment and the need for the maintenance of the ecological balance while ate the same time receiving the satisfaction and pleasure derived from the engagement in tourism activities. The overall travel and interaction of different people has contributed to the emergence of a more cohesive world that is aware of the place of diversity among the people of the world.

Criticism of ecotourism

Critics have cast aspersions as to whether the ideals of ecotourism are practical and if so whether they are being implemented. Cases have been mentioned where ecotourism had effects which were contrary to its ideals. For instance, cases of human displacements and dispossession have been mentioned of the South African situation. This involve cases where humanity

has had to be evicted to create room for the preservation of natural resources. In addition, cases have come up where mismanagement of funds and inadequate legal and political infrastructure has defeated the objective of empowering the locals. The funds have found new owners in the name of management and bureaucratic expenses.

Conclusion

In the long run, ecotourism indeed is a noble concept that needs to be embraced by all stakeholders. However, a proper infrastructure must be developed for the realisation of the principles and guiding objectives of ecotourism and by extension nature based tourism activities.

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