ECOTOURISM: A Modern Industry For The Modern Age

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BACKGROUND

Many tourists travel to beautiful natural areas where they can see wildlife and unusual plants and meet unique cultures. The goal of ecotourism is to provide these tourists with an experience that helps them learn about the importance of conservation so that they travel responsibly. In this way they help to protect the environment and improve the well-being of the local residents (International Ecotourism Society, as cited in Melanis & Campbell, 2007). However, sometimes ecotourism does not support environmental or cultural sustainability, so solutions are needed to solve the problems created by ecotourism.

RESEARCH FOCUS

This research seeks the question, “How can ecotourism be developed without harming the physical and socio-cultural environment?”

The research explores the benefits and drawbacks of ecotourism and potential methods of resolving the problems associated with the industry.

GLOBAL DESTINATIONS

- **Saluté - Kyrgyzstan**: This country has 50 natural parks and reserves where the government protects the unique ecosystems and many kinds of wildlife. Ecotourism helps local communities and education to conserve the natural environment, which includes savannas, mountains, lakes, deserts, rainforests and coral reefs (Schlichter, 2017).

- **Galapagos Islands - Ecuador**: The 13 major islands and archipelagoes of Galapagos are a mecca for eco-tourists. The islands house some of the earth’s most unique animals, and visitors can enjoy the sea lions and penguins. However, tourists cannot see penguins daily because these activities would disturb the wildlife. Galapagos became a Natural Heritage Site in 1978, and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1984 (Sherman Travel Editorial Staff, 2011).

- **Borneo - Indonesia**: The island of Borneo is famous for its large elephant population (International Ecotourism Society, as cited in Meletis & Campbell, 2009). The island of Borneo is famous for its large elephant population (International Ecotourism Society, as cited in Meletis & Campbell, 2009).

- **Blue Mountains - Australia**: These mountains are located close to Sydney, and the area has waterfalls, canyons, valleys and high scenic viewpoints. The oil from the macadamia trees that feed the koalas bear is what makes the air look blue. The region has 600 native species and the Wollemi pine, one of the rarest trees, and ecofriendly accommodations. Tourists travel to beautiful natural areas where they can see wildlife and unusual plants and meet unique cultures (Sherman Travel Editorial Staff, 2013).

- **Ejido - Norway**: Norway is an international leader for its environmental policies that protect its forests from industries such as oil and fishing. These remote ocean areas contain birds and sea animals, and oil drilling and fishery activities are still practiced in the fishing villages. Tourism can help, but it also has the potential to disrupt the local community’s efforts to conserve the environment. It also helps to protect local traditions and improve communities (International Ecotourism Society, as cited in Meletis & Campbell, 2009).

BENEFITS

One goal of ecotourism is to develop an industry that brings social and economic benefits to residents in the local area that is visited for its natural beauty and cultural wealth. The industry creates jobs and increases local economies. It also helps to protect local traditions and improve communities. The second goal of ecotourism is to help support environmental sustainability. By educating tourists and local people about conservation the industry protects the environment. Also, the money earned from ecotourism can be used to increase environmental sustainability.

While ecotourism has many potential benefits for the economy, local communities and environmental conservation, it also has several disadvantages. The ecotourism industry increases the use and pollution of the local natural resources, contributes to global warming and causes environmental damage to wildlife and natural areas. Another serious problem is that ecotourism can harm the local culture if the number of tourist exceeds the sustainable limit, or visitors disrupt the community.

DRAWBACKS

The problems associated with ecotourism may be resolved if all stakeholders work together to find ways to operate the industry in an environmentally sensitive matter. Industry leaders should work with governments and educate tourists to balance social, economic and environmental goals. Also, it is an important to establish working partnerships with everyone involved in the industry, especially with local communities, and encourage the accommodation sector to support the construction of more eco-hotels and eco-resorts.

SOLUTIONS

The problems associated with ecotourism may be resolved if all stakeholders work together to find ways to operate the industry in an environmentally sensitive matter. Industry leaders should work with governments and educate tourists to balance social, economic and environmental goals. Also, it is an important to establish working partnerships with everyone involved in the industry, especially with local communities, and encourage the accommodation sector to support the construction of more eco-hotels and eco-resorts.

THE SUSTAINABILITY DIMENSIONS

This diagram shows all the factors involved in a sustainable ecotourism industry. It includes the economic impact, protection of the environment, the tourists’ experience, and the benefits for the local community.

CONCLUSIONS

As tourism became more popular and the world faces more environmental challenges, it is important to find a way to support a sustainable industry that promotes the ecology in the areas tourists visit. If all stakeholders are aware of the potential to provide tourism with a positive, eco-friendly experience, and they can use this experience, the industry can succeed.

Many eco-tourists already use sustainable practices, and some government have excellent policies that protect the environment, the local communities and the industry. If everyone involved in the ecotourism industry is educated about the issues, all people can continue to enjoy the world’s natural beauty.

REFERENCES