

## ECOTURISM – A NEW APPROACH

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**Abstract.** *This research paper aims to explore the factors that surround eco-tourism, specifically the media coverage, monetary and social elements that might influence the efficacy of it. The method used to obtain the data presented in this project has been gathered using Google Survey and the help of 59 students from “Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava. The results of this study conclude that a larger population would practice eco-tourism if better information would be provided and the subject would have more media coverage.*

**Keywords:** *customs,heritage,natural,non-damaging,non-intrusive,sustainability*

### **Introduction**

Ecotourism has started in 1970 and it's a result of dissatisfaction with mass tourism and a concern regarding the sustainability of touristic heritage. This branch of tourism is based on three main virtue : Conservation, Communities, Interpretation. As a complement to popular tourism, ecotourism is based on exotic plants and animals, isolated cultures and the opportunity for personal growth. The importance of this touristic branch stems from the need to preserve touristic attractions and guarantee an, as close as possible to the original, experience. Also, eco-tourism has the aim to maintain local cultures of the host location, respecting their environment. Through interpretation of original experiences, humans are able to rediscover themselves and to become enriched with other points of view, virtues and thoughts.

### **Bases of Ecological Tourism**

Ecological Tourism has the purpose of minimizing the impact of foreign visitors on local environment thus conserving communities, local customs and touristic attractions. The International Ecotourism Society states that the principles that define this branch of tourism are the following:

- Minimize physical, social, behavioral, and psychological impacts.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry.
- Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries political, environmental, and social climates.
- Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities.
- Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous People in your community and work in partnership with them to create empowerment.

The three main pillars of eco-tourism are based on :

1. Conservation: a long lasting solution regarding mantaining the bio-cultural diversity and protecting the local inhabitants from the impact of foreign culture
2. Communities: local economy grows as the demand for tourism and a better infrastructure arises
3. Interpretation: eco-tourism provides greater understanding and apreciation for nature through, local society and culture

It is believed that the original experience is changing with every touristic group, becoming farther away from the authentic attraction it once was. In order to maintain the attraction as untouched as possible, eco-tourism provides a series of measures so the experience can be constant through waves of tourists. These measures regard the preservation of local communities, flora, fauna and natural attractions by being as non-invasive as possible. The best approach to conserve the touristic spot is to not leave anything behind (waste), to not vandalise the place or its surroundings, to not introduce foreign species of plants and animals etc. The only thing a tourist should be able to take from a place is a photo, thus having a souvenir that will not harm the host destination.

### **Survey regarding the impact of Eco-Tourism**

The target audience of this survey consists of students from “Stefan cel Mare” University from Suceava, the audience doesn't have an official background in ecologic tourism and most of the participants come from urban environment.

In order to research how familiar are the students from “Stefan cel Mare” University from Suceava with the concept of ecological tourism I created a survey on the main student group. Most of the survey questions were focused on how familiar are the students with this concept but also which factors interfere with practicing this branch of tourism. A vast majority of them said that they are familiar with this concept, 40 % from 40 responses were positive in this regard. As questions progress, 55% percent of students believe that eco-tourism is not enough promoted, which can be the main cause people are not practicing this branch of tourism .

Being asked if the ecological tourism would make a difference in the most targeted tourism destinations, the students responded positive. This far down the survey a trend becomes noticeable. Most respondents would practice this branch of tourism if more information were available. Even though some sources are available for information (Google, Books, Physical resources etc.), the students did not practice ecologic tourism in 42,5% of total cases. Furthermore an astonishing 40% of them mentioned that the lack of proper information is the main cause of not practicing safe and conservational tourism.

One of the most difficult question in the survey was regarding the monetary factors for this experience. As the audience asked are students, the monetary factor should be the one that weighs the most in their decision. Regardless of this fact, 50% of the respondents said that they are willing to pay more for an authentic experience.

As the tourism experiences are heavily adjusted to the audience, 75% of the people that responded to the survey agreed that an authentic experience is more important than one adjusted for their liking.

The last question on this survey addressed the fact that ecological tourism exist only because people practice it, being a collective effort. The majority of test subjects expressed their will to help ecological tourism exist, 68,3% of them agreeing on this fact.

### **Conclusions**

After reviewing the 10 questions on the survey, the vast majority of people are ready to make an effort to create a better tourism experience if they had enough information on the matter.

Some touristic destinations can and are destroyed by the number of tourists and their approach to traveling, some examples of this phenomena are : Kyoto (Japan), Hallstatt (Austria), Spanish Steps (Rome) etc. People will disregard the attraction, vandalizing it and leaving trash behind. In time this kind of behavior destroys the most precious wonders of Earth.

As more and more cases of damage created by people is documented, the most damage people make is trying to leave something behind, like a signature, so they can never leave the place. More often than not, this kind of signatures are destroying monuments, stones, old alleys and the damage could be irrecoverable. The path from tourist to vandal is short so the future generations of tourists should be taught how to behave near historic monuments and attractions.

Also there should exist a non-damaging way of “leaving a signature” accessible, for example photos of the location offered for free or a guest book.

Having in mind the main issue regarding eco-tourism (lack of information) can be solved by targeting the sources that the potential tourists are already approaching such as Google and books from the touristic domain. Promoting eco-tourism should be done using clear and simple materials that contain the steps that should be regarded when visiting a destination in order to help preserve it.

In order to find the right steps to take, I have googled the question “How to practice eco-tourism?” and *the wanderlust me (website)* had an article regarding the steps that can help eco-touristic enthusiasts. An example of these are :

- Say “no” to straws
- Walk while exploring (instead of petrol powered vehicles)
- Minimize your food consumption ( uneaten food should not go to waste because it was used only for esthetic and Instagram purposes)
- Do not accept plastic water bottles
- Buy from small, local retailers
- Do not purchase wildlife

In my opinion, in touristic destination should be signs advertising eco-tourism and the simple steps tourists can take immediately to help. Also the awareness regarding eco-tourism should be raised on transport means by which tourists get to the destination. Souvenirs created from waste can also be a helpful and powerful reminder of why eco-tourism is important (bracelets with water/mud from local beach and plastic collected from it, cups made from beach glass etc.).

To conclude this research, taking action should be registered through a tree step funnel : building awareness about eco-tourism by digital and printed means; influencing consideration by showing tourist the right path to take and driving tourist to action by helping them maintain the area as good as it originally was and even improve it.

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