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## **Ecotourism**

- With advances in transportation and information technology, even the most remote places on Earth are within reach of the traveler. In fact, tourism is now the world's largest industry, with nature tourism the fastest growing segment.
- People want to experience the nature and the world, but should try to do so in a way that doesn't impact the natural environment.
- In response to this increasing appreciation of nature experiences, a new travel ethic has arisen called ecotourism.
- Ecotourism is now defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education".
- Ecotourism is an increasingly popular form of tourism in which tourists seek out wild and scenic areas such as rainforests or mountains for an active and educational trip. The tourists are usually from the North America, Europe or Australia / New Zealand; their destination is often in the developing world.
- 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.
- Ecotourism possesses the following characteristics:
  - Conscientious, low-impact visitor behavior
  - Sensitivity towards, and appreciation of, local cultures and biodiversity
  - Support for local conservation efforts
  - Sustainable benefits to local communities
  - Local participation in decision-making

- Educational components for both the traveler and local communities
- Increased tourism to sensitive natural areas without appropriate planning and management can threaten the integrity of ecosystems and local cultures. The increase of visitors to ecologically sensitive areas can lead to significant environmental degradation. Likewise, local communities and indigenous cultures can be harmed in numerous ways by an influx of foreign visitors and wealth.
- 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 can provide a viable economic development alternative for local communities with few other income-generating options. Moreover, ecotourism can increase the level of education and activism among travelers, making them more enthusiastic and effective agents of conservation.
- Fundamentally, eco-tourism means making as little environmental impact as possible and helping to sustain the indigenous populace, thereby encouraging the preservation of wildlife and habitats when visiting a place. This is responsible form of tourism and tourism development, which encourages going back to natural products in every aspect of life. It is also the key to sustainable ecological development.
- Ecotourism sets out guidelines for how tourists should behave when visiting fragile environments:

Protect the environment - keep to footpaths, don't leave litter or start fires.

1. Don't interfere with wildlife - don't scare or feed the animals.
2. Protect resources - don't take too many showers or use air conditioning.
3. Support local communities - stay in locally owned accommodation and buy produce from local people.

4. Eat local food and drink - avoid products that have been imported from MEDCs.
  5. Respect local customs and traditions - some communities are offended when tourists wear inappropriate clothes in religious places, strip off on the beach or behave in a rowdy manner. Locals appreciate tourists who try to learn the language and show an interest in their culture.
- Ecotourism helps create a better appreciation of the world's natural resources, such as landscapes, wildlife and coral reefs. This stimulates a desire to protect the natural environment through the creation of national parks, wildlife preserves and marine parks. Funding for conservation work is generated by tourists through sources such as park entrance fees, camping fees, local taxes and safari tours. Ecotourism can also assist in the battle to protect the ecosystems of developing countries by providing alternative sources of employment, which limits the damage caused by over-fishing and land clearance for farming and logging.
  - Ecotourism is for environment-conscious people who love Nature, understand the negative influence of conventional tourism on the environment and want to minimize it. Ecotourism promotes recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, safe disposal of waste and garbage and creation of economic opportunities for the local communities.

#### References:

1. <https://www.ecotourism.org>
2. <http://untamedpath.com/>