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Green Tourism

Ecotourism is one of the forms of tourism that involves visiting fragile, unspoiled, and relatively undisturbed natural areas – in the remote wilderness or rural environments, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial mass tourism. Its goal may be to educate a traveller, to provide some money for environmental protection, to benefit the economic development and political empowerment of a particular local community, or to increase respect for different cultures, customs and traditions or for human rights. Since the 1980s ecotourism began to be considered as a critical endeavour by the environmentalists, so that our future generations may experience destinations relatively undisturbed by people's intervention. A lot of scientists and university programs use this description as the working definition of ecotourism.

According to the definition and main principles of ecotourism established by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) in 1990, ecotourism is “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”. Martha Honey describes seven characteristics of ecotourism:

- Involves travelling to natural areas;
- Minimizes impact on nature;
- Creates environmental awareness;
- Provides financial support for environmental conservation;
- Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local communities;
- Respects local culture, customs and traditions;
- Supports human rights and democratic movements.

Tour guides are an obvious and direct medium to communicate awareness among ecotourists. With the confidence of the ecotourists and intimate knowledge of the environment, they can actively discuss these conservation issues. A tour guide

training program in Tortuguero National Park in Costa Rica, for example, has helped to mitigate negative environmental impacts by providing information and regulating tourists on the beaches which are used by nesting endangered sea turtles.

Ecotourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of tourism industry, growing annually by 10–15% worldwide. Ecotourism is “the practice of low-impact, educational, ecologically and culturally sensitive travel that benefits local communities and host countries”. Many of the ecotourism projects are not meeting these standards. Even if some of the guidelines are being executed, the local communities are still facing other negative impacts. South Africa is one of the countries that are reaping significant economic benefits from ecotourism, but negative effects include forcing people to leave their homes, gross violations of fundamental human rights, and environmental hazards – far outweigh the medium-term economic benefits.

Rural tourism or agritourism is a kind of eco-tourism, which has recently appeared and continues to develop in many European countries. It is significant that in the developed world this kind of holiday is in demand not only for people of moderate means, but also for a wealthy part of the population. Agritourism enables urban residents to relax in the countryside in nature, relieve their stress, visit local attractions, see the modern life of rural citizens, folk customs traditions, and take part in agricultural work.

By promoting the development of small businesses in rural areas this kind of tourism enables urban residents to relax actively in private agriculture, and farmers to improve their financial issues.

The problems of rural tourism are the most important to define the legal status of this activity. The scope and types of the excursions that can be done in rural areas are very diverse. The most common type of the excursion activities in rural areas are local history. These tours cover nature and history, ethnography, architecture, biographies of famous people who were born or lived in the areas.

The basis for the preparation of the excursions in the countryside can be local history materials and memorial museums, both public and those which work on a

voluntary basis. Workers and activists of such activities should organize and conduct a search, methodical and excursion work in rural areas.

Green tourism has a lot of advantages. It contributes to solving major social and economic problems of the village:

1. employment of the rural population;
2. revenue growth and improvement of the living standards of the rural residents with relatively low financial costs;
3. improvement of the estates and villages, development of engineering and social infrastructure;
4. extension range of gardening;
5. implementation of on-site production of personal farming as finished goods;
6. preservation of local customs, folklore, crafts;
7. increase of the cultural and educational level of the rural population.

Green tourism can be a additional source of the replenishment of the local budgets. It does not require major investments and uses mainly private sources of capital. Green tourism enables to reduce the negative environmental effects of intense tourist activity.

Rural tourism in many countries may be the hallmark of the state in the international tourism market, as it is evidenced by the willingness of the foreigners to get acquainted with the historical and natural potential of different countries.

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