

## Eco Tourism

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Good day my fellow Lions. My name is Ulvi Sami and I am a member of Girne Ada Lions Club located in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

My talk today will be on Eco Tourism.

Let me start by giving some statistics

Global Tourism industry IS BIG

- It provides 230 million jobs and over 10% of the gross domestic product worldwide.
- If tourism were a country, it would have the 2nd largest economy, surpassed only by U.S.

IT IS GROWING

- 1950: 25 million international tourist arrivals.
- 2005: 800 million international tourist arrivals
- 2020: forecast is 1.56 billion international arrivals.

ECO - TOURISM IS GROWING EVEN FASTER

- Since the 1990s, Eco-Tourism has been growing 20% - 34% per year which is 3 times faster than the tourism industry as a whole.

WHATS MORE, ECO TOURISTS SPEND MORE

- In Dominica, in the Caribbean, "stay over" tourists using small, nature-based lodges spent 18 times more than cruise passengers spend while visiting the island.
- The daily expenditure of cultural tourists is €70 versus €52 for visitors on a touring holiday

## TOURISM IS MORE IMPORTANT TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

- Tourism is a principle "export" (foreign exchange earner) for 83% of developing countries, and the leading export for 1/3 of poorest countries.

## HOWEVER, TOURISM IN GENERAL ALSO HAS SOME NEGATIVE IMPACTS:

- There are 109 countries with coral reefs. In 90 of them reefs are being damaged by cruise ship anchors and sewage, by tourists breaking off chunks of coral, and by commercial harvesting for sale to tourists.
- Cruise ships in the Caribbean are estimated to produce more than 70,000 tons of waste each year
- An average 18-hole golf course soaks up at least 525,000 gallons of water a day - enough to supply the irrigation needs of 100 Malaysian farmers.

SO TO SUMMARIZE AND PUT IT IN PERSPECTIVE, tourism industry is growing as a whole but the eco-tourism segment is growing 3 times faster. Eco tourists spend more money than mass tourists. Eco tourism contributes more to the local economies than mass tourism. Tourism is very important for the economies of developing countries and is growing faster in those countries. Tourism is not without some serious negative impacts.

## HAVING GIVEN YOU SOME NUMBERS, LET US LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT WHAT IS ECO TOURISM

Eco-tourism is short for ecological tourism.

The Eco-Tourism Society defines it as "responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of the local people".

The Australian Commission on National Eco-Tourism Strategy calls it: "nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable".

Eco-Tourism is therefore all about *uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel*. This means that those who implement and participate in Eco-Tourism activities should follow the following principles:

- Travel to natural destinations
- Minimize impact on the environment and the local culture
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Respect local culture
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate.

A walk through the rainforest is not therefore eco-tourism unless that particular walk somehow benefits that environment and the people who live there. A loose interpretation of this definition allows many companies to promote themselves as something that they are not. If true eco-tourism is important to you, ask plenty of questions to determine if your trip will help "conserve and improve" the places you visit.

The philosophy of Eco tourism is very important so that future generations can experience the wonderful environment we have today. After all, the world that we inhabit today has been passed onto us by previous generations to improve, preserve and pass onto future generations.

However it is defined, the ultimate goal of Eco-Tourism should be to infuse the entire travel industry with the principles and practices of Eco-Tourism and thereby transform tourism into an environmentally and culturally sensitive activity that contributes to sustainable growth in developing countries.

THERE ARE HOWEVER SOME DRAWBACKS IN THE WAY THAT ECO-TOURISM IS PRACTICED TODAY

LET US LOOK AT SOME OF THESE:

*Eco tourism or eco terrorism?*

Mega-resorts, including luxury hotels, condominiums, shopping centers and golf courses, are increasingly established in nature reserves in the name of eco-tourism. These developments are sometimes protested as 'eco-terrorism'. Such projects build completely artificial landscapes, tending to irretrievably wipe out plant and wildlife species - even entire eco-systems.

There is therefore a widening belief that Eco-Tourism can be just as damaging as other forms of more traditional tourism. The trend towards eco-tourism holidays, presented as sustainable, nature-based and environmentally friendly, is now subject to considerable controversy.

There is also a relatively obvious contradiction. Namely any commercial venture into unspoiled, pristine land with or without the "eco" prefix must generate sufficient revenue. In order to do that, one has to have high passenger traffic, which inevitably means a higher pressure on the environment.

### *Eco-tourism is an eco-facade.*

There is also a view that many eco-tourism claims concerning its benefits are exaggerated or owe more to labeling and marketing than genuine sustainability. Not only are such projects repeatedly planned and carried out without local consent and support, but they often threaten local cultures, economies, and natural resource bases. Some critics regard eco-tourism as an 'eco-facade': a tactic concealing the mainstream tourism industry's consumptive and exploitative practices by 'greening' it.

### *No local benefits*

Contrary to claims, local people do not necessarily benefit from eco-tourism. Tourism-related employment is greatly overrated: locals are usually left with low-paying service jobs such as tour guides, porters, and food and souvenir vendors. Most money, as with conventional tourism, is made by foreign airlines, tourism operators, and developers who repatriate profit to their own economically more advanced countries.

### *Romantic devastation*

Again, some experts feel that eco-tourism's claim that it preserves and enhances local cultures is highly insincere. Ethnic groups, an 'exotic' backdrop to natural scenery and wildlife, are viewed as a major asset in attracting visitors.

### *The Dangers of Eco-Tourism Lite*

Much of what is marketed as Eco-Tourism is simply conventional mass tourism wrapped in a thin veneer of green. What we can call Eco-Tourism lite, is propelled by travel agents and tour operators, which promote quick, superficially "green" visits within conventional packages. A sizable segment of the traveling public wants this type of tourism. Increasing numbers of older, wealthier and "softer" travelers have begun opting for comfort over conservation. These travelers are typically "entertained by nature, but not unduly concerned with its preservation".

### *Mismanagement*

Governments often lack the commitment or capability to manage Eco-Tourism sites effectively. The regulations for environmental protection are vaguely defined, costly to implement, hard to enforce, and uncertain in effectiveness. Government regulatory agencies, as political bodies, are susceptible to making decisions that spend budget on politically beneficial but environmentally unproductive projects.

AS WE HAVE SEEN, THIS FAST GROWING SEGMENT OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY HAS ADMIRABLE OBJECTIVES BUT IS NOT WITHOUT DRAWBACKS. LET US NOW LOOK AT WHAT OUR RESPONSIBILITIES ARE AS INDIVIDUALS.

SIMPLY PUT, OUR RESPONSIBILITIES ARE, to Understand, make others understand and raise awareness about the need to strengthen certain aspect of eco-tourism as it develops:

Firstly whenever possible we should support all efforts towards Regulation and accreditation.

Many environmentalists have argued for a global standard of accreditation, differentiating Eco-Tourism companies based on their level of environmental commitment. A national or international regulatory board would enforce accreditation procedures, with representation from all the stake holders. The decisions of the board would be sanctioned by governments, so that non-compliant companies would be banned from using the Eco-Tourism brand.

Some experts suggest a Green Stars System, based on the defining criteria of eco-tourism. Eco-tourists would be confident of a genuine Eco-Tourism experience when they see the higher star rating.

Secondly, we must support all efforts to better educate eco-tourists. More initiatives should be carried out to improve their awareness, sensitize them to environmental issues, and care about the places they visit.

Tour guides are an obvious and direct medium to communicate awareness.

Thirdly, as large scale eco-tourism lacks sustainability, we should support and encourage small scale, slow growth, and locally based Eco-Tourism. Local peoples have a vested interest in the well being of their community, and are therefore more accountable to environmental protection than multinational corporations. The lack of control, westernization, adverse impacts to the environment, loss of culture and traditions outweigh the benefits of establishing large scale Eco-Tourism.

**WE HAVE LOOKED AT THE STATISTICS AND WHAT ECO TOURISM IS. WE HAVE ALSO LOOKED AT SOME OF ITS DRAWBACKS. SO, IS IT A GOOD THING? SHOULD WE PROMOTE IT OR SHOULD WE ABANDON IT?**

Before drawing some conclusions, it is worthwhile noting the irony that as eco-tourism picks up, with all its ideals, so will its contribution to global warming. This is because airlines contribute about 2% of global carbon emissions. As an example, a round trip journey between London and New York emits 1.5 metric tons of carbon dioxide per passenger.

Overall, there is no doubt that approached properly and seriously, eco-tourism is a good thing as it creates a win-win situation for all the stakeholders. However, as we have seen, the greed in human beings that is motivated by excessive profits is likely to create an industry that is far from the ideals and principles that it set out to abide by.

As responsible members of our society it is the duty of all of us to raise awareness and strive to put in place the mechanisms that will prevent eco-tourism from going against its own principles.