Wildlife Conservation: Should The Tourism Industry Promote Ecotourism

People have traveled around the world for as long as we can remember, but it was not until recent years that citizens have begun to worry about the harmful impacts of tourism on the environment and local culture. With the population increasing and resources becoming scarce, concern for this problem grows as time continues. With these interests in mind, several different niches have been developed, one of which includes ecotourism. Ecotourism has been seen as a solution to reverse the negatives effects of tourism on the world, which is a motive for the tourism industry to promote ecotourism. However, the establishment of ecotourism has been questioned for its fulfillment of its goals and its purpose. This produces insecurities of how well this niche market truly is for the wellbeing of the planet, thus it should not be a promoted type of tourism.

Jonathan Nash, “Eco-Tourism: Encouraging Conservation or Adding to Exploitation?” defines ecotourism as “a creative way of marrying the goals of ecological conservation and economic development.” This explains that ecotourism has a purpose of conservation as well as sustainable development. Continuing, the principles of ecotourism can be concluded as non-destructive use, protection and restoration of biodiversity, promotion of environmentally sustainable development, environmental awareness, direct economic benefit for local people, and the well-being of stakeholders (Bricker). In summation, ecotourism is a niche market that focuses on natural environments and its preservation.

The supporting argument on promoting ecotourism is supported by two main reasons, the first of which is that ecotourism helps with the preservation of a given destination.

A promoting example for the reason ecotourism helps with the preservation of a given destination, which supports the thesis that ecotourism should be promoted by the tourism industry, is the source “The Bottom Line: Getting Biodiversity Conservation Back into Ecotourism” by Katrina Brandon and Richard Margoluis in The Ecotourism Equation: Measuring the Impacts. Katrina Brandon and Richard Margoluis were asked to contribute to the bulletin series of the paper The Ecotourism Equation: Measuring the Impacts for the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Katrina Brandon is currently in independent consulting since 2010 and has a PhD in M.S in Development Planning and Economics. Richard Margoluis is the chief measurement, evaluation, and learning officer at the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, with a Phd in Epidemiology. This document presents the key benefits of ecotourism for conservation assembled into five main areas. These are, 1. A source of financing for biodiversity conservation, especially in legally protected areas; 2. Economic justification for protected areas; the lack of clarity concerning goals, objectives, and definitions found within ecotourism projects. 3. Economic alternatives for local people to reduce exploitation on protected areas, wildlands, and wildlife resources; 4. Constituency-building which promotes biodiversity conservation; and 5. An impetus for private biodiversity conservation efforts. These benefits can involve stakeholders in other sectors, as it promotes the conservation objective (Brandon et. al. 1996). In this way, ecotourism should be promoted because it helps to preserve the local environment.

This source is worth evaluating because it contains valuable information from a seemingly reputable source. This, being a Yale article, is esteemed as having authentic reports with contributors that have rigorous training on the specific subject. However, this article could have some amount of vested interest, meaning that information could be given with intentions of personal or financial gain. This is due in part of Katrina Brandon working for the Parks in Peril Program she was working at during the publishing of the source. The Parks in Peril Program is a 62 million dollar USAID funded project administered by TNC, also known as The Nature Conservancy. “The program was an emergency effort to protect the most important and imperiled natural areas in the hemisphere by working to build the capacity of independent, self-sustaining conservation organizations” (http://expomaquinarias.com). This illustrates that the data presented could be present in a way that would make others invest in the program, which hinders the overall reliability.

The second reason of the thesis “the tourism industry should promote ecotourism” is that ecotourism encourages conservation, and provides the benefits of economic growth within the area. The source “Eco-Tourism: Encouraging Conservation or Adding to Exploitation?” by Jonathan Nash, proves this claim. He explains that this tourism sector is growing rapidly, due in part of population growth and continual urbanization. Ecotourism provides what is becoming more and more rare; biodiverse land. With that in mind, Nash provides compelling evidence of the influence of ecotourism. “The eco-tourism industry, which is growing rapidly, has emerged as one of the most important sectors of the international tourism industry, making up 7 percent of the world tourism market. In the Asia-Pacific region alone, eco-tour operators report growth rates of 10 percent to 25 percent a year. Demand for quality ecotourism destinations will continue to grow as urban congestion, pollution, crowding, and concern for the natural environment all increase” (Nash).

Not only that, the source also claims that ecotourism helps animal conservation by stating “Wildlife pays so wildlife stays” (Nash). For further explanation, it is said that “In Amboseli Park in Kenya, one much-publicized study estimated that each lion was worth US$27,000 and each elephant herd was worth US$610,000 in tourist revenue per year. Eco-tourism often proves to be a more sustainable development strategy than extractive uses of the land such as logging, grazing, mining, or agriculture. In one economic assessment of rainforest land use in Bahia, Brazil, Conservation International determined that logging the forest provided an initial high return, followed by little income. Conversion of the forest into pasture land was even less profitable and required substantial initial investment. The study concluded that ecotourism provided the most income over the long term” (Nash). The source thus concludes that ecotourism not only helps conservation, but also inspires future pursuits of viable means of tourism.

“Eco-Tourism: Encouraging Conservation or Adding to Exploitation?” is a seemingly dependable source, with it coming from a valid website named The Population Reference Bureau (PRB). It is a private, nonprofit organization that specializes in collecting and supplying statistics necessary for research and/or academic purposes focused on the environment, and health and structure of populations. Jonathan Nash, an author for PRB, is a former policy analyst with a focus on people, health, and the planet. Within this article, Nash sources every piece of information, giving credit to those who created the data. Doing so makes this source reputable, and able to be fact-checked. This source was very natural, especially considering this article acknowledges both sides of the argument.

Despite its strengths, it also has weaknesses. PRB asks for donations, which hinders the overall independency of the source. It also opens up the possibility that authors try to gain donors by their work, telling them what they want to hear. Of course this is only a possibility, therefore this source is highly reliable.

The argument against the tourism industry promoting ecotourism is reasoned into two main points, any form of tourism has a negative impact on wildlife, and ecotourism can lead to the exploitation of biodiverse lands.

The issue of tourism negatively impacting wildlife is supported by the report Impact of Tourism on Wildlife Conservation. Ecotourism in mainly located in biodiverse lands, which also includes the many species of animals that live there and that are essential to the ecosystem. This means it coordinates very closely with wildlife observing. Impact of Tourism on Wildlife Conservation explains the impact; “Wildlife watching tourism can result in damage to sites and habitats where species are watched. One dramatic example of this is the damage that is commonly reported to coral reefs that are regularly visited by too many recreational divers. Damage to coral destroys reef organisms and reduces the habitat available to fish for spawning and feeding. This in turn reduces the abundance of marine life at these sites, and ultimately makes them much less attractive to divers” (Leisanyane et al). The source also claims “Wildlife watching tourism can have adverse effects on wildlife in three main ways – by causing changes in their behavior, changes to their physiology, or damage to their habitats. Wildlife species are often particularly vulnerable to the effects of disturbance during their breeding periods and juvenile stages of offspring. Any disruption of courtship and mating behaviors, or later on when offspring are being cared for, reduces overall breeding success, and therefore is a serious threat to population maintenance and survival” (Leisanyane et al). With the upbringing of ecotourism facilities also means damage to the ecosystem and habitats, including “deforestation, draining of wetlands, and intensified or unsustainable use of land” (Leisanyane et al). The report also sources the Food and Agriculture Organization, stating that FAO, 2010, research warns the adverse effects from ecotourism when the streams of tourism grow (Leisanyane et al). To interpret, when tourism in unregulated in a given area the land becomes overworked and it becomes more likely to affect animals and their behavior negatively. Thus, ecotourism is a negative figure when representing the wildlife.

The rationale behind choosing this as a source is the globallity that is provided when sourcing this, as well as the overall potency. It says within the document that “this publication was prepared by the INTOSAI Working Group on Environmental Auditing (WGEA). The WGEA aims to encourage the use of audit mandates and audit methods in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development by Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs)” (Impact of Tourism on Wildlife Conservation). The company has many members world-wide, with many from Africa holding leadership positions, meaning there are many views, all of which have manner of global perspective. The Working Group on Environmental Auditing (WGEA) aims to improve the use of audit mandate and audit instruments in the field of environmental protection policies, therefore the information is to an extent, neutral. Not only, those who contributed are specialized in auditing, being from a professional organization of supreme audit institutions.

The information from the source given is lacking in data that proves what is being claimed, and is therefore a weakness. The source also generalizes, assuming almost every wilderness niche market business not only has the ability to come in close contact with an animal, but to do so frequently enough that it alters the animal’s behavior. These weaknesses decrease the

source’s overall worth, but not enough to where it is not valuable.

Reason 2 explains because ecotourism can lead to exploitation, the tourism industry should not promote ecotourism. Sujata Narayan, the author of “Below the Surface: The Impacts of Ecotourism on Costa Rica”, states that over-visitation compounds the problem. Narayan goes on to say that Costa Rican policies direct ecotourists into specially designated areas for ecotourism, which alleviates pressure on other fragile environments. What then happens is that areas that are already strained, become more strained by the presence of humans (Narayan). Narayan then presents “(Visitation to Select Costa Rican National Parks, 1996) represents the total number of visits to various national parks in 1996. As can be seen in this figure, there are some areas that receive well close to 200,000 visitors a year. Together, they account for close to 65% of visitation to the national parks. These parks, however, are negligible in terms of their share of the protected land area” (Narayan). Concluding, there is an issue of carrying capacity in these parks. A few of these problems of ecotourism are caused by of lack of funding, poor park management, and not monitoring programs too closely. To provide and example, Narayan states, “ while significant investment has been made in creating a national park system geared towards ecotourism, overall funding falls severely short of the amount necessary to support adequate park management, infrastructure, and programming. As a result, problems such as trail deterioration, habitat disruption, pollution, and litter are becoming more commonplace” (Narayan).

Even though this article provides significant data points, sources, and intelligible reasoning, the sourcing of the article is disreputable, as there is no information on the author. This means one cannot know whither he or she has any training on the subject, vested interest, or has the reputation of false articles. Also, the data provided is out-dated, it being from over two decades ago.

However upon further research, it was found that other, much more reputable sources used the article as a source, giving it the incentive of being correct and very functional.

When I first started my research for my question, I thought my topic had one obvious answer; ecotourism should be promoted. As I did further research I began to realize that the answer is far more complicated than that. The answer was dependent upon what entails ecotourism, which is a different definition within many different sources. Ecotourism is viewed from the standpoint of being a scheme to attract more customers, to a beneficial organization that helps conserve biodiversity. My original opinion was weakened with this understanding, mostly because of the weaknesses found within ecotourism. Ecotourism can be used positively, for example contributing to the local economy and ecosystem, yet it can also be used negatively, such as an excuse for exploitation. Throughout my research I still wonder the definite difference of ecotourism and sustainable tourism, of which sustainable tourism is held in much higher regards. If I were to do another research project related to the question “Should the tourism industry promote ecotourism?”, I would study the effects of tourism on wildlife and the best ways to reverse and combat these effects. In return, I hope that researchers will study more sustainable means of development, as well as win-win scenarios for humans and the wellbeing of the planet. Through my indefinite opinion on this topic, it is clear that it needs to be further researched.

Works Cited

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