



Versatility in Hospitality Industry Around the Globe A Case Study on Sustainable Tourism-Costa “RICA”

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Abstract: *This case study reflects on the Costa Rican experiences with ecotourism by assessing the positive and negative environmental, economic and social impacts of eco-tourism development at four tourist destinations-Manuel Antonio, Monteverde Tortuguero and ASOMAFO. These destinations represent different stages of tourism development. The assessment shows that the development of ecotourism has a dilemma. Compared to alternative land-use options, ecotourism remains a promising development strategy. However, it should be embedded in a broader process of capacity building. The article evaluates some indicators of sustainable tourism in Armenia using the following seven dimensions: tourism assets, tourism activity, tourism-related linkages, tourism-related leakages, environmental and social sustainability, overall infrastructure, attractiveness. The investigation of the topic shows that the whole world walks towards sustainability. The global challenges are of high importance and every country must think about the negative effects of global warming, pollution, degradation, poverty, etc. The empirical analysis shows that there are many problems in sustainable development of tourism in Armenia. The research empirically confirms and theoretically proves that Armenia has a great potential for tourism development and steps must be undertaken to increase the environmental, cultural sustainability, develop infrastructures, raise competitiveness, etc. The main conclusion is that for sustainable development of tourism it is necessary to raise public consciousness and knowledge of other aspects of ecology and sustainable tourism, use renewable energy sources, ensure sustainable landfill and waste management, use electric or hybrid vehicles, etc. Sustainable tourism development in Armenia should contribute to socio-economic, cultural and environmental development of the country. The results of the research can be useful for the state organs, private sector, and also for researchers in the tourism sphere..*

Keywords: Destination, Tourism, Ecotourism, Development

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, ecotourism has pushed its way to the forefront as one of the preferred tools for conservation and community development in many rural areas. Its attractiveness rests in its potential to provide local economic benefits while also maintaining ecological resource integrity through low-impact, non-consumptive use of local resources. Nevertheless, success in ecotourism may lead to failure over the long term. Successful ecotourism initiatives may draw increasing interest and a correspondingly higher number of tourists, thus intensifying negative impacts such as solid waste generation, habitat disturbance, and trail erosion. Such impacts could seriously threaten the resources upon which ecotourism depends.[1]

The research presented here explores ecotourism's potential as a tool for promoting conservation and community development. After reviewing the existing literature related to ecotourism's social and environmental benefits and impacts, we examine these benefits and impacts more closely, drawing upon field research from Costa Rica, a country widely acclaimed for embracing ecotourism as a national conservation and development strategy. We conclude with a discussion of ecotourism's place in the broader policy arena and some measures which could improve ecotourism's capacity to positively influence conservation and community development.

II. SUMMARY

What is Ecotourism?

While we do not intend to enter the debate about what constitutes ecotourism, it is worth noting that definitions and philosophies differ. The International Ecotourism Society (2001) offers a succinct and widely accepted definition: 'Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.' The World Conservation Union (IUCN) also provides a slightly expanded description of ecotourism's key characteristics:

[Ecotourism is] environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations (cited in Brandon, 1996).

With the overwhelming embrace of ecotourism as an environmentally sustainable and economically viable conservation strategy, scholars and practitioners have expressed concern that opportunistic tourism operators are capitalising on ecotourism's appeal to promote activities with little or no true attention to environmental and social responsibility (Boo, 1990; Honey, 1999b; Wight, 1994) Acott et al. (1998) describe this situation by offering an extensive discussion of 'deep ecotourism' versus 'shallow ecotourism'. This discussion, premised on principles associated with deep ecology, maintains that deep ecotourism emphasises nature's intrinsic value, the importance of community self-determination and participation, and a preference for small-scale operations. Shallow ecotourism, on the other hand, involves management decisions based primarily utilitarian values. The authors maintain that only deep ecotourism offers possibilities for long-term sustainability.

Ecotourism Benefits:

Under ideal circumstances, ecotourism provides local economic benefits (e.g. employment, improved infrastructure, increased business for local stores) while also maintaining ecological resource integrity through low-impact, non-consumptive resource use. Those who advocate ecotourism as a viable conservation option cite its potentially non-consumptive nature and its financial promise (Jacobson & Robles, 1992). Unlike many sustainable harvesting initiatives, eco tourism consistently provides a financial return per hectare competitive with current land uses. For instance, Ceballos-La scuráin (1996) cites a study estimating A mboseli National Park's financial value (attributable mostly to tourism) at US\$40 /ha, as compared to less than US\$0.80 /ha when used for agriculture. Another study by Munn (1991, as cited by Brandon, 1996) found that each free-flying macaw in Peru generated between US\$750 and US\$ 4700 annually in tourism revenues. Ecotourism can also substantially contribute to the local economy, especially when local residents are involved in its management and operations (Lindberg et al., 1996; Wunder, 2000).

In some cases, ecotourism financially supports protected areas through tourism-related park fees. The mere existence of an ecotourism lodge increases the number of people visiting the area and, consequently, the gross revenues contributed to park management. Moreover, in many cases ecotourism offers the economic justification necessary to establish a protected area (Brandon, 1996). Ecotourism can also offer success above and beyond that of a traditional integrated conservation and development project. Because ecotourism brings people closer to local markets, it can be an important, low-cost mechanism for local businesses and artisans to market and sell their goods (Healy, 1994). Thus, ecotourism serves as a spin-off for other businesses.

Brandon (1996) also discusses ecotourism's role in building a constituency to promote conservation and providing an impetus for private conservation efforts. Under such circumstances, conservation benefits can extend beyond the immediate scale of the ecotourism venture, as ecotourists (national and international) become active advocates for conservation in the area visited, as well as in their home towns or countries. Where ecotourism serves as an impetus to private conservation efforts, it essentially expands the scope and diversity of protected areas.

Ecotourism Drawbacks:

Ironically, however, ecotourism's success may actually lead to its demise (Boo, 1990; Jacobson & Robles, 1992). Successful ecotourism initiatives may draw increasing interest and a correspondingly higher number of tourists, thus increasing negative impacts such as solid waste generation, habitat disturbance, and forest degradation resulting from



trail erosion. Such impacts could seriously threaten the resources upon which ecotourism depends. Jacobson and Lopez (1994, as cited in Brandon, 1996: 415) assert that 'ecotourism cannot be viewed as a benign, non-consumptive use of natural resources.' Ecuador's Galapagos Islands offer a notable example of the negative impact of nature-based tourism. In 1974 the Galapagos National Park Management Plan called for a limit of 12,000 tourists per year. Surpassing this limit each year, the 1991 Galapagos Global Tourism Management Plan dropped the overall maximum limits (Fundación Natura & WWF, 1997). The large increase in numbers has resulted in erosion along sensitive trails, plant and animal disturbance, and a general decline in the quality of the tourism experience (Brandon, 1996).

In addition to its potential environmental drawbacks, ecotourism also often fails to provide widespread economic benefits. Many scholars question ecotourism's contribution to local development, asserting that little or no ecotourism revenue reaches local people (Healy, 1994; Jacobson & Robles, 1992; McLaren, 1998). For example, Bookbinder et al. (1998), in their survey of residents in Nepal's Royal Chitwan National Park, found that only 6% of surveyed households earned income directly or indirectly from ecotourism. Lindberg et al. (1996) allude to a common concern that ecotourism creates relatively few jobs. Even those who profit financially from tourism find it to be an unstable income source subject to seasonal fluxes, as well as economic and political events (Epler Wood, 1998; Jacobson & Robles 1992).

Tourism, in general, can also contribute to the disintegration of local communities' social and cultural structures (Boo, 1990 McLaren, 1998). While many claim that ecotourism has less serious adverse effects on local people than mass tourism, the literature suggests there is little difference (Brandon, 1996). Brandon maintains that tourism's most serious impact may be the 'commodification' of culture, wherein people and their cultures become marketable commodities. In addition, tourism may bring rapid changes that erode community cohesion (Honey, 1999a; McLaren, 1998).



Tourism Development In Four Costa Rica Area:

The Manuel Antonio region on the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica is easily accessible from San José. The combination of easy accessibility, growing investments and scenic beauty made the region one of the most visited areas in the country. Tourism in the region began in the 1960s when a road was built from San José to Quepos. In 1972, on the insistence of the local communities, the national government created a recreation park to preserve remaining areas of natural coastal vegetation (J. Badilla 2002, personal communication). Later, in an attempt to protect it from the damage caused by tourism, the area was reclassified as a National Park (Manuel Antonio National Park; MANP). In 1979, MANP was visited by 30,000 people. In the 1980s, Northern Americans started tourism businesses here, and the tourism industry really took off. It is estimated that in 2003 around 200,000 tourists—mostly foreigners—visited the region (Cordero 2004). Since then, the number of visitors to the Manuel Antonio region has increased even more (M. Esperla, 2002/2005 personal communication). Tourism in the Manuel Antonio region is not solely nature based. A study by Ankersmid and Kelder (2001) revealed that most tourists (61%) were interested in the combination of nature and beaches. Only, 17% of tourists mentioned nature as the main reason for visiting the area.

The Monteverde region is situated in the Northwestern part of Costa Rica on the Tilaran Mountain range around the Continental Divide. The altitude of the area varies from about 600 to 1,842 m. Tropical Montane Cloud Forest, one of



the world's most threatened ecosystems, covers much of the Monteverde region (Nadkarni and Wheelwright 2000). There are three main protected areas in the region--the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve (MCFP, founded in 1972). Bosque Eterno de los Niños (BEN, founded in 1986) and the Santa Elena Reserve (SER, founded in 1992). Although scientific tourism in the Monteverde region started earlier, commercial tourism didn't really take off until the 1980s. This surge was partly due to a documentary broadcast by the BBC in 1978. The creation of the BE and SER helped the region gain further fame as a green tourist location (Aylward et al. 1996). Still, because the area is relatively isolated due to its bad traffic connections, tourism numbers have never risen as high as in the Manuel Antonio region. MCFP, which almost all tourists to this area visit, had almost 55,000 visitors in 2000 (Burlingame 2000). As in the Manuel Antonio region, the number of tourists to the Monteverde region has increased rapidly in the last couple of years to an estimated 75,000 in 2004 (M. Cruz, 2005, personal communication).

The Tortuguero region, a backwater area in the province of Limón, is situated on the Caribbean Coast. The region is relatively isolated as all traffic is water based. Getting to the region requires a boat trip of at least 45 min. Swamps combined with tropical rainforest are the region's main ecosystems. With a record of over 2,600 different species of plants and trees, Tortuguero's biodiversity is very high (Solano Marín 1992). Tortuguero National Park (TNP) was created in 1975 to protect sea turtles. The region began to attract a few tourists in the late 1980s. Since 1996, the annual number of visitors to NP has grown from 9,000 to an estimated 80,000 persons in 2004. This year around 90% of all visitors were foreign. Mostly, nature lovers visit the region. Apart from natural beauty, the region has no other tourist attractions. Tortuguero hardly receives individual visitors as most tourists arrange a package tour in San José. This consists of the trip to the region and an overnight stay in one of a limited number of lodges. (D. Loth, 2002/2005, personal communication; Reyes and Troëng 2002; Harrison and Troëng 2005).

The Asociación Comunal para el Manejo Forestal (ASCOMAFOR) stimulates com-munal development and forest protection in the rural-mixed tropical lowlands. ASCO MAFOR is situated in the province of Alajuela, a 3.5-h car drive from San José. In 2001 TACOMA FOR initiated a community-based tourism project in the communities of Ouebrada Grande, Santa Elena, Garabito and San Marcos. They work together with Ecoteach (a United States/Costa Rican-based conservation organisation). The four com-munities each independently try to provide tourists with facilities. ASCOMAFOR unites them by promoting tourism and by providing resources. Annually, 850 tourists (mostly youngsters aged 11-18) live with Costa Rican families and follow cultural, ecological (reforestation) and horticultural programs. Recently, a women's organisation has taken the initiative to transform part of their homes to cater for independent tourists. In 2004, they received 218 visitors (J. P. Ruiz, 2002, personal communication; O. Vargas, 2002/2005 personal communication). All tourists in the region are foreign.

Economic impacts of tourism in the research areas:

Economically, the Manuel Antonio and the Monteverde region benefit from an increase in foreign exchange as a result of tourist spending in hotels, restaurants and souvenirs shops. In the Monteverde region, almost all of this money stays in the region. For example, many of the handicrafts sold are also produced here. Tourism has diversified the local economy rather than resulted in a loss of other resource bases (Burlingame 2000; M. A. Méndez 2002, personal communication; W. Parejeles, 2002/2005, personal communication) However, in the Manuel Antonio region, local ownership of tourist facilities is very low which causes much economic leakage out of the region (X. Delgado, 2002, personal communication; Duim et al. 2001). Also, contrary to the Monteverde region, only few handicrafts are produced here, so the linkages between tourism and other economic sectors are weak (G. Acuña, 2002, personal communication; A. C. Alvarado, 2002, personal communication; Duim et al. 2001). Both regions suffer from inflation of local prices, which makes it difficult for local people to make ends meet (G. Acuña, 2002, personal communication; Chamberlain 2000; X. Delgado, 2002, personal communication).

Although foreign money is spent in the Tortuguero region, the emphasis on package tours means that most money is made outside the region and that there is little room for local entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, tourism has brought some more money to the local economy, especially to local guides. Nowadays, the region is very much dependent on tourism and subject to inflation (D. Loth, 2002/2005, personal communication; V. Vargas, 2002/2005, personal communication; S. Troëng, 2005, personal communication; Place 1998: 115). The small scale of tourism with ASCOMA FOR brings only little extra income to the region. On the other hand, tourism is community based, which means that it only employs



locals, and all foreign exchange stays within the region. No other economic drawbacks are observed (T. Rodríguez, 2002, personal communication; C. E. Sibaja, 2002/ 2005, personal communication).

Social impacts of tourism in the research area:

Tourism in both the Manuel Antonio and the Monteverde region has stimulated locals to improve their education (e.g., the private college of ecotourism). Medical care has also, and women have gained empowerment (C. Aruya, 2002, personal communication; M. Gonzales, 2002/2005, personal communication; Koningen 1996; J. Vargas, 2002, personal communication). Support given to local culture in the Monteverde region is another positive aspect of tourism. In the Manuel Antonio region, on the other hand, cultural disintegration is perceived, especially between different generations (Arts and Gudden 2002; Delgado personal communication). In both regions, the growing number of tourists and immigrants has caused community organisation to diminish. In the Monteverde region, this has caused the community development planning system to stop functioning effectively (N. Scrimshaw, 2002, personal communication). Also, the increased access to alcohol and an increase in crime rates are considered troublesome in these regions (Acuña et al. 2000; Chaves, personal communication; Koningen 1996; Moffat 2000; F. Nuñez. 2002. personal communication). Drug abuse and prostitution are said to have become troublesome in the Manuel Antonio region as well. Another negative social aspect of tourism in the Manuel Antonio region is that the higher prices in this region cause locals to be excluded from some tourist facilities and parts of the coastal area (Duim et al. 2001; Verger, personal communication).

In the Tortuguero region, the package tour structure limits the contacts between locals and tourists. Also, local people appear to make little use of the recreational facilities. Tourism development has nevertheless slightly stimulated the improvement of education infrastructure and medical facilities in the region (J. Madden, 2002, personal communication; J. Montana, 2002, personal communication; E. Orlando, 2002, personal communication). Following the influx of tourists, women also gained empowerment. The Women's Association that manages the recycling plant exemplifies this (J. Madden, 2002 personal communication). However, frictions about how the incoming communal money should be used have been reported too. This has had a negative effect on the way people deal with environmental and social issues. Also, alienation has taken place in the community, possibly as a result of the influx of tourism workers (D. Loth, 2002/2005 personal communication). Tourism with ASCOMA FOR integrates local education and culture in the tourist experience and stimulates intercultural exchanges. Women are the leading force behind tourism with ASCOMAFOR, and in this way, they have gained empowerment. Unfortunately, the positive effects of tourism remain limited due to the small scale of tourism. On the other hand, no negative social aspects of tourism were mentioned either (G. Alvarez, 2002, personal communication; G. Espinoza, 2002, personal communication; M. Hernandez, 2002, personal communication; O. Vargas, 2002/2005 personal communication).[2]

The growth of the eco-lodge:



Lapa Rios Eco Lodge



One recent eco-tourism development has been the provision of eco-lodges – accommodation ‘in tune’ with the environment and run by local people. Originally these lodges were very basic, with a couple of beds in wooden huts and little else but, as the expectations of tourists have grown, so has the level of luxury.

In Costa Rica there are still reasonably priced options available. On the Caribbean coast, for example, the Selva Bananito lodge is located on an 850 ha farm dedicated to providing holiday accommodation and associated activities. Built from wood discarded by loggers, the number of guests is limited. There is no electricity, solar energy being used to heat the water. Biodegradable soaps are used for washing, glass and plastic is recycled, and drinking and cooking water is purified using bacteria, enzymes and water lilies. The owners, the Stein family, have set up a charitable trust to educate people about the rainforest and provide activities such as jungle hikes and birdwatching. Prices are around £250 for a three-day stay.

There are hundreds of lodges in Costa Rica. Along with the cheaper ones, there are some of the world’s most opulent and expensive options. The Rainforest Package at the multi award-winning Lapa Rios lodge, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, for instance, costs around £2,500 per person over the Christmas period.

The main lodge and restaurant is connected to 16 private bungalows (Figure 3) by a series of walkways, all made with sustainable materials and thatched roofs. Staff from surrounding villages are employed as guides, cooks, waiters and cleaners. Among the activities available are overnight jungle tours, educational walks to find medicinal plants, dolphin watching and surfing lessons.

Lapa Rios has won many awards from international travel magazines such as Conde Nast Traveller and Forbes. However, along with many lodges in Costa Rica, it is owned by expatriates from the United States, rather than local people. This has brought criticism that the eco-tourism sector has few benefits, apart from local employment (which may be poorly paid), for nearby communities.



Eco-adventure holidays:

Being one of the first countries to embrace eco-tourism, Costa Rica has benefited enormously from its international reputation. Over the last decade, however, competition for the eco-tourist dollar has grown. Many MEDCs have increased their market share and have been joined by LEDCs including Madagascar, Borneo and Namibia – all hoping to become the ‘next big thing’.

Costa Rica, with its well-educated and entrepreneurial population, has not been slow to react and its natural resources are now being used to appeal to a different sector of the market. Less drawn to bird- and wildlife-watching (although these still appeal as part of the holiday), young, single professionals and families with a larger disposable income want to take part in more active eco-adventure holidays. Costa Rican-owned companies such as Aventuras Naturales and Rios Tropicales, who were originally involved in the development of the country’s white-water rafting business, have now expanded to take advantage of this eco-adventure market. Activities they offer include:

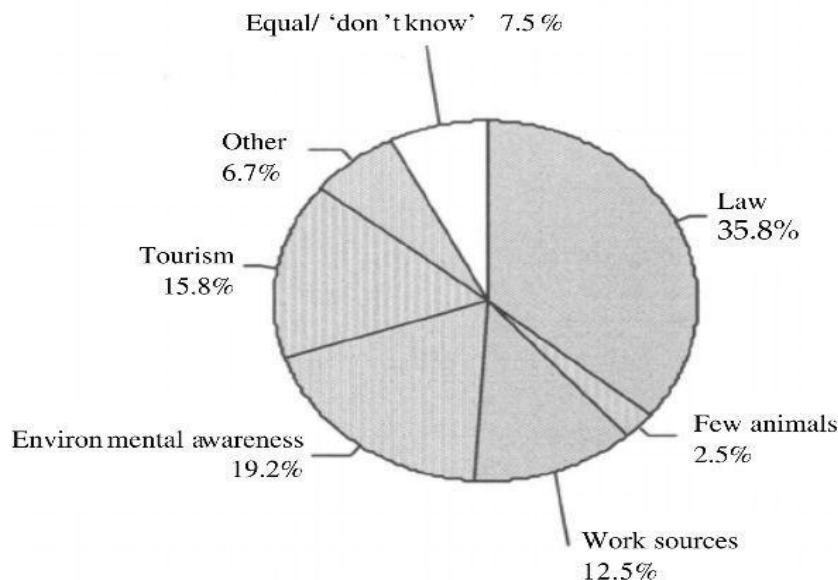
- Flying through the canopy of the rainforest on zip wires. The largest of these is located near volcan arenal and involves being hurled at speeds of up to 40mph along 700 metre-long cables, 65 metres above the forest floor.
- Other canopy adventures where participants travel through the trees using ropes, harnesses and treetop platforms.



- Horse riding, ranging from gentle meanders taking in mud baths near active volcanoes to high- speed gallops across the plains of guanacaste.
- Central america’s longest water slide (measuring 450 metres) near rincon de la vieja national park.
- Rafting or kayaking down some of the world’s best white-water rivers with grades of rapids from easy to the extremely tough grade six . Some trips may involve overnight stays in eco- lodges that are only accessible from the water.
- Mountain biking, either cross- country or downhill, from the central highlands to the oceanic plains – costa rica also plays host to two of the world’s toughest endurance races each year.
- Popular hiking trips through the rainforests and up the mountains on single- or multi-day excursions – a four- day ascent of chirripo, the country’s highest peak at 3820 metres, for instance, books up several months in advance.

By providing such a wide variety of activities, Costa Rican eco-adventure tourism appeals to many different types of traveller and the business has expanded greatly from its initial concentration on surfing and scuba diving. Although no actual figures exist for the economic benefits, this sector of the economy is growing and employs an increasing number of people, from highly qualified guides to chefs and drivers.

Motivations for resource management decisions:



In order to understand ecotourism's role in encouraging conservation, we explored community perceptions of motivations for decreased deforestation and hunting.* In general, study participants in the ecotourism communities saw both hunting and deforestation as declining, with 80% and 91% of survey respondents, respectively, citing decreases. Illustrate the minimal perceived influence of tourism or increased work opportunities on declining deforestation and hunting rates. Although people generally agreed that these, along with environmental awareness, were important in deterring environmentally destructive practices, they overwhelmingly identified legal restrictions as the most influential factor. In Drake Bay, where tourism is the economic main-stay, people did at tribute to tourism more influence in declining hunting and deforestation rates. For instance, one respondent noted, 'The change to tourism- I think it is good because there is a lot more forest protection ... Now, there is much more awareness for protecting the forest.' In general, however, most respondents did not view ecotourism as the most important factor influencing conservation practices. This may reflect, in part, the fact that legal restrictions often provide nearly instant motivation to change behaviours, while change due to shifting values and attitudes usually occurs at a much slower pace.

It is interesting to note that legal restrictions appear to play a stronger role in declining deforestation rates, as compared to hunting rates. This accords with work by Bruner et al. (2001), which shows that parks have been more effective in halting land clearing than in stopping hunting. In our case studies, interviewees mentioned this was the case because it



was easier for hunters to hide from the law and that park officials rarely patrolled at night when the majority of hunting takes place.

Overall, most people place much of the blame for forest destruction on outside logging interests. Independent studies generally support these assertions (e.g. Barrantes et al., 1999). Study participants in La Gamba and Cerro de Oro also implicated outsiders in hunting taking place near their communities. Those in Drake Bay did not discuss this issue, possibly because they claim hunting is virtually non-existent now. While most study participants believed hunting and deforestation have decreased, many conceded that they had been significant problems in the past.

Most important reason for decreased hunting (1 = 101 who believe hunting has decreased) Note: Some gave more than one most important reason. Cerro de Oro residents were not asked if work sources played a role because this was not an issue there. In La Gamba, we did not ask people about tourism, as originally we planned to keep this embedded within work sources.

IV. CONCLUSION

As an ecotourism destination, Costa Rica has been amazingly successful and has, on the whole, managed to balance the needs of travellers with a successful economy, conservation and environmental stability. The challenge for the country is how to keep the economic benefits without losing sight of the initial vision of preservation of its natural heritage.

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