

Ecotourism: a sustainable option



The continued expansion of tourism in the world due to world population growth, increasing affluence of many nations, the expansion and diversification of travel motivations and expectations, great technological achievements in information and communication, the fierce competition between an increasing number of tourist destinations, and deregulation of movements is an important playground for global forces.

Tourism has been variously advocated as a means of advancing wider international integration within areas such as the European Union (EU) or as a catalyst for modernisation, economic development and prosperity in emerging nations in the Third World. The World Tourism Organisation estimated that international travelers today number in excess of 528 million. For the past three years, international tourism has been booming. According to the World Tourism Organisation, (WTO, 2006) the number of international tourist arrivals in 2005 was estimated at over 800 million, a 5.5 per cent increase following the 10 per cent surge registered in the preceding year. Despite wars, terror, oil price hikes, and natural disasters, global markets have shown great resilience and consumers have become better at weighing their options by delaying or diverting their travel rather than abandoning it.

According to UNWTO Report 2010, "the long-haul travel worldwide will grow faster, at 5.4 per cent over the period 1995-2020, than the interregional travel, at 3.8 per cent. Consequently, the ratio between interregional and long-haul travel will shift from around 82:18 in 1995 to close to 76:24 in 2020." Tourism has become a landmark in human activities reaching 800 million international tourist visits

in 2005 and registering receipts totaling \$444 billion without the cost of international transport which may reach US\$180 billion.

Environmental influence: Environmental and Ecological Effects

Excessive and badly planned tourism development affects the physical environment of tourist destinations. In many areas, the uncontrolled commercial exploitation of tourism has produced poorly designed hotels and motels that protrude into the cultural and scenic environment discharging waste and sewage in an unprocessed form leading to environmental degradation at the tourist site.

Poor and ill conceived forms of tourism development also destroy irreplaceable natural environments. Thus, marshlands and mangrove swamps, which provide both outlets for flood control and also the basic ingredients for local fishing industries, have been drained to build tourist houses. Water resources needed by local farmers and villages have been diverted for the use of tourist and golf courses causing challenges to farmers' livelihood. A good feature of environmental influence of tourism is that local population learns a lot about preservation and conservation of environment from tourists. In 1972, Damella and Dennis Meadows in their book *Limits to Growth* shook the world's complacency by arguing that the Earth's ability to absorb pollution is not finite. Thereafter, *World Conservation Strategy* by the International Union for the conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN, 1980) in its report introduced the concept of sustainable development for the preservation of tourist destinations.

This concept was put in Centre stage and was promoted as a vehicle for deliverance by the Brundtland Commission (World

Commission on Environmental and Development Report in 1987) in its report entitled *Our Common Future*. Brundtland Commission defines sustainable development as one that meets the need of present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their needs. Rio-de-de Janeiro Earth Summit 1992 also called as United Nations Conference on the Environment & Development (UNCED Earth summit) and 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development have recommended sustainable tourism as a solution for environmental degradation at the tourist sites.

Ecotourism

In order to avoid adverse environmental effects, experts have advocated ecotourism. Ecotourism is also called as ethnic tourism, adventure tourism or alternative tourism. Ecotourists mingle with indigenous people and influence them strongly. Ecotourism is underpinned by the following principles.

- It should be built on dialogue with local population who ought to be aware of its effects.

- It should be established on sound environmental principles sensitive to local culture and religious tradition.

- It should be a means of giving the poor a reasonable and more equal share in the gains

- The scale of tourism should be tailored to match the capacity of the local area to cope, measured in aesthetic and ecological terms.

- It should not make any impact upon the indigenous culture.

Thus, alternative tourism is being promoted recently all over the world not only to avoid environment degradation at tourist destinations but also to ensure sustainable development.