

DAVID A. FENNELL

ECOTOURISM

Fifth edition

Ecotourism

The new fifth edition of *Ecotourism* focuses on an array of economic, social, and ecological inconsistencies that continue to plague ecotourism in theory and practice, and examines the sector in reference to other related forms of tourism, impacts, conservation, sustainability, education and interpretation, policy and governance, and the ethical imperative of ecotourism as these apply to the world's greenest form of tourism.

Building on the success of prior editions, the text has been revised throughout to incorporate recent research, including ecotourism taking place in under-represented world regions. It includes new case studies on important themes in research and practice as well as learning objectives in each chapter. David Fennell provides an authoritative and comprehensive review of the most important issues, including climate change and UN Sustainable Development Goals. Ecotourism continues to be embraced as the antithesis of mass tourism because of its promise of achieving sustainability through conservation mindedness, community development, education and learning, and the promotion of nature-based activities that are sensitive to both ecological and social systems. The book debates to what extent this promise has been realised.

An essential reference for those interested in ecotourism, the book is accessible to students, but retains the depth required for use by researchers and practitioners in the field. This book will be of interest to students across a range of disciplines including geography, economics, business, ethics, biology, and environmental studies.

David A. Fennell is a Professor in the Department of Geography and Tourism Studies at Brock University in Ontario, Canada. His previous books include *Sustainable Tourism: Principles, Contexts and Practices*, *Tourism and Animal Ethics*, *Tourism Ethics* and *Ecotourism Programme Planning*. David is also the founding Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Ecotourism*.



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Fifth edition

David A. Fennell

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Part I

The essence of ecotourism

This book is divided into three main parts (Figure P1). The first part discusses the nature of ecotourism and how it differs from other types of tourism, along with a more detailed investigation of the ecotourist. Part II focuses on the core criteria used to define ecotourism, and Part III focuses on many of the main topics and issues that are important to ecotourism both in theory and practice.

Part I deals with the *essence* of ecotourism, or the nature of ecotourism. I have characterised this as travel with a primary interest in the natural history of a destination. In exploring this dimension recently I found assistance in looking more specifically at the literature on biology and natural history (Fennell 2012d). Natural history is that branch of science premised on observational rather than experimental practices. According to Bartholomew (1986: 326), 'A student of natural history, or a naturalist, studies the world by observing plants and animals directly . . . ' From this perspective, Wilcove and Eisner (2000) add that natural history is broadly the observation of different organisms, including their evolution and behaviour as well as how they interact with other species.

Explained as such, ecotourists may be regarded as students of natural history. They are motivated to pay close attention through observation of organisms, their role and function within the environment and those of a more dedicated kind (hard-path ecotourists) do this through patient observation. Furthermore, it would seem logical to characterise ecotourists as naturalists rather than ecologists, because of the observational tendencies of the former and the experimental practices of the latter. (See Schmidley 2005 for a discussion on how natural history needs to become more scientific and theory-based.)

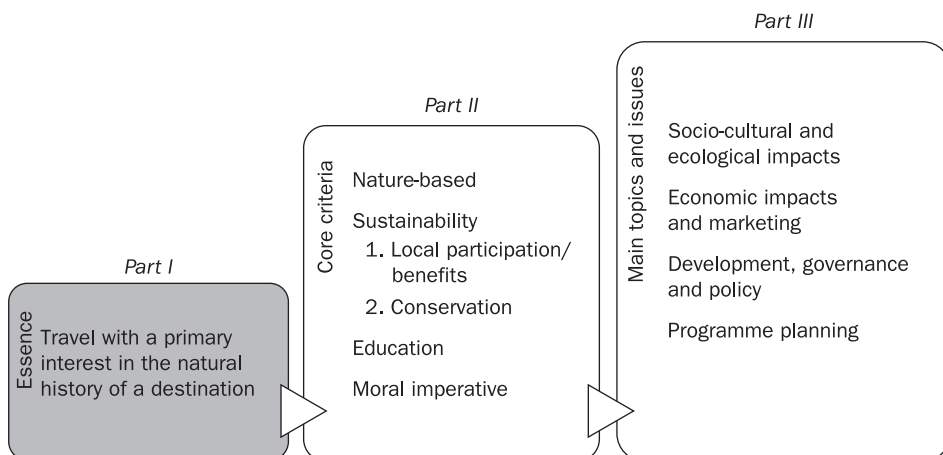


Figure P1 The structure of ecotourism

2 • The essence of ecotourism

Natural history, and those who practise it, is taken to encompass the following areas in the broadest sense: botany, general biology, geology, palaeontology and zoology. It follows that the ecotourist, according to this manner of viewing ecotourism, would be interested in these types of attractions, and not just wildlife as in the case of wildlife tourism. For those theorists looking for a line of demarcation between ecotourism and wildlife tourism, the foregoing may be of some use.

Part I contains two chapters. The first chapter focuses on the nature of ecotourism and, in particular, on investigating ecotourism as a distinct form of tourism as compared to other types. This includes an in-depth look at the roots of ecotourism as well as a series of different definitions that have been used in the past. Mass and alternative forms of tourism are also examined. The second chapter places emphasis on understanding the ecotourist, especially in regard to how this particular type of traveller differs from other types of tourists along the lines of motivations, expectations and behaviours.

There are questions about whether ecotourism is in fact a distinct market or not, and this discussion is examined at length. This discussion provides the background for a more specific look at the core criteria of ecotourism including: (1) the nature-based foundation of ecotourism; (2) the sustainability dimension of ecotourism from the perspective of conservation; (3) the human dimension of sustainability in the form of local participation and benefits; (4) learning and education as part of the ecotourism experience; and (5) the ethical imperative.

1

The nature of ecotourism

Learning objectives

- 1 To discuss the nature of attractions, and to highlight which attractions are most important to ecotourists.
- 2 To illustrate how Alternative Tourism is different from Mass Tourism, and to situate ecotourism in the former.
- 3 To make reference to the strong relationship that exists between nature-based tourism and ecotourism, but also why it is important to make a distinction between both.
- 4 To discuss the roots of ecotourism, and to introduce the core criteria around which it is defined.

In this chapter the structure of the tourism industry is discussed, with more of a focus on attractions as fundamental components of the tourist experience. Both mass tourism and alternative tourism (AT) paradigms are introduced for the purpose of exploring the range of different approaches to tourism planning, development and management. As a form of AT, ecotourism is introduced and defined, and emphasis is placed on exploring ecotourism's roots; that is, how ecotourism has evolved over time. Initial steps are taken towards differentiating ecotourism from other forms of tourism through a discussion on the introduction of key defining criteria. This discussion provides the necessary backdrop from which to examine more closely the ecotourist, in Chapter 2.

Tourism

As one of the world's largest industries, tourism is associated with many of the prime sectors of the world's economy. According to Yeoman *et al.* (2006) tourism has had an average annual increase of 6.6 per cent over the last half century, with international travel rising from 25 million in 1950 to over 700 million by 2002. In 2018, the number of tourists crossing international borders reached 1.4 billion (up 6 per cent from 2017) – a number that is reported to be two years ahead of forecasts (UNWTO 2019). More specifically, and of interest to our discussion of ecotourism to follow, is the fact that in 1950 the top five travel destinations (in Europe and the Americas) held 71 per cent of the travel market, but by 2002 they held only 35 per cent. Yeoman *et al.* ascribe this to an increasing desire to visit new places, which in turn has been stimulated by an emergence of newly accessible destinations in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific.

The consistent and sustained interest in travel has prompted some to argue that tourism is now the *summum bonum* (supreme good) in the lives of countless people around the world. That is, if pleasure is what we yearn for most in our lives (this seems to be the conclusion drawn from many philosophical works), tourism seems to be one of the most popular manifestations of this pleasure-seeking mentality (Fennell 2018a). More on this concept in Chapter 2.

Because of this magnitude, tourism has proved difficult to define because of its reliance on primary, secondary and tertiary levels of production and service, and the fact that it is so intricately interwoven into the fabric of life economically, socio-culturally and environmentally. This difficulty is mirrored in a 1991 issue of *The Economist*:

There is no accepted definition of what constitutes the [tourism] industry; any definition runs the risk of either overestimating or underestimating economic activity. At its simplest, the industry is one that gets people from their home to somewhere else (and back), and which provides lodging and food for them while they are away. But that does not get you far. For example, if all the sales of restaurants were counted as travel and tourism, the figure would be artificially inflated by sales to locals. But to exclude all restaurant sales would be just as misleading.

It is this complex integration within our socio-economic system, according to Mitchell (1984) that complicates efforts to define tourism. Tourism studies are often placed poles apart in terms of philosophical approach, methodological orientation or intent of the investigation. A variety of tourism definitions, each with disciplinary attributes, reflect research initiatives corresponding to various fields. For example, tourism shares strong fundamental characteristics and theoretical foundations with the recreation and leisure studies field. According to Jansen-Verbeke and Dietvorst (1987) the terms 'leisure', 'recreation' and 'tourism' represent a type of loose, harmonious unity which focuses on the experiential and activity-based features that typify these terms. On the other hand, economic and technical/statistical definitions generally ignore the human experiential elements of the concept in favour of an approach based on the movement of people over political borders and the amount of money generated from this movement.

It is this relationship with other disciplines; for example, psychology, sociology, anthropology, geography and economics, which seems to have defined the complexion of tourism. However, despite its strong reliance on such disciplines, some, including Leiper (1981), have advocated a move away in favour of a distinct tourism discipline. To Leiper the way in which we need to approach the tourism field should be built around the structure of the industry, which he considers as an open system of five elements interacting with broader environments: (1) a dynamic human element; (2) a generating region; (3) a transit region; (4) a destination region; and (5) the tourist industry. This definition is similar to one established by Mathieson and Wall (1982), who see tourism as comprising three basic elements: (1) a dynamic element, which involves travel to a selected destination; (2) a static element, which involves a stay at the destination; and (3) a consequential element, resulting from the first two, which is concerned with the effects on the economic, social and physical subsystems with which the tourist is directly or indirectly in contact. Others, including Mill and Morrison, define tourism as a system of interrelated parts. The system is 'like a spider's web – touch one part of it and reverberations will be felt throughout' (Mill and Morrison 1985: xix). Included in their tourism system are four component parts, including Market (reaching the marketplace), Travel (the purchase of travel products), Destination (the shape of travel demand) and Marketing (the selling of travel).

In recognition of the difficulty in defining tourism, Smith (1990a) feels that it is more realistic to accept the existence of a number of definitions, each designed to serve different purposes. This may in fact prove to be the most practical of approaches to follow. In this book, tourism is defined as the interrelated system that includes tourists and the associated services that are provided and utilised (facilities, attractions, transportation and accommodation) to aid in their movement, while a tourist, as established by the World Tourism Organization, is defined as a person travelling for pleasure for a period of at least one night, but not more than one year for international tourists and six months for persons travelling in their own countries, with the main purpose of the visit being other than to engage in activities for remuneration in the place(s) visited.

Tourism attractions

The tourism industry includes a number of key elements that tourists rely on to achieve their general and specific goals and needs within a destination. Broadly categorised, they include facilities, accommodation, transportation and attractions, as noted. Although an in-depth discussion of each is beyond the scope of this book, there is value in elaborating upon the importance of tourism attractions as a fundamental element of the tourist experience. These may be loosely categorised as cultural (e.g. historical sites, museums), natural (e.g. parks, flora and fauna), events (e.g. festivals, religious events), recreation (e.g. golf, hiking) and entertainment (e.g. theme parks, cinemas), according to Goeldner *et al.* (2000). Past tourism research has tended to rely more on the understanding of attractions, and how they affect tourists, than of other components of the industry. As Gunn has suggested, 'they [attractions] represent the most important reasons for travel to destinations' (1972: 24).

MacCannell described tourism attractions as, 'empirical relationships between a tourist, a site and a marker' (1989: 41). The tourist represents the human component, the site includes the actual destination or physical entity, and the marker represents some form of information that the tourist uses to identify and give meaning to a particular attraction. Lew (1987), however, took a different view, arguing that under the conditions of tourist-site-marker, virtually anything could become an attraction, including services and facilities. Lew chose to emphasise the objective and subjective characteristics of attractions by suggesting that researchers ought to be concerned with three main areas of the attraction:

- 1 *Ideographic*. Describes the concrete uniqueness of a site. Sites are individually identified by name and usually associated with small regions. This is the most frequent form of attraction studied in tourism research.
- 2 *Organisational*. The focus is not on the attractions themselves, but rather on their spatial capacity and temporal nature. Scale continua are based on the size of the area which the attraction encompasses.
- 3 *Cognitive*. A place that fosters the feeling of being a tourist, attractions are places that elicit feelings related to what Relph (1976) termed 'insider' 'outsider', and the authenticity of MacCannell's (1989) front and back regions.

Leiper (1990: 381) further added to the debate by adapting MacCannell's model into a systems definition. He wrote that:

A tourist attraction is a systematic arrangement of three elements: a person with touristic needs, a nucleus (any feature or characteristic of a place they might visit) and at least one marker (information about the nucleus).

Some authors, including Pearce (1982), Gunn (1988) and Leiper (1990), have made reference to the fact that attractions occur on various hierarchies of scale, from very specific and small objects within a site to entire countries and continents. This scale variability further complicates the analysis of attractions as both sites and regions. Consequently, there exists a series of attraction cores and attraction peripheries, within different regions, between regions, and from the perspective of the types of tourists who visit them. Spatially, and with the influence of time, the number and type of attractions visited by tourists and tourist groups may create a niche; a role certain types of tourists occupy within a vacation destination. Through an analysis of space, time and other behavioural factors, tourists can be fitted into a typology based on their utilisation and travel between selected attractions. One could make the assumption that tourist groups differ on the basis of the type of attractions they choose to visit, and according to how much time they spend at them (see Fennell 1996). The implications for the tourism industry are that often it must provide a broad range of experiences for tourists interested in different aspects of a region. A specific destination region, for example, may recognise the importance of providing a mix of touristic opportunities, from the very specific, to more general interest experiences for the tourists in search of cultural and natural experiences, in urban, rural and back-country settings. Some attractions may be short-stop places on the way to other major attractions. Such is the case of Hamelin Pool Nature Reserve (www.sharkbay.org/place/hamelin-pool/) within the larger UNESCO Shark Bay World Heritage Area (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/578/>) in Western Australia.

Attractions have also been referred to as sedentary, physical entities of a cultural or natural form (Gunn 1988). In their natural form, such attractions form the basis for distinctive types of tourism which are based predominantly on aspects of the natural world, such as wildlife tourism (see Reynolds and Braithwaite 2001) and ecotourism (see Page and Dowling 2002). For example, to a birdwatcher individual species become attractions of the most specific and most sought-after kind. A case in point is the annual return of a single albatross at the Hermaness National Nature Reserve in Unst, Shetland, Scotland. The albatross has become a major attraction for birder-tourists, while Hermaness, in a broader context, acts as a medium (attraction cluster) by which to present the attraction (bird). Natural attractions can be transitory in space and time, and this time may be measured for particular species in seconds, hours, days, weeks, months, seasons, or years. For tourists who travel with the prime reason being to experience these transitory attractions, their movement is a source of both challenge and frustration. Case study 1.1 illustrates the excitement (and issues) with the pursuit of grizzly bears in Alaska.

CASE STUDY 1.1

Up close and personal with grizzly bears in Denali National Park, Alaska

It is part of the human condition that we seek novelty in our lives, and tourism provides an excellent avenue for these novel experiences. It is also the case that satisfying our curiosity for other things often means getting closer for a more thorough inspection, no matter what the subject or object. But what constitutes being too close when it comes to the viewing of carnivorous megafauna like grizzly bears? Verbos and colleagues

explain the nature of this phenomenon in the context of grizzly bear viewing in the iconic Denali National Park of Alaska, which receives over 500,000 tourists per year, and where there is a 274-metre viewing regulation for grizzlies. Based on interviews of 43 visitors at the Denali Wilderness Access Center after their day-long wildlife viewing of bears, Verbos *et al.* were interested in studying proximity preferences of these visitors. They write that . . .

Initial coding of visitors' responses illuminated four descriptive proximity preferences within the sample: Close, Close but., Neutral and Far. Most visitors indicated a proximity preference of Close (n = 19), without referencing any specified distance. A second segment of visitors (Close but., n = 14) preferred close proximity and mentioned ethical concerns about the impact on wildlife. The remaining visitors either deferred to far distances they perceived caused the least impact on wildlife (Far, n = 2) or held an indifferent view to the role of proximity in wildlife viewing (Neutral, n = 8). Axial coding revealed five interrelated themes that influenced proximity preferences of visitors: the bus, the wildlife checklist, ethics, viewing technology and experiential diversity. Here's what the respondents said about each:

The bus

I think the system of having buses is kind of cool because it really does seem like a lot of people get access [to wildlife viewing] with minimal impact which is kind of different compared to other state and national parks.

Ethics

Oh, it [closeness] definitely enhances it [wildlife viewing], but, I mean, at the same time if you are infringing upon their space then it kind of defeats the whole purpose of it. So it's tough, but I think that because of the way that Denali sets it up with the buses and not many cars are out there, I think, there is a proper etiquette that goes along with it.

The wildlife checklist

You can see [animals] in a zoo [if you want close proximity] rather see them far away. We saw a bear and cubs, moose, caribou, that's pretty much it . . . sheep way up on the hill . . . itty bitty dots. I don't think [proximity] changes [the experience] for me. I came to see more of scenery than wildlife, so it's fine. I think you can see a bear in a zoo if I really wanted to see a bear, so it doesn't matter either way.

Viewing technology

We wouldn't had seen half of the wildlife if we didn't have people with binoculars that were actually scouting it over. So it was really wonderful . . . It would have been nice if we could have get to see more using the binoculars. It would have been nicer. Visitors should know to bring binoculars.

Experiential diversity

It is frustrating not to be able to sit and watch an animal for an hour. Now, when we got to Eielson Visitor Centre, we took a lot of time to see things [. . .] And people have different expectations.

continued

The authors were able to check the credibility of these themes (from the visitors) by interviewing park managers and biologists, which, generally, paralleled visitor themes according to how the bus satisfied desired proximity expectations. They did add, however, that viewing technology, specifically cameras and mobile phones, altered visitors' proximity preferences. Managers commented that cell phones and cameras often facilitated visitors' desires for pictures with wildlife at close and unsafe proximities. Cameras and mobile phones often caused visitors to desire closer, more dangerous, proximities to wildlife.

The rash of recent incidents and injuries throughout National Parks Service units and other protected area settings involving smart phones, selfie-sticks, and cameras anecdotally supports the claims that these devices have the potential to either increase proximity preferences (i.e. the closer the better for photos), or justify achieving desired proximity through the attainment of a tangible artefact (i.e., photo) from a wildlife encounter. Thus, for managers, different types of viewing technologies facilitated the movement of visitors to disparate ends of the proximity preference spectrum (close vs. far). Given the proliferation of hand-held devices and their ubiquitous presence in parks and protected areas, these findings indicate that further research is needed to investigate (a) if hand-held devices increase visitors' desired proximity to wildlife, (b) if these devices have resulted in an increase in negative tourist-wildlife encounters and (c) if so, how to educate and inform tourists about the suggested usages of these devices.

<https://www.nps.gov/dena/learn/nature/grizzlybear.htm>

Stretch your thinking:

Do you think that management strategies should rely more on behavioural cues from grizzlies, as well as other wildlife, as better indicators of safe proximity than prescribed and static distances discussed in this study?

Verbos, R. I., Zajchowski, C. A. B., Brownlee, M. T. J., & Skibins, J. C. (2017). 'I'd like to be just a bit closer': wildlife viewing proximity preferences at Denali National Park & Preserve, *Journal of Ecotourism*, DOI: 10.1080/14724049.2017.1410551

Mass tourism and AT: competing paradigms

Tourism has been both lauded and denounced for its capacity to transform regions physically. In the former case, tourism is the provider of long-term development opportunities; in the latter the ecological and sociological disturbance to transformed regions can be overwhelming. While there are many cases describing impacts in the more developed countries, most of the documented cases of the negative impacts of tourism are in the developing world. Young (1983), for example, documented the transformation of a small fishing farming community in Malta by graphically illustrating the extent to which tourism development – through an increasingly complex system of transportation, resort development and social behaviour – overwhelms such areas over time.

These days we are more prone to vilify or characterise conventional mass tourism as a beast, a monstrosity which has few redeeming qualities for the destination region, their people and the natural resource base. Consequently, mass tourism has been criticised for the fact that it dominates tourism within a region owing to its non-local orientation, and the fact that very little money spent within the destination actually stays and



Plate 1.1 Tourist development at Cancún, Mexico

generates more income. It is quite often the hotel or mega-resort that is the symbol of mass tourism's domination of a region. These are built using non-local products, have little requirement for local food products, and are owned by metropolitan interests. Hotel marketing occurs on the basis of high volume, attracting as many people as possible, often over seasonal periods of time. The implications of this seasonality are such that local people are at times moved in and out of paid positions that are based solely on this volume of touristic traffic. Development exists as a means by which to concentrate people in very high densities, displacing local people from traditional subsistence-style livelihoods (as outlined by Young 1983) to ones that are subservience-based. Finally, the attractions that lie in and around these massive developments are created and transformed to meet the expectations and demands of visitors. Emphasis is often on commercialisation of natural and cultural resources, and the result is a contrived and inauthentic representation of, for example, a cultural theme or event that has been eroded into a distant memory.

The picture of mass tourism painted here is outlined to illustrate the point that the tourism industry has not always operated with the interests of local people and the resource base in mind. This has been reinforced through much of the tourism research that emerged in the 1980s, which argued for a new, more socially and ecologically benign alternative to mass tourism development. According to Krippendorf (1982), the philosophy behind AT – forms of tourism that advocate an approach opposite to mass conventional tourism – was to ensure that tourism policies should no longer concentrate on economic and technical necessities alone, but rather emphasise the demand for an unspoiled environment and consideration of the needs of local people. This 'softer' approach places the natural and cultural resources at the forefront of planning and development, instead of as an afterthought. Also, as an inherent function, alternative forms of tourism provide the means for countries to eliminate outside influences, and to sanction projects themselves

and to participate in their development – in essence, to win back the decision-making power in essential matters rather than conceding to outside people and institutions.

AT is a generic term that encompasses a whole range of tourism strategies (e.g. ‘appropriate’, ‘eco-’, ‘soft’, ‘responsible’, ‘people to people’, ‘controlled’, ‘small-scale’, ‘cottage’ and ‘green’ tourism), all of which purport to offer a more benign alternative to conventional mass tourism (Conference Report 1990, cited in Weaver 1991). Dernoï (1981) illustrates that the advantages of AT will be felt in five ways:

- 1 There will be benefits for the individual or family: accommodation based in local homes will channel revenue directly to families. Also families will acquire managerial skills.
- 2 The local community will benefit: AT will generate direct revenue for community members, in addition to upgrading housing standards while avoiding huge public infrastructure expenses.
- 3 For the host country, AT will help avoid the leakage of tourism revenue outside the country. AT will also help prevent social tensions and may preserve local traditions.
- 4 For those in the industrialised countries, AT is ideal for cost-conscious travellers or for people who prefer close contacts with locals.
- 5 There will be benefits for international relations: AT may promote international, interregional and intercultural understanding.

More specifically, Weaver (1993) has analysed the potential benefits of an AT design from the perspective of accommodation, attractions, market, economic impact and regulation (Table 1.1). This more sensitive approach to tourism development strives to satisfy the needs of local people, tourists and the resource base in a complementary rather than competitive manner. The importance, as well as the challenge, of AT as a softer and more responsible form of tourism is demonstrated by the fact that in Europe, tourism is supposed to double over the course of the next 25 years, with most of this coming in the form of AT (European Commission 2004).

Some researchers, however, are quick to point out that as an option to mass tourism, fully-fledged AT cannot replace conventional tourism simply because of mass tourism’s varied and many-sided associated phenomena (Cohen 1987). Instead, it is more realistic to concentrate efforts in attempts to reform the worst prevailing situations, not the development of alternatives.

Table 1.1 Potential benefits derived from an AT strategy

Accommodation

- Does not overwhelm the community.
- Benefits (jobs, expenditures) are more evenly distributed.
- Less competition with homes and businesses for the use of infrastructure.
- A larger percentage of revenues accrue to local areas.
- Greater opportunity for local entrepreneurs to participate in the tourism sector.

Attractions

- Authenticity and uniqueness of community is promoted and enhanced.
- Attractions are educational and promote self-fulfilment.
- Locals can benefit from existence of the attractions even if tourists are not present.

Market

- Tourists do not overwhelm locals in numbers; stress is avoided.
- 'Drought/deluge' cycles are avoided, and equilibrium is fostered.
- A more desirable visitor type.
- Less vulnerability to disruption within a single major market.

Economic impact

- Economic diversity is promoted to avoid single-sector dependence.
- Sectors interact and reinforce each other.
- Net revenues are proportionally higher; money circulates within the community.
- More jobs and economic activity are generated.

Regulation

- Community makes the critical development/strategy decisions.
- Planning to meet ecological, social and economic carrying capacities.
- Holistic approach stresses integration and well-being of community interests.
- Long-term approach takes into account the welfare of future generations.
- Integrity of foundation assets is protected.
- Possibility of irreversibilities is reduced.

Source: Weaver (1993).



Plate 1.2 AT can take many forms, including recreational fishing enterprises that maintain local control and small-scale design

Butler (1990) feels that mass tourism has not been rejected outright for two main reasons. The first is economic, in that it provides a significant amount of foreign exchange for countries; the second is socio-psychological and relates to the fact that

many people seem to enjoy being a mass tourist. They actually like not having to make their own travel arrangements, not having to find accommodation when they arrive at a destination, being able to obtain goods and services without learning a foreign language, being able to stay in reasonable, in some cases considerable comfort, being able to eat reasonably familiar food, and not having to spend vast amounts of money or time to achieve these goals.

(Butler 1990: 40)

Ecotourism's roots

Until recently, there has been some confusion surrounding the etymology or origin of the term 'ecotourism', as evident in the tremendous volume of literature on the topic. For example, Orams (1995) and Hvenegaard (1994) write that the term can be traced back only to the late 1980s, while others (Higgins 1996) suggest that it can be traced to the late 1970s through the work of Miller (1989) on ecodevelopment. One of the consistent themes emergent in the literature supports the fact that Ceballos-Lascuráin was the first to coin the phrase in the early 1980s (see Thompson 1995). He defined it as, 'traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas' (Boo 1990: xiv). Ceballos-Lascuráin himself states that his initial reference to the phrase occurred in 1983, while he was in the process of developing PRONATURA (see Conservation Society 1.0), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Mexico (van der Merwe 1996).

FOCUS ON CONSERVATION SOCIETIES . . . PRO-NATURA INTERNATIONAL

For more than 30 years, Pro-Natura has been tackling the social, economic and environmental problems that face rural communities in the Developing World. The aim is to provide viable economic alternatives to those people struggling to make a living from imperilled environments through a focus on poverty reduction, climate change and biodiversity.

This is achieved by building local capacity and establishing participative governance, so that the preservation and restoration of natural resources can be linked to local economic success. Delivering sustainability is a complex challenge and Pro-Natura's strength lies in the network of in-house and 3rd party experts it can deploy to build the local capacity needed to implement integrated solutions. The network is backed up by an experienced executive management team and a world-class Advisory Board.

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Apparently, however, the term has been traced further back to the work of Hetzer (1965), who used it to explain the intricate relationship between tourists and the environments and cultures in which they interact. Hetzer identified four fundamental pillars that need to be

followed for a more responsible form of tourism. These include: (1) minimum environmental impact; (2) minimum impact on – and maximum respect for – host cultures; (3) maximum economic benefits to the host country's grassroots; and (4) maximum 'recreational' satisfaction to participating tourists. The development of the concept of ecotourism grew, according to Hetzer (personal communication, October 1997), as a culmination of dissatisfaction with negative approaches to development, especially from an ecological point of view. Nelson (1994) also adopts this particular stand in illustrating that the idea of ecotourism is in fact an old one, which manifested itself during the late 1960s and early 1970s when researchers became concerned over inappropriate use of natural resources.

Even before this time, however, Lothar Machura's (1954) paper, 'Nature protection and tourism: with particular reference to Austria', was perhaps the first academic work to plant the seeds of the relationship between tourism and conservation. He discussed how tourism could cooperate with nature protection or how it would be incompatible. Tourism, as Machura wrote, could be an agent to arouse or express a love of nature. Of interest is the fact that a Google Scholar search of Machura's paper as of October 2013 yielded no citations (four citations as of 2019, two from Fennell and two others, perhaps stemming from the fourth edition of this book in 2014).

In other related research, Fennell (1998) found evidence of Canadian government 'ecotours' which were operational during the mid-1970s. These ecotours centred around the Trans-Canada Highway and were developed on the basis of different ecological zones found along the course of the highway – the first of which was developed in 1976. This Canadian version of ecotourism is felt to be rather progressive for the time despite the lack of an explicit look at low impact, sustainability, community development and the moral philosophy labels that are attached to ecotourism in the present day. The ecotours were developed at a time when the Canadian government felt it important to allow Canadian and foreign travellers to appreciate the human–land relationship in Canada, through the interpretation of the natural environment. Although a set definition of ecotourism was not provided, each of the ecotour guides contains the following foreword:

Ecotours are prepared by the Canadian Forestry Service to help you, as a traveller, understand the features of the landscape you see as you cross the country. Both natural and human history are described and interpreted. The route covered by the Ecotours is divided into major landscape types, or Ecozones, and a map of each Ecozone shows the location of interesting features (identified by code numbers). While most features can be seen from your car, stops are suggested for some of them. Distances between points of interest are given in kilometres. Where side trips are described, distances are given to the turnoff from the highway. You will derive the maximum value from this Ecotour if you keep a record of the distance travelled and read the information on each point of interest before reaching it.

(Fennell 1998: 32)

This prompted Fennell to suggest that ecotourism most likely has a convergent evolution, 'where many places and people independently responded to the need for more nature travel opportunities in line with society's efforts to become more ecologically minded' (Fennell 1998: 234), as also suggested by Nelson (see earlier). This evidence comes at a time when researchers have been struggling to find common ground between ecotourism and its relationship to other forms of tourism. (For other early references on ecotourism see Mathieson and Wall 1982; Romeril 1985.)

There seems to be acceptance of the fact that ecotourism was viable long before the 1980s, however, in practice, if not in name. For example, Blangy and Nielson (1993) illustrate that the travel department of the American Museum of Natural History has

conducted natural history tours since 1953. Probably the finest examples of the evolution of ecotourism can be found in the African wildlife-based examples of tourism developed in the early twentieth century and, to some, the nature tourism enterprises of the midnineteenth century (Wilson 1992). Machura's paper may have been a reaction to these natural history-based tours. Furthermore, there are numerous references to the fact that human beings, at least since the Romantic period, have travelled to the wilderness for intrinsic reasons. Nash writes that during the nineteenth century many people travelled both in Europe and North America for the primary purpose of enjoying the outdoors, as illustrated in the following passage:

Alexis de Tocqueville resolved to see wilderness during his 1831 trip to the United States, and in Michigan Territory in July the young Frenchman found himself at last on the fringe of civilization. But when he informed the frontiersmen of his desire to travel for pleasure into the primitive forest, they thought him mad. The Americans required considerable persuasion from Tocqueville to convince them that his interests lay in matters other than lumbering or land speculation.

(Nash 1982: 23)

Tocqueville was after something that we consider as an essential psychological factor in travel: novelty. Nash (1982) credits the intellectual revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the push needed to inspire the belief that unmodified nature could act as a deep spiritual and psychological tonic. It required the emergence of a group of affluent and cultured persons who largely resided in urban environments to garnish this appreciation (e.g. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Ruskin). For these people, Nash (1982: 347) writes, 'wilderness could become an intriguing novelty and even a deep spiritual and psychological need'. In the USA, the sentiment at the time was not as strong as it was in Europe, where, 'as late as the 1870s almost all nature tourists on the American frontier continued to be foreigners' (1982: 348).

When Americans did start travelling to the wild parts of their country it was the privileged classes that held the exclusive rights. A trip to Yellowstone in the 1880s, according to O'Gara (1996), was about three times as expensive as travel to Europe at the time. There was no question that those from the city were especially taken with Yellowstone's majesty, but their mannerisms left much to be desired, as is evident in an account of such tourists by Rudyard Kipling (1996: 56):

It is not the ghastly vulgarity, the oozing, rampant Bessemer steel self-sufficiency and ignorance of the men that revolts me, so much as the display of these same qualities in the womenfolk . . . All the young ladies . . . remarked that [Old Faithful] was 'elegant' and betook themselves to writing their names in the bottoms of the shallow pools. Nature fixes the insult indelibly, and the after-years will learn that 'Hattie', 'Sadie', 'Mamie', 'Sophie', and so forth, have taken out their hairpins and scrawled in the face of Old Faithful.

Defining ecotourism

Given the ambiguity associated with the historical origins of ecotourism, the purpose of the present section is to identify the key principles of the term, especially the link between nature tourism (or nature-oriented tourism) and ecotourism. For example, Laarman and Durst, in their early reference to ecotourism, defined it as a nature tourism in which the 'traveler is drawn to a destination because of his or her interest in one or more features

of that destination's natural history. The visit combines education, recreation, and often adventure' (Laarman and Durst 1987: 5). In addition, these authors were perhaps the first to make reference to nature tourism's hard and soft dimensions, based on the physical rigour of the experience and also the level of interest in natural history (Figure 1.1). Laarman and Durst suggested that scientists would in most likelihood be more dedicated than casual in their pursuit of ecotourism, and that some types of ecotourists would be more willing to endure hardships than others in order to secure their experiences. The letter 'B' in Figure 1.1 identifies a harder ecotourism experience based on a more difficult or rigorous experience, and also based on the dedication shown by the ecotourist relative to the interest in the activity. The concept of hard and soft forms of ecotourism may apply to both primary and secondary attractions. Corral, Szteren and Cassini (2017) found that some beach tourists at Cabo Polonio, Uruguay (primary attraction) will endure several days without electricity, running water and vehicles, but will also spend considerable time at a continental pinniped colony (secondary attraction). Living in discomfort is coupled with being close to nature, and there appears to be 'a spontaneous predisposition to take care of nature' (Corral *et al.* 2017: 291).

The hard and soft path characteristics have been theoretically positioned in work by Acott *et al.* (1998) on deep and shallow ecotourism. Deep ecotourism is characterised according to intrinsic value, small-scale development, community identity, community participation and the notion that materialism for its own sake is wrong. Conversely, shallow ecotourism is characterised as a business-as-usual attitude to the natural world, nature is seen as a resource to be exploited in maximising human benefits, management decisions are based on utilitarian reasoning and sustainability is viewed from a weak or very weak perspective. The void between deep and shallow ecotourism, acknowledging that each are dichotomous positions on a continuum, prompted the authors to observe that shallow ecotourism verges on mass ecotourism. The only difference, they note, is in the way each is promoted, where shallow ecotourism would make ecotourism claims in its advertising (e.g. wildlife viewing of one

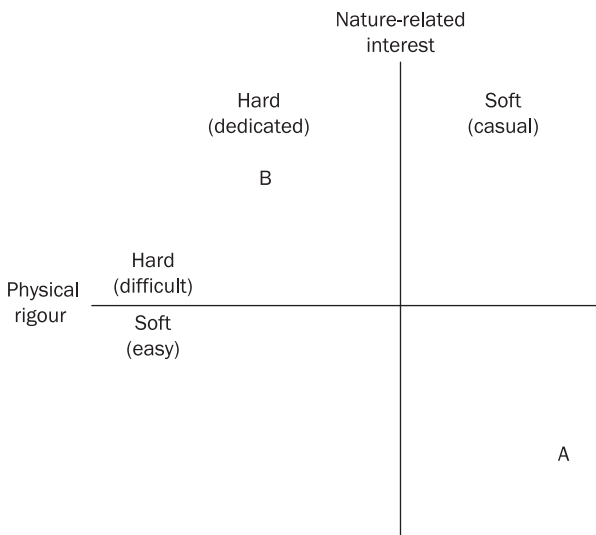


Figure 1.1 Hard and soft dimensions of ecotourism

Source: Laarman and Durst (1987).

sort or another), with profit taking precedence over social and ecological considerations. (See Weaver 2001a and Fennell 2002a for a more in-depth discussion of the hard and soft dimensions of ecotourism.)

A subsequent definition by Laarman and Durst (1993) identifies a conceptual difference between ecotourism and nature tourism. In recognising the difficulties in defining nature tourism, they establish both a narrow and broad scope to its definition. Narrowly, they say, it refers to operators running nature-oriented tours; however, broadly it applies to tourism's use of natural resources including beaches and country landscapes. They define nature tourism as 'tourism focused principally on natural resources such as relatively undisturbed parks and natural areas, wetlands, wildlife reserves, and other areas of protected flora, fauna, and habitats' (1993: 2). Given this perspective, there appears to be consensus in the literature that describes ecotourism as one part of a broader nature-based tourism (NBT). This becomes evident in the discussion by Goodwin (1996: 287), who wrote that *nature tourism*:

encompasses all forms of tourism – mass tourism, adventure tourism, low-impact tourism, ecotourism – which use natural resources in a wild or undeveloped form – including species, habitat, landscape, scenery and salt and fresh-water features. Nature tourism is travel for the purpose of enjoying undeveloped natural areas or wildlife.

And conversely, that *ecotourism* is:

low impact nature tourism which contributes to the maintenance of species and habitats either directly through a contribution to conservation and/or indirectly by providing revenue to the local community sufficient for local people to value, and therefore protect, their wildlife heritage area as a source of income.

(Goodwin 1996: 288)

The emergence of a basic foundation clarifying the relationship between (NBT) and ecotourism has not, however, precluded the development of numerous definitions of ecotourism, each seeking to find the right mix of terms. Beyond the early definitions discussed here, Ziffer (1989) discussed NBT and ecotourism by first considering a variety of terms, such as 'nature travel', 'adventure travel' and 'cultural travel', which are largely activity based; and also the value-laden terms, such as 'responsible', 'alternative' and 'ethical' tourism, which underscore the need to consider impacts and the consequences of travel. Ziffer feels that nature tourism, while not necessarily ecologically sound in principle, concentrates more on the motivation and the behaviour of the individual tourist. Conversely, ecotourism is much more difficult to attain owing to its overall comprehensiveness (the need for planning and the achievement of societal goals). She defines ecotourism as follows:

a form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures. The ecotourist visits relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity. The ecotourist practises a non-consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labor or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic well-being of the local residents. The visit should strengthen the ecotourist's appreciation and dedication to conservation issues in general, and to the specific needs of the locale. Ecotourism also implies a managed approach by the host country or region which commits itself to establishing and maintaining the sites with the

participation of local residents, marketing them appropriately, enforcing regulations, and using the proceeds of the enterprise to fund the area's land management as well as community development.

(Ziffer 1989: 6)

Like Ziffer's, the following definition by Wallace and Pierce (1996: 848) is also comprehensive, acknowledging the importance of a broad number of variables, including volunteerism (see Spotlight on Volunteerism 1.0). To these authors, ecotourism is:

travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas for study, enjoyment, or volunteer assistance. It is travel that concerns itself with the flora, fauna, geology, and ecosystems of an area, as well as the people (caretakers) who live nearby, their needs, their culture, and their relationship to the land. it [*sic*] views natural areas both as 'home to all of us' in a global sense ('eco' meaning home) but 'home to nearby residents' specifically. It is envisioned as a tool for both conservation and sustainable development – especially in areas where local people are asked to forgo the consumptive use of resources for others.

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GoEco is a leading eco-tourism company with a varied selection of affordable, ethical volunteer projects abroad. Our team is made up of experienced and passionate specialists who are eager to give you the voluntourism vacation of a lifetime!

We act as a gateway to over 150 extraordinary community, wildlife and environmental initiatives all over the world thanks to our great partnerships. Our providers are well diversified, ranging from local community groups to renowned global organizations. All of our projects are carefully vetted to ensure every volunteer experience meets our standards and yours.

We make it our mission to help you make the most of your time abroad and that is why we start by getting to know you and your interests! GoEco provides you with all of the necessary information to help you make informed decisions about the project, the country and the time of year you want to go.

Our goal is for you to leave your host country with an even greater passion for volunteering and a desire to share your experience with others when you return home.

<https://www.goeco.org/about-goeco>

Wallace and Pierce (1996; see also Honey 2008 in regard to her seven principles of authentic ecotourism) suggest that tourism may be ecotourism if it addresses six key principles, including:

- 1 a type of use that minimises negative impacts to the environment and to local people;
- 2 the awareness and understanding of an area's natural and cultural systems and the subsequent involvement of visitors in issues affecting those systems;
- 3 the conservation and management of legally protected and other natural areas;
- 4 the early and long-term participation of local people in the decision-making process that determines the kind and amount of tourism that should occur;

18 • The essence of ecotourism

- 5 directing economic and other benefits to local people that complement rather than overwhelm or replace traditional practices (farming, fishing, social systems, etc.);
- 6 the provision of special opportunities for local people and nature tourism employees to utilise and visit natural areas and learn more about the wonders that other visitors come to see.

Donohoe and Needham (2006) embarked on an in-depth content analysis of ecotourism definitions and came up with similar results to an earlier and similar study by Fennell (2001; see Table 1.2). The themes that occurred most consistently in the ecotourism definition literature included: (1) nature-based; (2) preservation; (3) education; (4) sustainability; (5) distribution of benefits; and (6) ethics/responsibility. The absence of many of these core components of a definition of ecotourism has contributed to greenwashing, environmental opportunism and eco-exploitation according to the authors.

In subsequent work, these authors identified a continuum of ecotourism according to the operational congruency with ecotourism tenets (see also Honey 2003). Figure 1.2 shows that genuine ecotourism is that which abides by all of the tenets of ecotourism, while pseudo ecotourism can be characterised in two ways. The first, ecotourism lite, includes those operators or products that apply guidelines some of the time, with a focus on NBT. By contrast, greenwashing includes those products that rarely use the tenets of ecotourism, and where the focus is on marketing as a form of opportunism – taking the opportunity to market oneself as an ecotourism operator but without the intent of living up to the lofty goals of ecotourism.

Donohoe and Needham, Fennell, Honey, Wallace and Pierce, Ziffer and others recognise that for ecotourism to succeed it must strive to reach lofty goals. By comparison, however, the Ecotourism Society (now The International Ecotourism Society) advocated a much more general definition of the term; one that advocates a ‘middle-of-the-road’ or passive position (see Orams 1995), and one that is more easily articulated. This organisation defined ecotourism as, ‘responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people’ (Western 1993: 8). Preece *et al.*

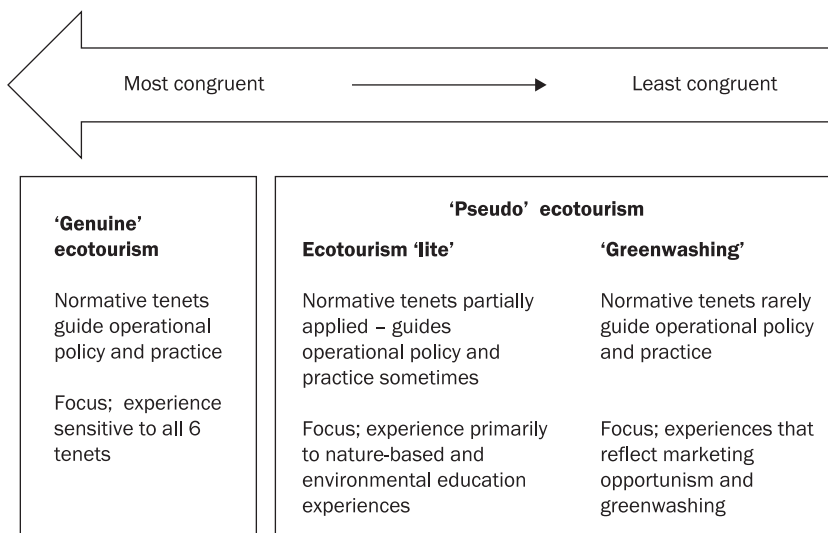


Figure 1.2 Ecotourism continuum: operational congruency with ecotourism

Source: Donohoe and Needham (2008).

(1995) used the Australian National Ecotourism Strategy definition of ecotourism in their overview of biodiversity and ecotourism, which is also one that is quite general in nature. The strategy defines ecotourism as NBT that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable.

These definitions are representative of what appears to be an emerging set of core principles that serve to delineate ecotourism. This core includes sustainability, education, a nature base and a conservation mandate or orientation (see Kutay 1989; Hawkes and Williams 1993; Wight 1993a; Buckley 1994; Blamey 1995; Wallace and Pierce 1996; Diamantis 1999; Weaver and Lawton 2007). The Quebec Declaration (UNEP/WTO 2002), the penultimate meeting of the International Year of Ecotourism in 2002, suggested that five distinct criteria should be used to define ecotourism, namely: nature-based product, minimal impact management, environmental education, contribution to conservation and contribution to community.

The foregoing, however, also serves to illustrate that there has been no quick or easy formula to define ecotourism, despite the emergence of core criteria. While basic definitions of the term leave much to the interpretation of the reader (see Table 1.2 for an overview of definitions over time); comprehensive definitions risk placing too many constraints on service providers such that the term becomes impossible to implement. If we examine closely some of the weaker definitions of ecotourism we can see how these may be subject to misrepresentation. The following two examples serve to illustrate this point:

Responsible travel that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.

Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.

The first definition was used as a long-standing definition of ecotourism by the International Ecotourism Society of the USA. The second is a definition used by the South Carolina Nature-Based Tourism Association, also of the USA, which defines a type of tourism inclusive of backpacking, boat tours, cycling, farm tours, fishing, hunting and ecotourism. Although defined in a similar context, in reality the two terms are fundamentally different.

In the case of the latter, it is a definition, which describes a number of types of tourism that rely on the natural environment. In the words of Weaver (2001a: 350), NBT is, 'any type of tourism that relies mainly on attractions directly related to the natural environment, Ecotourism and 3S tourism are both types of nature-based tourism'. As noted, ecotourism is then only one of many forms of NBT that rely on the open-air environment. This corroborates what others have said about the relationship between ecotourism and NBT.

Defining both terms in a similar capacity or treating them both as synonymous, however, has many implications. For example, the province of Saskatchewan in Canada uses a similar definition to the ones described earlier (Ecotourism is 'responsible travel to areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people') (Ecotourism Society of Saskatchewan 2000). Using the example of fishing, which is a popular activity in Saskatchewan, such an activity can be responsible, in the implementation of catch limits; it can conserve the environment, in the way hatcheries contribute fish stocks to the lakes and rivers; and it can contribute to the welfare of local people, through the use of an Aboriginal fishing guide. The point is that fishing is certainly acceptable as a form of NBT, but it is questionable as a form of ecotourism because of the practical and philosophical issues surrounding the pursuit and capture of game. In failing to effectively conceptualise ecotourism as a distinct form of NBT, industry stakeholders have misinterpreted and mismarketed ecotourism and in the process created a much bigger – but not necessarily better – industry (more on this in Chapter 7).

Table 1.2 Comparison of selected ecotourism and nature tourism definitions

Main principles of definition ^a	Definitions														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Interest in nature	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓
Contributes to conservation			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Reliance on parks and protected areas	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Benefits local people/long-term benefits			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓
Education and study	✓	✓	✓			✓					✓			✓	✓
Low impact/non-consumptive					✓							✓	✓	✓	✓
Ethics/responsibility				✓					✓	✓				✓	✓
Management					✓			✓			✓				✓
Sustainable								✓			✓				✓
Enjoyment/appreciation	✓				✓									✓	
Culture	✓				✓									✓	
Adventure		✓												✓	
Small scale												✓			✓

Primary source: Fennell (2001).

Sources used: 1 Ceballos-Lascuráin (1987); 2 Laarman and Durst (1987)^b; 3 Halbertsma (1988)^b; 4 Kutay (1989); 5 Ziffer (1989); 6 Fennell and Eagles (1990); 7 CEAC (1992); 8 Valentine (1993); 9 The Ecotourism Society (1993) in Goodwin (1996); 10 Western (1993) in Goodwin (1996); 11 Australian National Ecotourism Strategy (1993) in Goodwin (1996); 12 Brandon (1996); 13 Goodwin (1996); 14 Wallace and Pierce (1996); 15 The present study.

Notes:

^a Variables ranked by frequency of response

^b Nature tourism definitions

But why all the fuss over attempts to arrive at the right definition of ecotourism? Bottrill and Pearce (1995) observe that definitional variables are important because they are often used to observe, measure and evaluate what is and what is not ecotourism (see also Wallace and Pierce 1996, and their evaluation of ecotourism principles in Amazonas). In an analysis of 22 ecotourism ventures, Bottrill and Pearce found that only five were classified as ecotourism using the following criteria: motivation (physical activity, education, participation), sensitive management and protected area status. The authors submit that more work should follow to further define and modify the points and criteria raised. Their paper quite nicely addressed the need to move beyond definition to a position where ecotourism operators should be open to ethical and operational scrutiny by the public and other concerned stakeholders. This resonates with the work of Miller and Kaye (1993: 37), who suggest that ‘the merits or deficiencies of ecotourism . . . are not to be found in any label *per se*, but in the quality and intensity of specific environmental and social impacts of human activity in an ecological system’.

In view of the preceding, I offer the following definition of ecotourism, which has emerged from a review of the abundant literature on the topic (see Fennell 2001), as well as personal experience. The definition is thought to be comprehensive enough to avoid being misapplied, but not so wide-ranging as to be overly restrictive. Ecotourism, therefore, is:

Travel with a primary interest in the natural history of a destination. It is a non-invasive and participatory form of nature-based tourism that is built around learning, sustainability (conservation and local participation/benefits), and ethical planning, development and management.

This definition is structured in recognising that having been identified as a separate form of tourism, ecotourism must be classified and defined as such in order to maintain an element of distinctiveness, even though most ecotourists demand a softer, easily accessible, front-country type of experience (Kearsley 1997 in Weaver 1998), and that the 'popular' form of ecotourism demands mechanised transport, easy accessibility and a high level of services (Queensland Draft Ecotourism Strategy in Weaver 1998). The relationship between this very soft form of ecotourism and other types of tourism is a topic that is discussed later in this book. That said, it is important to consider that much more than simply demand must go into the understanding of ecotourism and ecotourists. In an attempt to stay clear of this fine line, at least at this stage, a harder stance on ecotourism is adopted. Furthermore, a stricter definition of ecotourism begs for the employment of measurable indicators in determining what is and is not ecotourism. (See Orams 1995 for a description of the hard-soft path ecotourism continuum.) An early example of this type of thinking can be seen through the efforts of Shores (1992), who identified the need for higher standards in the ecotourism industry through the implementation of a scale to measure the level of achievement according to the principles of ecotourism. The scale ranges from 0 (travellers made aware of the fragility of the environment in a general capacity) to 5 (a trip where the entire system was operating in an environmental way).

The reader will most certainly recognise the absence of culture as a fundamental principle of ecotourism in the aforementioned definition. This definition views culture only inasmuch as the benefits from ecotourism accrue to local people, recognising that culture, whether exotic or not, is part of any tourism experience. If culture was a primary theme of ecotourism then it would be cultural tourism – not ecotourism. There is no doubt that culture can be part of the ecotourism experience; the point is, however, that it is more likely to be a secondary motivation to the overall experience, not primary as in the case of nature and natural resources. For example, in a study completed by Fennell (1990), it was found that there was no statistically significant difference between the average Canadian traveller and ecotourists as regards many cultural attractions, including museums and art galleries, local festivals and events and local crafts. Furthermore, in a study on whale watching brochures Kur and Hvenegaard (2012) found that these promotional devices did not emphasise cultural or historical attractions, but tended to favour more the education, natural environment and sustainability of the whale watching experience. The authors concluded that the marketing of culture has limits according to the interests of ecotourists. In the Greenbox destination of the north midlands of Ireland, Conway and Cawley (2016) also found a poor link between culture and ecotourism providers, even though the region contains several spectacular historical and archaeological sites. Sustainable development plays a vital role in ecotourism because it forces us to consider not only the needs of local people – people who need to have an opportunity to participate in decision-making and who must benefit economically and socially from these decisions – but also the need to conserve or indeed preserve the natural world for now and for future generations. These are values that transcend the interests of the corporation or other stakeholders that would take a more self-interested approach to ecotourism development (Chapters 4 and 5).

Learning about the environment through highly structured environmental education programmes is an essential aspect of the ecotourism experience and past research (see Bachert 1990) has sought to examine how it relates to the need to gain knowledge on-site through interpretation and the information provided by guides and other facilitators. In whale watching, for example, many people just want to see a whale (novelty or curiosity), while conversely others want a more comprehensive learning-based whale watching experience (the focus of Chapter 6). Knowledge can be thought of as information one applies to a situation, whereas learning is something that results from participation. And it is important to view learning in terms of a primary motivation of the ecotourist. Hultman

and Andersson Cederholm (2006: 78) argue that despite the fact that ecotourism is about learning or acquiring knowledge about nature, ecotourists ‘cannot bodily engage with nature in any invasive way; nature must remain pristine’. This discussion on being non-invasive is consistent with the perspective adopted in this book. Even though ecotourists experience nature first-hand, it is a type of interaction that places the interests of the natural world, including individual entities, first over the interests of the ecotourism industry (see also Butler 1992). Experiencing nature first-hand relates to Wilson’s (1984: 214) concept of biophilia defined as ‘The innate tendency to be attracted by other life forms and to affiliate with natural living systems’. Ecotourism is thus an outlet for this mindset, whereby the feelings of such users may dictate the forms of recreation participated in and the potential to negate effects of such activities on the natural world (see also Kellert 1985 who notes people and the activities they choose can be correlated with these values towards wildlife). The importance of sustainability and learning, and other core tenets, is emphasised in the following Field Note based on the experience of the Australian scholar – and ecotourist – David Newsome.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD – DAVID NEWSOME

In this Field Note, Newsome writes passionately about the characteristics that ensure best practice in ecotourism, and those that don’t, based on many years of experience as a naturalist and ecotourism researcher. Ecotourism operators, therefore, must embrace a number of core tenets of ecotourism because if they fail to do this, their programs are really not ecotourism [a theme that permeates this book]. These tenets to Newsome, although debated, include being nature-based, ecologically sustainable, environmentally educative, locally beneficial and being successful in fostering visitor satisfaction. In January 2013, Newsome took a trip to Sri Lanka and reports that although there are several good examples of ecotourism in Sri Lanka, he found a couple of examples that he judged to be not as good based on his considerable experience. The example of Hurulu Ecopark is in this latter category. Newsome writes that...

The Hurulu Ecopark and Biosphere Reserve is an old teak plantation with a population of 230 elephants. It is a focal point of nature-based tourism activity in the Habarana area of Sri Lanka. The park is serviced by a large number of private jeep owners (e.g. United Jeep Safari Association Habarana), but the number of guides and official tour operators is difficult to determine. A jeep/tourist/permit is required to enter the reserve, and when cleared for entry as many as 30 vehicles depart and enter the park at approximately the same time and then split off along a network of tracks in search of elephants. When elephants are located, there is close approach at sightings and frequently ten to 12 vehicles in attendance. During the sightings, elephants were clearly disturbed as evidenced by the aggressive behaviour directed towards closest vehicles. In one case an attack on a vehicle was witnessed and the vehicle was damaged. The occupants of the vehicle said they had found the incident very stressful. Also, at sightings there was significant engine noise and the smell of exhaust fumes. Some drivers switched off their engines during a sighting; others in close proximity did not. There seemed to be no rules or protocols regarding the viewing of wildlife and certainly no interpretation. The delivery of interpretation in this case was especially important as during December–January male elephants are in musth (sexually active males with high testosterone levels) and behaving more aggressively towards intruders in their space. Furthermore, December–January is also the peak tourist season in Sri Lanka and a lot of tourists are entering the parks and viewing elephants on

a twice daily basis. The access track network was in a very poor condition and typified by deep ruts and quagmires with some drivers struggling to avoid becoming bogged in water-logged and muddy stretches of track. In one case a vehicle laden with tourists required the assistance of others in order to be extracted from deep mud. Some tracks had become unnavigable resulting in the development of secondary trail networks thereby expanding the access footprint across the park. There was no evidence of trail management. It can thus be concluded that the practice of ‘ecotourism’ at Hurulu Ecopark and Biosphere Reserve lacks key fundamental aspects such as ecological sustainability, environmental education and visitor satisfaction for discerning visitors.

<https://lanka.com/about/attractions/hurulu-eco-park/>

Newsome, D. (2013). An ecotourist’s recent experience in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 12(3), 210–220.

Focusing on the right values is important for an industry that purports to be ethical, which, along with the thoughts of an increasing number of scholars, is seen to be an integral aspect of the definition in theory and practice (the focus of Chapter 7). This means appropriate planning, development and management of ecotourism. This would include ethical marketing, the ethical treatment of animals and other aspects of the natural world, which in the past has translated into discussions on low impact and non-consumptiveness. Acott *et al.* (1998: 239) may have got it right when they argued that ‘There are many problems in trying to define ecotourism without proper attention being paid to underlying



Plate 1.3 Mayan ruins: major attractions in the peripheral regions of the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico