Case study of ecotourism

Ecotourism: Ecotourism is responsible travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strive to be low impact and (often) small scale (as an alternative to mass tourism).

Sustainable tourism: Sustainable tourism is tourism attempting to make a low impact on the environment and local culture, while helping to generate future employment for local people. The aim of sustainable tourism is to ensure that development brings a positive experience for local people, tourism companies and the tourists themselves. Sustainable tourism is not the same as ecotourism.

Carrying capacity: The maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction.The IB splits carrying capacity into environmental carrying capacity and perceptual carrying capacity. Environmental carrying capacity is the maximum number of visitors before environmental harm is done. Perceptual carrying capacity is the maximum number of visitors before visitors consider an impact like noise to be excessive.

Many people that ecotourism or sustainable tourism is not possible. Most tourists arrive at their destinations by planes, which are a major contribute to the greenhouse effect. Deforestation will have taken place to build many hotels and resorts and the hotels and resorts will create areas of private land that will disturb local flora and fauna. Tourists will put pressure on local electricity and water supplies and create waste that has to be treated. They may demand products that are not found locally and could introduce new diseases or alien species. Because of this some people say ecotourism should be known as ego-

tourism. This is when people go on holiday so that they can show off to the friends when they get home of what a fantastic time they had and tell them what a remote location they visited, while also caring for the environment.

Possible Ecotourism Destinations	Possible Ecotourism Activities
• Rainforests (Amazon) • Antarctica • Coral Reefs (Australia and Belize) • Deserts (Sahara and Atacama) • Savanna (areas of grassland - common location to do safari in Africa) • Mountain ranges (Himalayas and Andes) • Remote islands (Galapagos Islands) Some countries like Belize and Costa Rica market themselves as ecotourist destinations	• Bird watching • Walking • Cycling • Rafting and kayaking • Safari (looking for animals) • Restoring water ways • Flora and fauna surveys (counting and cataloging species) • Cleaning beaches and reefs • Hot air ballooning • Horse riding • Surfing • Tree planting • Swimming and diving

People often get sustainable tourism and ecotourism confused, but there are some unique differences between the two. You will learn more about sustainable tourism at the end of this unit but some of the main similarities and differences include.

Similarities Between Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism	Differences Between Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism
• Both attempt to minimise the impact on the environment • Both attempt to minimise the impact on local populations. With ecotourism this might include indigenous groups. • Both aim to create a unique and enjoyable experience for tourists. • Both aim to educate tourists about responsible travel • Both hope to be sustainable over the long-term.	• Ecotourism is usually on a smaller scale, whereas sustainable tourism can be on a much larger scale • Sustainable tourism also focuses on the economic needs of areas • Ecotourism is usually to remote areas of natural beauty, where sustainable tourism can be to any location e.g. cities or beaches • Ecotourism usually involves physical activity. • Ecotourism is a type of tourism that is included under the umbrealla of sustainable tourism

How to be Sustainable (Go to sustainable tourism section for more information: [Sustainable tourism)]

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY	SOCIAL/CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY
• Use renewable energy sources to power tourist facilities • Promote use of public transport or non-polluting transport methods e.g. cycling, walking and kayaking • Avoid deforestation or damage to any natural habitat when building tourist facilities • Recycle all waste (plastic, paper, glass, metal) • Minimise waste e.g. packaging for hotel toiletries • Conserve water (half flush toilets, showers, reduction in washing by reusing towels. • Educate about importance of biodiversity, energy reduction, conservation, etc.	• Employ local workers and provide them with training programmes. • Only buy local products so to support local economy. • Reinvest all tourist company profits in the local economy to minimise economic leakage. • Use local guides and companies	• Ensure that all tourist facilities are able to be accessed by locals and that they are affordable. • Promote local food, dance, music, costumes, language, etc. • Educate about local history and culture • Preserve historical and archeological sites (ruins, churches, castles, etc.)

Ecotourism Case Study - Costa Rica - Monteverde Cloud Forest

Costa Rica, located in Central America, often advertises itself as an ecotourism location. The government has actively promoted ecotourism to create jobs and income in a country which has seen a decline the primary sector. Small-scale sustainable tourist developments have been promoted in protected areas. One of these areas in the Monteverde cloud forest.

The cloud forest is at an altitude of about 1700metres. It has extremely diverse flora and fauna (over 100 species of mammals, 2,500 plant species over 400 bird species and over 120 reptile and amphibian species). Tourism was initially developed by a population of about 5,000 Quakers (Christian Community) leaving in the area. Tourist developments included the local population who had an interest in the maintenance of the forest.

In 1972 the 'Tropical Science Centre' purchased an area of forest (320 hectares) to be managed by the Quakers for tourism activities. In 1974 the area only received 471 visitors but by the 1990's tourism was averaging about 50,000 a year. To try and stop tourism growing too big, locals asked for the roads not to be paved. To this day the only access is by dirt road (30km of bumpy track only really accessible by 4x4s). This growth in tourism has created numerous benefits:

- 80 new businesses have opened in Monteverde since 1970's
- The Reserva Biológica Bosque Nuboso Monteverde now covers over 10,500 hectares
- The large Santa Elena reserve (300 hectares) has also been established
- Many more smaller reserves have also been created, increasing the size of the protected area e.g. Arenal Conservation Area
- There are 400 full-time and 140 part-time jobs directly related to tourism - there are many more indirect jobs.
- The Monteverde reserve employs over 50 staff
- The reserve actually budgets to train and educate locals and tourists about ecotourism and protection of the reserve
- Access to the cloud forest is strictly controlled. Trails in both reserves are only limited to certain areas, allowing wildlife to exist undisturbed elsewhere.
- Locals arts and crafts have been rejuvenated
- An increase in the quantity and variety ecotourist activities e.g. canopy walks
- Local population and private sector value the cloud forest as its creates income. It is worth more standing than being cut down.

As with most things that have been a few problems:

- Land prices have increased
- People have migrated into the area looking for jobs placing pressure on the local infrastructure
- Atmosphere has changed away from local Quaker community to a tourist centre
- Tourists are demanding more and more facilities and greater luxury. These facilities can use more electricity, although the majority of Costa Rica's energy is produced from renewable sources.
- 40% of Monteverde's amphibians have become extinct (including the Golden Toad). Not directly blamed on tourism but probably climate change.
- Many areas close to the trails have less wildlife, showing that humans do disturb and have an impact on them
- Some activities don't necessarily appear sustainable e.g. monorails through the canopy and zip lines.
- Because of the dirt track road, most tourists arrive in 4x4s which use more petrol. In addition the large amounts of 4x4s create a lot of dust which can disturb plant and animal life.

Monteverde Area Map

Carrying Capacity

The idea of carrying capacity does come in for criticism. The main argument is that facilities and technology change and all tourists behave differently. For example 10 cyclists, cycling and camping in a forested area are going to have a very different impact compared to 10 hunters travelling through a forest in 4 x 4 vehicles. Also areas carrying capacity may increase with the building of a new resort, the development of renewable energy or the opening of a desalination plant. Despite its criticisms it can be useful for explaining the possible impacts from tourism. Carrying capacity is often divided into

Ecological/Environmental/Biological/Biophysical: This deals with the extent to which the natural environment is able to tolerate interference from tourists. This is made more complicated by the fact that because it deals with ecology which is able to regenerate to some extent so in this case the carrying capacity is when the damage exceeds the habitats ability to regenerate.

Economic: This relates to a level of unacceptable change within the local economy of a tourist destination, it is the extent to which a tourist destination is able to accommodate tourist functions without the loss of local activates , take for example a souvenir store taking the place of a shop selling essential items to the local community. This might also involve a cost-benefit analysis of income generated versus added costs from inflation.

Perceptual or Social: This relates to the negative socio-cultural affects related to tourism development. Perceptual and social carrying capacity may have been reached when the local tolerance for tourism decreases or tourists enjoyment is reduced.

Physical: This is the maximum number of people that an area is actually able to support/hold. In the case of an individual tourist attraction it is the maximum number that can fit on the site at any given time and still allow people to be able to move. For a tourist destination this might mean also mean the total number of rooms available or incoming flights e.g. Easter Island only has five flight a week and there is no other way of getting there.

Problems if a destination exceeds its carrying capacity include:

- Inflation
- Tensions between locals and tourists
- Deforestation
- Congestion
- Water pollution from increased waste
- Water shortages from increased demand
- Air pollution from increased cars and flights

- Footpath erosion
- Damage to archaeological sites
- Power black-outs
- Visual and noise pollution
- Disturbance of wildlife
- Reduction in visitor numbers