

All About Ecotourism

By: Rosemary Black
Charles Sturt University, Australia

For RRT 287

1



What is Ecotourism?

Definitions

There are almost as many definitions of ecotourism as there are ecotourism operators. The two that are commonly referred to in Australia are:

"Nature based tourism that involved the interpretation and education, and is managed to be ecologically sustainable (recognising that the 'natural environment includes cultural components and that 'ecologically sustainable involves an appropriate return to the community and long term conservation of the resource)." Commonwealth Department of Tourism 1995

"Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation."

Ecotourism Association of Australia 1991

2



What is Ecotourism?

Definitions

Even though definitions vary most agree that the main components of ecotourism are:

- Ecotourism features interpretation and education
- Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable
- Ecotourism incorporates cultural considerations
- There is net return/benefit to the local community

3



What is Ecotourism?

The 8 Principles of Ecotourism

Ecotourism:

- #1 focuses on personally experiencing natural areas in ways that lead to greater understanding and appreciation
eg. guided walks through surrounding natural areas with informative and entertaining commentary that focuses on the natural values of the area
- #2 integrates opportunities to understand natural areas into each experience
eg. availability of reference material, interpretive signage along walking trails

4



What is Ecotourism?

The 8 Principles of Ecotourism

Ecotourism:

- #3 represents best practice for ecologically sustainable tourism
eg. minimal disruption to wildlife and native vegetation
- #4 positively contributes to the ongoing conservation of natural areas
eg. assistance with fauna and flora surveys

5



What is Ecotourism?

The 8 Principles of Ecotourism

Ecotourism:

- #5 provides constructive ongoing contributions to local communities
eg. purchase of local goods, contributions to local environment groups
- #6 is sensitive to, interprets and involves different cultures, particularly indigenous culture
eg. traditional custodians are consulted with about the nature and scope of the operation

6



What is Ecotourism?

The 8 Principles of Ecotourism

Ecotourism:

#7 consistently meets client expectations
eg. informal feedback on client satisfaction is sought through surveys and indicates that the majority of clients are satisfied with this experience

#8 marketing is accurate and leads to realistic expectations
eg. whales on the cover of a desert tour brochure are not likely to lead realistic expectations!

7



The Benefits of Ecotourism

Economic development and diversification, particularly in regional areas.

The tendency for greater expenditure and length of stay by ecotourists (compared to tourists generally).

The generation of income for conservation and management of national parks and other public land.

Quality employment opportunities utilising local knowledge.

8



The Benefits of Ecotourism

Foreign exchange earnings.

Education and appreciation of Australia's natural heritage

A study conducted in 1995 estimated that there were 600 ecotourism operators in Australia, providing 6500 jobs and approximately \$250 million in turnover. Of these operators 105 were based in Queensland (Econsult, 1995).

9



Profile of an Ecotourist

What are they looking for?

Ecotourists generally seek out travel experiences that involve:

Areas or attractions of natural beauty.

Small group sizes and away from crowds.

10



Profile of an Ecotourist

What are they looking for?

Interaction with other people who are preferably like minded and compatible.

Some level of interaction with the environment

Some degree of information and learning.

Fun and enjoyment.

11



Profile of an Ecotourist

The three broad market segments

BTR's research suggests that there are 3 broad ecotourism market segments. These are:

Impulse

Characterised by nature based day trips away from the main tourist destinations and mainly booked locally by domestic and international tourists

12



Profile of an Ecotourist

The three broad market segments

Active

Characterised by younger and middle aged professionals who generally book in advance. There is a skew to domestic tourists although there could well be the potential for growth through international marketing, infrastructure and product development.

13



Profile of an Ecotourist

The three broad market segments

Personalised

Essentially older professionals (or retired) who expect to be well looked after by the operator. This segment is skewed to international tourists who book overnight ecotours before arriving in Australia

14



Profile of an Ecotourist

How do they choose their eco-experience?

The main points that came out of the BTR research indicate that ecotourists:

Value personalised service coupled with high quality natural resources

Often select their tours once they are in the area and level of interpretation provided is one of the major considerations

Word of mouth and local information are important sources of influence.

15



The role of the Ecotourism Association of Australia

Priorities

Defining ecotourism

- Shaping ecotourism
- Operator guidelines
- Codes of conduct
- Visitor awareness
- Training
- Standards

Developing ecotourism

- Quality
- Growth
- Diversity

National Ecotourism Accreditation Program

16



National Ecotourism Accreditation Program

Products accredited during 1997/98

Crystal Creek
Hookes Creek Forest Resort
Montague Island Nature Reserve Tours
On The Wallaby
Tree Tops Environmental Centre
Jemby Rinjah Lodge
Dreamtime Outback Safaris
Eco-Adventure Tours
Gippsland High Country Tours

Gipsy Point Lodge
Mallee Outback Experience
Otway Ocean Tours
Adventure Charters of Kangaroo Island
Dick Lang's Desert Air Safaris
R & B Kimberley Ecotours

17

