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

The 8 Principles of 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

#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 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 about the nature and scope of the operation
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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!

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.
- 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 6,500 jobs and approximately $250 million in turnover. Of these operators, 105 were based in Queensland (Econsult, 1995).

Profile of an Ecotourist

- What are they looking for?
  - Small group sizes and away from crowds.
  - Areas or attractions of natural beauty.
  - 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.

The three broad market segments

- Impulse
  - Characterized by nature-based day trips away from the main tourist destinations and mainly booked locally by domestic and international tourists.
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.

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.

How do they choose their eco-experience?

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

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

Products accredited during 1997/98
- Crystal Creek
- Hooker Creek Forest Resort
- Maningrida Nature Reserve Tours
- On The Wallaby
- Tree Tops Environmental Centre
- Denely-Brough Lodge
- Dreamtime Outback Safaris
- Eco-Adventure Tours
- Bilinga High Country Tours