

UNIT 2 ECOTOURISM

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is the tourism industry's fastest growing sub-sector, with an estimated world-wide annual growth of 10-15%. It is a promising means of advancing social, economic and environmental objectives in developing countries. It offers new opportunities for small-enterprise investment and employment and increases the national stake in protecting the biological resources of developing countries.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you should be able to identify:

- the principles and economic importance of ecotourism, and
- the impact of ecotourism on the environment.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Ecotourism

Also known as “ecological tourism”, ecotourism is responsible for travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people. It is a form which appeals to the ecologically and socially conscious; it is a recreational and educational travel based on natural attractions. It focuses on local culture, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on the planet, typically involving travel to destinations where flora, fauna and

cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Ecotourism activities include flora and fauna studies, surveys and visits, whale watching, turtle watching, hiking in National Parks, cycling in the outback, volcano watching, support to endangered species, recording local cultures, bird breeding support, trips to the frozen wastes, volunteering, ecolodging, and farm visits.

3.2 Benefits of Ecotourism

Ecotourism has great potential for sustainable development. It satisfies several criteria (defining points) such as

- i. conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity, through ecosystem protection;
- ii. promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity;
- iii. sharing of socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous people by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism enterprises, support for human rights and democratic movements, producing direct financial benefits for conservation through park entrance fees, tour company, hotel, airline and airport taxes, and voluntary contributions, providing empowerment for local people through income, and other tangible benefits such as potable water, roads, health clinics, etc.;
- iv. increase of environmental and cultural knowledge through travel to natural destinations and education for both tourists and residents of nearby communities;
- v. minimization of tourism's own environmental impact;
- vi. affordability and lack of waste in the form of luxury; and
- vii. local culture (ecotourism is culturally intrusive and exploitative), flora and fauna being the main attractions.

3.3 Direct Environmental Effects of Ecotourism

These effects include

- i. environmental degradation with tourist infrastructure;
- ii. population pressures from ecotourism also leaves behind garbage and pollution associated with the Western style;
- iii. the activities disturb fauna and flora e.g. trampling of flora and fauna during picture-taking, wildlife viewing, nature hike;
- iv. environmental hazards e.g. consumption of virgin territories by deforestation, disruption of ecological life systems, pollution types, etc. leading to environmental degradation;
- v. no re-investment of profits into local economy or environmental protection;

- vi. limited employment of local people, and entry at its lowest level and meager wages;
- vii. resentment by local people e.g. due to unfair compensation benefits and displacement from traditional lands;
- viii. development of destructive markets in wildlife souvenirs e.g. sale of coral trinkets contributing to illegal harvesting and poaching from tropical islands and animals products in Asia;
- ix. threats to indigenous cultures e.g. illegal loss of homes, displacement to marginal lands with harsh climates, poor soils, lack of water and infested with livestock and disease; and
- x. mismanagement of ecotourism sites- regulations for environmental protection are vaguely defined, costly to implement, hard to enforce and uncertain in effectiveness.

3.4 Ecolodge

This is the accommodation preferred by ecotourists and by those who are seeking an intimate contact with nature. It is used to identify a nature-dependent tourist facility that meets the principle of ecotourism. Ecolodges enhance the economic value of natural resources and cultural experiences. An ecolodge is a small-scale facility that blends with its surroundings, offering visitors an environmental experience of the natural world around them. Unlike the traditional tourist facility, the main attractions and activities in an ecolodge are related to the surrounding environment.

3.4.1 Characteristics of an Ecolodge

- i. the ecolodge is constructed using natural and locally produced building materials;
- ii. it ideally relies on solar or alternative energies;
- iii. it recycles the waste and wastewater it generates;
- iv. it serves locally grown and produced foods and usually donates part of its profit to local conservation efforts;
- v. it is locally owned and operated and provides visitors with some form of environmental education, in order to enrich their understanding of planet Earth. This helps to preserve the world's natural habitat and cultural heritage and benefit local inhabitants.

3.4.2 Features of an Ecolodge

- i. location and resource protection;
- ii. natural and cultural attractions (outstanding natural beauty);
- iii. facilities (distinct design features);
- iv. capacity (typically harbours 25-100 guests);

- v. activities (e.g. trail hiking, nature interpretation, bird watching, river trips, desert excursions, mountain biking, horse and camel riding); and
- vi. general atmosphere (friendly, flexible and educational environment to give a sense of ‘belonging’ to visitors).

3.5 Ecotourism Development in Nigeria

The development of ecotourism in Nigeria can be traced back to 1889 when the colonial administration established the first forest reserve in the then Colony of Lagos. The number of reserves increased thereafter over the years to include wildlife sanctuaries, communal forests and national parks. Currently, there are 36 game reserves and six National Parks. The table below shows the game reserves and national parks by distribution. The Cross River National Park is made up of two sections, namely the Oban and Bosh/Okwong. The species found in both sectors include antelopes, chimpanzees, high forest monkeys, high forest elephants, manatees, bush pigs, baboon, leopards and gorillas, some of which are endangered species. The Cross River National Park is now the only significant park in the rainforest zone of Nigeria, and it is preserving major forest species and the future values associated with them.

Name	State	Status
Kainji Lake Park	Niger	National
Old Oyo Park	Oyo	National
Lake Chad Park	Borno	National
Yankari Park	Bauchi	National
Cross River Park	Cross River	National
Gashaka-guranti Park	Adamawa	National
Ebbazikampe Reserve	Kwara	Game
Okpara Reserve	Oyo	Game
Upper Ogun Reserve	Oyo	Game
Ofosu Reserve	Edo	Game
Okomu Reserve	Edo	Game

Ologbo Reserve	Edo	Game
Gilli gilli Reserve	Edo	Game
Iri Ada Obi Reserve	Edo	Game
Ologbo emu urho Reserve	Edo	Game
Orle River Game Reserve	Edo	Game
Anambra Reserve	Anambra	Game
Udi/Nsukka Reserve	Anambra	Game
Akpaka Reserve	Anambra	Game
Game reserve A Reserve	Cross River	Game
Game reserve B Reserve	Cross River	Game
Stubbs Creek Reserve	River	Game
Ibi Reserve	Plateau	Game
Wase Rock Bird Sanctuary Reserve	Plateau	Game
Ankwe River Reserve	Plateau	Game
Damper Sanctuary Reserve	Plateau	Game
Wase Sanctuary Reserve	Plateau	Game
Pandam Reserve	Plateau	Game
Nasarawa Reserve	Plateau	Game
Lame/Bura Reserve	Bauchi	Game
Kogin Kano Reserve	Kano	Game
Dagida Reserve	Niger	Game
Alawa Reserve	Niger	Game
Kamaku Reserve	Kaduna	Game
Kwaiambana Reserve	Sokoto	Game

Source: Akegbejo-Samsons, Y. (1996).

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have learned that

- i. ecotourism is the fastest growing sub-sector of tourism,
- ii. ecotourism is a potential source of improved socio-economic life in developing countries, and
- iii. ecotourism ensures the protection of nature and biodiversity.

5.0 SUMMARY

The development of ecotourism is critical for effective national development, as it not only assures improved socio-economic life for the citizens but also assures a safe environment for human existence.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) (a) What is “ecological tourism”?
(b) List any ten activities involved in ecological tourism.
- 2) Mention the areas of focus of ecotourism.
- 3) Enumerate any five benefits of ecotourism.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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Ecotourism in Africa.