

THE ETHICS, OBLIGATIONS, AND STAKEHOLDERS OF ECOTOURISM MARKETING

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Abstract: Ecotourism is small-scale tourism that visits areas of exceptional natural and cultural interests in a manner that: (1) protects the nature; (2) preserves the culture; (3) enhances the local economy; and (4) educates the tourists. Ecotourism was created as the antidote to mass tourism's disregard at best, or exploitation at worst, of pristine destinations. But the term ecotourism is easily abused. Marketing, from product development to promotion, creates expectations for both hosts and guests. Procedures and oversight must be established to ensure that ecotourism remains true to its intended purpose. Worldwide, this is still a work in progress. This paper discusses the ethics, obligations, and stakeholders involved in the marketing of ecotourism products using insights, examples, and best practices from around the world.

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Reikšminiai žodžiai: eko turizmas, rinkodara, masinis turizmas.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of ecotourism has developed within the last generation to counteract the negative impacts of mass tourism that had been expanding rapidly from urban areas and coastal resorts into more distant natural areas, often with little regard for environmental impacts. The emergence of ecotourism has paralleled the growth of the sustainability movement, and it has become a prominent subset of sustainable tourism (Wood, 2002). The term “ecotours” was first mentioned by Parks Canada in the 1960s (Fennel, 1999), and Canada has retained a leadership role in both ecotourism and heritage tourism. However, it was Hector Ceballos-Lascurian, a Mexican architect who specialized in environmentally-friendly designs, credited with coining, or at least popularizing, the term “ecotourism” in 1983 (Reid, 2000). In 1990, the International Ecotourism Society was founded (TIES, 2012). It immediately became a strong voice

for ecotourism, helping to define the concept and promote its principles to companies and governments around the world. As more destinations became aware of ecotourism and the urgent need to apply it properly, 2002 was designated as the International Year of Ecotourism by the United Nations.

The growth of ecotourism has led to the development of similar concepts with variations in names and applications. Among them are nature tourism, green tourism, low-impact tourism, responsible tourism, endemic tourism, indigenous tourism, geotourism, alternative tourism, village tourism, and adventure travel (Buckley, 2009). This proliferation of product spinoffs and terminology clearly demonstrates the widely-accepted importance of the ecotourism concept, but, as we shall discuss, ecotourism's adaptability has also blurred its meaning, value, and credibility. Ecotourism clearly distinguishes itself from nature tourism. While nature tourism is closely related to outdoor recreation, ecotourism has several additional features. First, it ensures that its participants, known as ecotourists, have the opportunity to interact with local inhabitants (UNWTO, 2002). Second, it includes site interpretation (education) of the natural and cultural settings it visits (Honey, 1999). Third, it enhances the economic well-being of the local community (Michels, 2012). And, fourth, it contributes to conservation (Self, Self, and Bell-Haynes, 2010).

There are many definitions of ecotourism based upon its setting and primary features. The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" (TIES, 1990). The preferred definition of ecotourism for this paper is "small-scale tourism that visits areas of exceptional natural and cultural interest in a manner that accomplishes the following: (1) protects the nature; (2) preserves the culture; (3) enhances the economy of the local people; and (4) educates the tourists." As these definitions imply, ecotourism must not only be sustainable, it must also embrace the Triple Bottom Line of people, planet, and profits to truly meet all of its goals (Wood, 2004) (Buckley, 2009).

Tourism is a marketing-driven industry. For ecotourism, which is a major form of special interest tourism (Weiler and Hall, 1992), marketing is an especially important function. Each of the four "P's" of the traditional marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion) has an array of significant nuances when applied to ecotourism. Even though the main reason for developing tourism anywhere is to benefit the local community, and the primary benefit sought is economic, tourism creates additional impacts on the community's environment, society, and culture. Proper ecotourism marketing is, therefore, critical for optimizing its positive impacts in each of these areas. After a brief review of ecotourism and the marketing mix, this paper will discuss the use and abuse of ecotourism labeling and the vital role that certification, codes of conduct, and interpretation play in the development and delivery of authentic ecotourism products.

2. ECOTOURISM AND THE MARKETING MIX

Ecotourism products require a special environmental setting, one that features an area of pristine natural beauty, is somewhat off-the-beaten path, and has the potential for related activities that appeal to a certain type of tourist, known as an ecotourist or ecotraveler (Wood, 2002). Product development requires the discovery of these settings and the permission to operate tours there, either from local people or from local authorities. Mass tourism, on the other hand, faces no such restrictions in offering tour packages to enclave resorts or sightseeing itineraries that go from city to city and from one major attraction to another. Whenever possible, ecotourism should highlight existing attractions and activities, and ecotourism facilities should be locally-owned, locally-operated, and human-scale. The only development normally required for ecotourism is reasonable access to the destination, the provision of basic facilities or, better yet, modification to local ones, and the training of local entrepreneurs and staff in ecotourism principles and management. Unlike mass tourism destinations, no foreign direct investment is needed or wanted. While ecotourism companies located in major source markets may operate tours to multiple destinations, there is no franchising of ecotourism products or ecolodges at the destinations. Depending on their content and conditions, ecotourism products provide experiences that can be classified along a continuum, ranging from soft ecotourism at one end to hard ecotourism at the other (Zalatan and Gaston, 1996). As such, ecotourism has the potential to appeal to a wide variety of travelers and add substantial value to a destination's product mix.

The pricing of ecotourism products is counter-intuitive. Common sense tells us that ecotourists who stay in tents and longhouses and tromp along jungle trails or trek into the mountains should pay less than mass market tourists who travel by air-conditioned motor coaches, stay in deluxe hotels, and visit world-famous attractions. But, often they do not when all the expenses are totaled. Ecotourism products are normally more difficult to access, require permits, utilize expert tour managers and local guides, and contribute to conservation efforts. In addition, they are unable to benefit from economies of scale, and they may suffer from seasonality. Some ecotourism experiences can be enjoyed by independent travelers, but they are often sold in the form of package tours. These tours are all-inclusive and thoroughly programmed with little opportunity for participants to deviate from the prepared itinerary. Of course, in most ecotourism destinations, there is no other place to eat or sleep than the facilities included in the tour package. The main concern about pricing of ecotourism products is that they are priced so that the operator attracts enough customers for the destination to remain viable and stay in business. Two bad things can happen when ecotourism becomes unprofitable at a destination. One is if the community stops being an ecotourism destination, the opportunity that has been presented to diversify its economy, enhance its standard of living, and help preserve its natural environment is lost. The second ill effect is that once an ecotourism destination is developed, if it fails, it might continue operating, but without staying true to ecotourism principles. In this situation, ecotourists can become dissatisfied with their experience, unwittingly cause harm to the destination, and lose

confidence in the ecotourism concept. These types of pseudo-ecotourism destinations already exist, and they malign the image of the entire industry. The “eco” in ecotourism stands for ecology, but it also means economy. For an ecotourism company to succeed, it must achieve both its environmental goals and its financial goals.

Although ecotourism products have a substantial following, they do not receive large-scale support from intermediaries in the mainstream distribution system. Travel agents can sell them, but unless they specialize in ecotourism, they will lack the product knowledge and motivation to promote them with any degree of authority (Wood, 2002). The same is true with typical outbound tour companies that develop itineraries to mass market resorts and destinations. They compete heavily on price and make their profit through volume. With the increased interest in the ecotourism products, more outbound companies are specializing in packaging, selling, and operating ecotourism and adventure travel products. Since these companies are located in the source markets, they require the services of local ecotourism companies to provide operational support at the destinations (Wood, 2002). Most of these local ecotourism companies are small businesses, located in remote settings in far-flung parts of the world. Their promotion and distribution resources are quite limited.

Only the largest ecotourism companies are able to print and distribute sales material, advertise in tourism publications, or attend travel trade shows. The Internet has become the most cost-effective promotional channel for providing ecotourism enthusiasts worldwide with basic information, contacts, and the means to reserve and pay for their arrangements (Special Report: Travel Marketing, 2006) (Self, Self, and Bell-Haynes, 2010). Wary consumers who have learned to distrust the ecotourism label also rely on the Internet to talk to other travelers (Special Report: Travel Marketing, 2006) and investigate ecotourism credentials (Ketchell, 2007). According to Roth (2011), peer review travel sites have become the dominant influence on travel decisions, and social media has become twice as important a source of information as advertising for eco-travelers. The activities of ecotourism associations and government tourism promotion offices should also be utilized to reach distant marketplaces. However, findings at the World Ecotourism Summit in 2002 revealed a basic lack of knowledge of markets and how to reach them (UNWTO, 2002). The Summit also stressed the need for additional public awareness of the concept of ecotourism in both the source markets and the host communities.

3. ECOTOURISM USE AND ABUSE

As ecotourism became the buzzword describing the proper way to visit remote areas using environmental care and cultural sensitivity, it attracted tourists with similar interests and values. As their ranks grew, more tourism businesses in all sectors began to jump on the ecotourism bandwagon. Every tour was suddenly labeled green, and everything from cruise ships to massive beachfront resorts and hi-rise hotels was being touted as part of ecotourism (Loftis, 1994). A study by TerraChoice Environmental

Marketing in 2007, entitled the “Six Sins of Greenwashing”, found that matters were continuing to get worse. It reported that 99 percent of all products labeled as “green” were at least partially bogus (Judkis, 2008). Tourism was one of the worst offenders, as well-intentioned ecotourists were being short-changed by ecotourism hucksters. As Crowfoot reported while visiting Hawaii in 2011, “Everyone had an angle for labeling their outing ecotourism, no matter how inauthentic” (Crowfoot, 2011). John Vidal, the environment editor for *The Guardian* in London, acknowledged the benefits of green travel. However, he also wrote the following: “At its worst, green travel is a cynical lie, told by travel agents, tour operators, airlines, and cruise lines claiming to be green but actually peddling mass, crass tourism. It has been used to cover any encounter with indigenous peoples, any foray into a forest or trip by bicycle” (Vidal, 2010).

Greenwashing, a term coined by the American environmentalist Jay Westervelt in the 1980s (Siegel, 2009) has become a worldwide sham, and companies in some of the most popular and hallowed ecotourism destinations are guilty of it. Dasenbrock (2002) found mixed results in Costa Rica, a country with world-class biodiversity, protected areas, and natural attractions that had already given rise to a billion dollar per year ecotourism industry by the turn of the millennium. She reported that authorities were allowing tourists to exceed the carrying capacity of protected areas and high-rise hotels and resorts were being constructed near them. Her summation was the industry was facing “difficulties in reconciling its environmental ideals with the growing demand for ecotourism and the temptation for profit-seeking.” Greenwashing was putting Costa Rica’s ecotourism reputation at risk.

The Galapagos Islands, with such unique bio-diversity as to inspire Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, have strayed from their ecotourism origins and become inundated with tourists. Annual arrivals in the Galapagos totaled only 1,000 ecotourists annually in the late 1960s, a number that grew to 180,000 visitors in 2008 (Self, Self, & Bell-Haynes, 2010). The Galapagos was one of the twelve original World Heritage Sites designated by UNESCO in 1978. Back then, tourists visited aboard small boats, and tourism revenue supported conservation. As tourism’s economic potential overwhelmed concerns about conservation, land-based tourism began to welcome visitors with nightclubs, bars (Darton, 2010), and hotels ranging from two to five stars. Sport fishing was also allowed (Darton, 2010). Greenwashing and uncontrolled tourism development changed the character of the local tourism industry (Self, Self, & Bell-Haynes, 2010). In 2007, UNESCO inscribed the Galapagos on its Danger List due to threats from “invasive species, unbridled tourism, and over-fishing” (UNESCO, 2010). Subsequent measures taken by the Ecuadorian Government, which administers the islands as a national park, were sufficient for its removal from the Danger List in 2010. However, conservationists say that the Galapagos is still “very much at risk.” They are equally convinced that well-planned tourism can help save it, while poorly-managed tourism will destroy it (Darton, 2010).

4. ECOTOURISM CODES OF ETHICS

Considering ecotourism's purpose and the goals it attempts to achieve, ethics are at its very core. If tourism planners and operators had treated the natural environment and the local community in an ethical manner, ecotourism, in its current form, would probably not exist. Ecotourism considerations should have already been a logical part of the *modus operandi* of everyone involved in tourism development and management. National parks, wildlife preserves, conservation movements, and even UNESCO's impetus for designating World Heritage Sites based on their natural and/or cultural resources, predate the concept of ecotourism. Hence, the development of ecotourism principles and practices was reactive, rather than proactive. The need for ecotourism was brought about by the willingness to ignore tourism's negative impacts in favor of short-term profits. However, this was also a period of prolonged tourism expansion that pushed tourists farther off the beaten path, and the entrepreneurial zeal to attract and serve these new markets forged ahead with them. At some point, various stakeholders began to realize that for everyone to benefit in the long-term, a sustainable and equitable approach was required.

Fennel and Malloy (2007) define ethics in their book entitled *Codes of Ethics in Tourism*, as "the rules, standards, and principles that dictate right, good, and authentic conduct among members of a society or profession." Hence, in ecotourism, various codes of ethics (also called codes of conduct or codes of practice) have been developed to control the impact of tourism on natural and cultural resources by guiding tourists' behavior and actions (Yunnan Ecotourism Association, 2002). Freedom is an important part of the tourism experience (Przeclawski, 1996), and even though these codes curtail tourists' freedom to do whatever they please, the use of codes acknowledges that tourists have certain responsibilities and obligations (Fennel and Malloy, 2007). Codes are also often created for ecotourism operators, and they are occasionally created for the local community. All three have responsibilities and obligations that must be met for everyone to benefit from ecotourism activities within a destination (Mock and O'Neil, 2012).

Since most ecotourists are seeking authentic experiences with nature and culture, they are willing to adhere to codes of ethics. For those who are new to ecotourism's demands, codes of conduct can help "persuade them to play an active and positive role in protecting the physical environment and engaging sympathetically with host communities" (Mock and O'Neil, 2012). Every destination is different. Even for tourists engaged in mass tourism activities, who do not really consider themselves guests, it is preferable to understand some local customs and language to facilitate enjoyment and to avoid cultural faux pas. For ecotourists, who do consider themselves guests, it is imperative to understand in advance the specific behaviors and actions that are deemed acceptable. Ecotourists feel a responsibility for the natural environment and for their cultural interactions, so they want to know what they can and cannot do. Since they value the destination's resources, they are eager to help maintain it by complying with applicable codes. For the few who fail to comply, they are subject to immediate removal from the destination.

Most ecotourism companies are located in source markets and gateway cities, but they are the driving force for the destinations they serve in terms of market development and sales (Wood 2002). They partner with the local community, including local authorities, facility managers, and ecotourism professionals and staff to create and deliver ecotourism experiences that will satisfy their clients. These companies are external to the destination, but they are critical to its success and sustainability. In ecotourism destinations that are fairly accessible to independent travelers, locally owned and operated ecotourism companies can function alone. But, in most situations, it is the external ecotourism companies or other intermediaries that stoke the market, bring in the groups, and utilize local facilities and staff as needed. In either situation, the ecotourism companies must work with the local authorities to set the standards and ensure adherence to ecotourism principles. A code of ethics is a set of guidelines that dictates how they must do this. If an ecotourism company, external or local, strays from the accepted principles and its agreed code of ethics, the viability of the entire destination could be in jeopardy. Ecotourists will not realize they are not receiving an authentic experience until it is too late, and the local community may be hesitant to stop the infusion of jobs and income, even when they begin to realize that incremental damage is occurring.

Local communities have the most to gain or lose from ecotourism (Wood, 2002). If ecotourism is successful, they have gained a new enterprise that will contribute to their well-being. If ecotourism proves to be unsuccessful, then it will have been disruptive and given false hope for economic development. It may have damaged precious natural resources and exposed them to further exploitation. It may have also upset the social equilibrium of the destination and introduced harmful concepts into the culture (Wood, 2004). External ecotourism companies can always find another destination, make arrangements, print new brochures, and create another web page. They can easily move on. So can ecotourists. It's a big world with many ecotourism destinations available to them. However, local communities cannot. The destination is their home. Inhabitants of rural areas often migrate to urban areas and gateway cities in search of a better life. Ecotourism has the potential to slow out-migration by creating more economic options for indigenous people, but only if it works.

Many codes of conduct have been created for ecotourism and other forms of sustainable development throughout the world. The APEC/PATA Code for Sustainable Tourism was adopted in 2001. The first two of its seven categories are "Conserve the natural environment, ecosystem, and biodiversity" and "Respect and support local traditions, cultures, and communities" (APEC/PATA, 2001). It has been used as a model by many companies in the region, such as Bali Discovery Tours. Although the Himalayan Tourist Code protects a unique environment, its code features several important elements that are found in other codes around the world, such as "Travel ecologically", "Protect wildlife", and "Respect the culture" (Ministry of Tourism, Nepal, 2000). In Africa, members of the Kenya Association of Tour Operators are bound by its Code of Conduct that was created to ensure all of its members "trade honestly" with tourists, travel agents, and other travel partners (KATO, 2012). Royal Ecotravel (2008), which operates in Kenya and Tanzania, reminds its ecotourists of their obliga-

tion by the following statement: "You, the traveler, have an enormous impact on the travel industry through the choices you make." Among its ten posted guidelines are "Respect the frailty of the earth" and "Respect the privacy and dignity of others." The International Institute for Peace through Tourism offers its IIP T Credo of the Peaceful Traveler for travelers of any type. It asks travelers to affirm their personal responsibility and commitment to eight practices. Among them are "Revere and protect the natural environment which sustains all life", "Appreciate all cultures I discover", and "Support travel services that share these views and act upon them" (Canfield and Hansen, 2002).

5. ECOTOURISM CERTIFICATION

Ecotourism certification has the potential to be a powerful marketing tool. For ecotourism companies, certification provides a seal of quality and authenticity for their product, shows their commitment for mitigating environmental and social impacts, and enables them to market their products more effectively (UNWTO, 2003). However, most sustainable tourism certification programs are nationally based, operate only regionally, and have limited consumer recognition (CREST, 2007). Therefore, individual businesses must take the initiative to add marketing value to compensate for the lack of brand name impact. For the distribution system, certification can distinguish which company among various operators a travel agency, inbound tour operator, or incentive planner should contract for services. For individual ecotourists, it helps identify and select the company they will use to gain the most from their ecotourism experience.

The concept of ecotourism certification is wonderful, but often its implementation is not. But, first, why is certification necessary at all? It all goes back to ethics and standards. Certification is voluntary, and any ecotourism company can label itself as ecotourism. This is quite fashionable in an increasingly environmentally-conscious world. Many tourists looking for a nature-based tour prefer a company with ecotourism in its name. As a result, so many companies have shamelessly and erroneously added ecotourism to their name, that terms, such as "ecotourism lite" (Honey, 1999) and "greenwashing" (Judkis, 2008) are used to describe those companies that promise an ecotourism experience, but fail to deliver on it. This abuse of the term "ecotourism" has diminished its marketing value and led to the need for certification of authentic ecotourism companies in order to separate them from the imposters and protect the image of the industry.

Ecotourism certification is still developing in many parts of the world. More than 60 certification programs were developed during the interval between the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio and the 2002 United Nations International Year of Ecotourism, and the number continues to rise (Hansen, 2007). The UNWTO conducted a worldwide study of certification systems for sustainable tourism that focused on environmental performance, product quality, and corporate social responsibility. Published in 2002, the study produced a set of guidelines for governments to use in support of certification schemes with significant attention given to each step of the process and the role played by the various stakeholders (UNWTO, 2003).

There are two main ways to go about certification. One is procedural, which only requires that a company be nominated as worthy by an already certified company, complete an application, pay a fee, and wait to see if anyone objects. The other is substantive, which requires technological expertise, completion of a training course, passing an exam, and acceptance into an ecotourism association (Buckley, 2009). Substantive certification schemes are obviously much more rigorous and successful. They can be managed by either government agencies or industry associations. To be effective they should include the following elements as a minimum: (1) strong brand recognition; (2) stringent audit procedures; (3) customized local implementation; (4) detailed criteria for various types and scales of products, such as ecolodges and ecotours; (5) two levels of accreditation for companies, one for basic performance and one for elite performance; and (6) transparent criteria and procedures that are widely publicized to bring credibility to the industry (Buckley, 2009).

Successful ecotourism certification can brand an entire country as an ecotourism showcase. Australia is one such example. Australia is roughly the same size as the U.S. mainland, but with less than one-tenth of the population. Its vast interior and coastal waters are full of natural wonders, such as Uluru, the desert landscapes of the Outback, and the Great Barrier Reef. Australia abounds in amazing flora and fauna. Its kangaroos and koalas, great white sharks, poisonous snakes, and giant crocodiles are famous and infamous throughout the world. Even though Australia has a number of popular urban destinations, its natural attractions are the highlight for many tourists, especially those who live in congested Asian cities. In 1991, as the number of so-called ecotourism companies was rapidly expanding in Australia, legitimate ecotourism companies held a conference and founded what has become Ecotourism Australia. Its motivation was to help consumers distinguish which companies were genuine and which ones were only using the ecotourism label as a marketing gimmick (Honey, 2002). In 1996, the association established a certification scheme for ecotourism products, and in 2000 it established the EcoGuide Program. Ecotourism Australia currently offers three types of ECO Certification: (1) Nature Tourism; (2) Ecotourism; and (3) Advanced Ecotourism. A fourth type of certification, named Respect Our Culture, has recently been made available to businesses that operate in culturally significant areas or provide indigenous cultural content in their site interpretation (Ecotourism Australia, 2012).

Ecotourism, or sustainable tourism, certifications have also been developed for regional and international application. Europe is the world's leading tourism region, and it has been a leader in eco-labeling and ecotourism certification. In 2004, the VISIT initiative was established under an EU project by combining several leading eco-labels that represented over 2,000 tourism businesses in countries ranging from the UK and Switzerland to Denmark and Latvia (VISIT, 2005). VISIT, which stands for Voluntary Initiatives for Sustainability in Tourism, mandates 21 criteria for sustainable tourism certification. Its purpose is to promote and support sustainable tourism development based on common standards derived from those criteria.

Two certification organizations widely associated with sustainability and ecotourism efforts that work on an international basis are Green Globe and Blue Flag. Green

Globe is based on Agenda 21, which was endorsed by 182 governments at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (Purl, 2003). Green Globe certification uses third-party independent auditors to conduct on-site assessments of tourism business and their supply chain partners on 337 indicators within 41 individual criteria. These are grouped in four areas: (1) Sustainable Management; (2) Social/Economic; (3) Cultural Heritage; and (4) Environmental (Green Globe, 2012). The Blue Flag program was founded in France in 1985 and launched throughout Europe in 1987 under the non-profit Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe (FEEEE). Blue Flag is a voluntary eco-label that has been awarded to approximately 3650 beaches and marinas in 46 countries in Europe, Africa, North and South America, the Caribbean, and New Zealand. Its certifications fall under four themes: (1) Water Quality; (2) Environmental Education and Information; (3) Environmental Management; and (4) Safety and Other Services. Certifications must be renewed annually (Blue Flag, 2012). Beaches and marinas that hold Blue Flag certification have shown to command premium prices for marina slips, charter sailboats, and hotel rooms (Sipic, 2010).

One of the most recent and ambitious organizations to tackle the challenge of sustainable tourism certification on an international basis is the Global Tourism Sustainability Council (GTSC). It was launched in 2010 by merging the Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria and the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (Harms, 2011). This was accomplished under an initiative led by the Rainforest Alliance in partnership with UNWTO, UNEP, and the United Nations Foundation, with assistance from multiple industry associations, such as the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism and Conservation International. The Global Tourism Sustainability Council provides a unique service for the development of certification schemes worldwide by providing criteria and indicators upon which to develop certification standards for destinations, tour operators, and hotels. More than 4,500 criteria already in use by dozens of certification schemes were reviewed and analyzed by GTSC to create the 37 guiding principles that it considers the minimum criteria necessary for tourism businesses to protect the world's natural and cultural resources while supporting conservation and poverty alleviation (Lane, 2010). The GTSC does not do the certifying, although it does approve certification programs and endorse accreditation bodies (Harms, 2011).

6. ECOTOURISM INTERPRETATION

Site interpretation that translates available attractions into distinctive visitor experiences is an integral component of ecotourism (Wood, 2004). It is an extension of learning about the destination that should have begun prior to arrival (Mock & O'Neil, 2012). One of the main goals of ecotourism is to educate tourists, and one of the primary motivations for ecotourists is the desire to observe and appreciate nature (Wood, 2002). Site interpretation activities of natural and cultural resources presented in person by trained local guides are among the most effective ways to create visitor satisfaction. Follows (1991) wrote, "Quality interpretation and quality tourism go hand in hand. Creating the experi-

ence is the key to successful marketing and promotion. The anticipation factor designed by tourism and marketing teams must match the integrity of the natural and cultural values being preserved.” Good promotions attract tourists, but good product delivery, including site interpretation, helps ensure a satisfied tourist. This is one of the major differences between the purely recreational motives often found in nature tourism and the natural and cultural insights sought from ecotourism activities.

Interpretation differs from the straightforward delivery of factual information by revealing a story or deeper message (Jamieson, 2006). It seeks to make an emotional connection with the visitors that helps to develop a caring attitude and perhaps build a lifelong interest in the destination (Fennel, 2002). This type of cultural immersion is also more entertaining and memorable than being at arm’s length from other people. An example of participatory interpretation favored by UNWTO (2002) is provided by the Earth Rhythms project in Canada. It enables visitors to “Live the story with real people.” As a form of visitor management, interpretation provides several important benefits in an ecotourism setting. Ecotourists are looking for authenticity. They want to experience the destination’s unique sense of place and learn how and why it is special. Once they learn about the uniqueness of the setting, they more readily adhere to the behavior and actions required to ensure a low-impact visit (Buckley, 2004). They will also be more likely to contribute to destination’s natural conservation and cultural preservation (Drumm, Moore, Sales, Patterson, & Terbaugh, 2004). This, in turn, attaches value to local resources, enhances ethnic pride, and encourages the community to use its resources in a sustainable manner (Jamieson, 2006). By teaching visitors about the setting, guides motivate visitors to be environmentally responsible. They are the heart and soul of the ecotourism industry (Ballantyne and Hughes, 2001), so it is critical for destinations to establish a guide licensing system with proper training (Drumm, Moore, Sales, Patterson, & Terbaugh, 2004).

Local vendors, who, in addition to guide services, can provide everything from food, crafts, and entertainment to ecolodges and transportation, add to the authenticity and educational value of the ecotourism experience. Ecotourists should endeavor to make as many of their purchases from local people as possible to enhance the local economy and the value of ecotourism within the community. This also helps spread the revenue generated by ecotourism more equitably among the stakeholders (UNWTO 2002). Indigenous people living in remote areas are often marginalized by their own governments. Yet, their values are often based on responsible stewardship of natural resources and hospitality towards visitors. They deserve to benefit from their role as hosts. Effective site interpretation narrows the cultural gap with ecotourists and their indigenous hosts and helps create the positive interactions that benefit everyone.

7. CONCLUSION

While many tourists are still content with mass tourism products, the market for those who are seeking authentic natural and cultural experiences is substantial, and it

continues to grow. For many destinations, ecotourism is the only viable form of tourism available. Destinations and companies wishing to tap into ecotourism must understand its marketing nuances. They also must protect the image of the industry and their own reputation by putting into place mechanisms such as codes of conduct and certifications. Effective site interpretation by trained local guides can assist those efforts and optimize visitor experience. Ecotourism has several stakeholders, but none is more vulnerable and dependent on its success than the host community. Ecotourism marketing requires substantial planning and expertise to achieve its goals. Many of its principles and processes are still evolving as ecotourism continues to grow as an important subset of sustainable tourism and a popular form of special interest tourism.

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SUINTERESUOTŲJŲ ŠALIŲ ETIKA IR PAREIGOS EKOLOGINIO TURIZMO RINKODAROJE

Stan MCGAHEY

Ekologinis turizmas yra nedidelio masto turizmas, liečiantis išskirtines gamtos sritis, nukreiptas į: gamtos saugojimą; kultūros išlaikymą; vietos ekonomikos didinimą; turistų švietimą. Ekologinis turizmas atsirado kaip atsakas masiniam turizmui. Tačiau terminu „Ekologinis turizmas“ lengvai piktnaudžiaujama vykdant rinkodarą. Būtina numatyti procedūras ir priežiūros mechanizmą, kad ekologinis turizmas atliktų savo paskirtį. Šiame straipsnyje aptariama suinteresuotų ekologiniu turizmu asmenų etika ir pareigos. Pateikiami geriausios praktikos pavyzdžiai iš viso pasaulio.

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