

## **2. ECOTOURISM AND OTHER FORMS OF TOURISM**

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### **2.1 Principles of Ecotourism**

As presented in the previous chapter, scholars have defined ecotourism in various ways, although the essence of each definition is more or less the same. The characteristics of ecotourists and principles of ecotourism have been also described. The principles of ecotourism developed by the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) are presented hereunder (Shrestha and Walinga, 2003):

- Avoids negative impacts that can damage or destroy the integrity or character of the natural or cultural environments being visited.
- Educates the traveler on the importance of conservation.
- Directs revenues to the conservation of natural areas and the management of protected areas.
- Brings economic benefits to local communities and directs revenues to local people living adjacent to protected areas.
- Emphasizes the need for planning and sustainable growth of the tourism industry, and seeks to ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental 'carrying capacity'.
- Retains a high percentage of revenues in the host country by stressing the use of locally owned facilities and services.
- Increasingly relies on infrastructure that has been developed sensitively in harmony with the environment - minimizing use of fossil fuels conserving local plants and wildlife, and blending with the natural environment.

Other authors have described ecotourism principles differently but the essence of these principles (Blamey, 2000; Dhakal and Dahal, 2000) is not too different from those mentioned above.

- It should not negatively impact the resource that helps to develop ecotourism in any destination. Rather it should be developed in an environmentally friendly manner.
- It should provide benefits to all parties—local natural resources, people and the tourism industry - with a stake in ecotourism.
- It should extend first-hand information to visitors.
- It should provide educational opportunities for all parties - local communities, government, NGOs, industry and tourists.
- It should encourage all-party recognition of the intrinsic values of the resource.
- It should involve acceptance of the resource on its own terms, and in recognition of its own limits.
- It should promote understanding and partnerships between many players, which could involve government, NGOs, industry, scientists and locals.
- It should promote moral and ethical responsibilities and behavior towards the natural and cultural environment by all players.

## **2.2 Ecotourism and other Forms of Tourism**

Mass tourism remained dominant in the world tourism market for a long time. But with change in times, tourism too has taken various forms, some of which are described hereunder.

### 2.2.1 Alternative Tourism

Alternative tourism can be defined as ‘forms of tourism that set out to be consistent with natural, social and community values and which allow both hosts and guests to enjoy positive and worthwhile interaction and shared experiences’. Therefore, ecotourism can be assumed to be one form of alternative tourism (Zurick, 1992 cited in Sheedy, 1995; Wearing and Neil, 1999).

Butler (1990 cited in Kunwar, 1997) identified several characteristics of alternative tourism. He observed it to be of small scale and developed and owned by local people. It involves traveling to relatively remote, undisturbed natural areas with the objective of admiring, studying and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals and cultural attributes. It also considers the conservation of the environment and sustenance and well-being of local people. Further, clients are expected to be individuals. Accommodations are locally owned and small-scale.

#### **Box 2.1: Features of Alternative Tourism**

- The attempted preservation, protection and enhancement of the quality of the resource base which is fundamental to tourism itself.
- The fostering and active promotion of development, in relation to additional visitor attractions and infrastructure, with roots in the specific locale and developed in ways that complement local attributes.
- The endorsement of infrastructure, hence economic growth, when and where it improves local conditions and not where it is destructive or exceeds the carrying capacity of the natural environment or the limits of the social environment whereby the quality of community life is adversely affected.
- Tourism which attempts to minimize its impact upon the environment, is ecologically sound, and avoids the negative impacts of many large-scale

tourism developments undertaken in areas that have not previously been developed.

- An emphasis on not only ecological sustainability, but also cultural sustainability. That is, tourism which does not damage the culture of the host community, encouraging a respect for the cultural realities experienced by the tourists through education and organized 'encounters'.

Source: Wearing and Neil, 1999.

Kunwar (1997) observes that alternative tourists try to avoid the beaten track and visit places where nobody has been before. Such a tourist seeks to forget civilization for a while and enjoys contact with the local people. S/he may enjoy even without modern tourist infrastructure and travel alone or in small groups. An alternative tourist is anticipated to be well educated and possess above average income and tend to remain in the country for more days than a traditional tourist.

### **2.2.2 Sustainable Tourism**

Although tourism has the potential to become an agent of development and change, due to the way it uses resources, it should not be considered an environmentally harmless industry as such. Therefore, only with careful planning it has the potential to operate and contribute in a sustainable manner (Butler cited in Woodley, 1993).

According to the WTO "sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present generation tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future." It is expected to lead to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs are fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems (WTO, 2002). The WTO paper further explains the need for achieving several objectives for ensuring sustainable tourism.

- The natural, historical, cultural and other resources for tourism are conserved for continuous use in the future, while still bringing benefits to the present society.
- Tourism development is planned and managed so that it does not generate serious environmental or socio-cultural problems in the tourism area.
- The overall environmental quality of tourism areas is maintained and improved where needed.
- A high level of tourist satisfaction is maintained so that tourist destinations retain their marketability and popularity.
- The benefits of tourism are widely spread throughout society.

The guiding principle for sustainable development emphasizes the management of natural and human resources for maximization of visitor enjoyment and local benefit and at the same time minimizing the negative impacts upon the destination site, community and local population (Kunwar, 1997).

### **2.2.3 Community based Tourism**

More recently, community based tourism has been recognized as another form of tourism. "Community based tourism occurs when decisions about tourism activity and development are driven by the host community. It usually involves some form of cultural exchange where tourists meet with local communities and witness aspects of their lifestyle. Many such remote ethnic communities may be vulnerable to outside influences and decisions about the way tourists are hosted must be owned by the community for successful and sustainable tourism" (SNV, 2003).

Community based tourism can generate a sense of pride in the local population and make funds available for maintaining or upgrading cultural assets e.g. archeological ruins, historic sites, traditional crafts production (World Bank, 2000 cited in UNEP, 2001).

The aims of community based ecotourism largely depend on the issues, problems and needs of the community. In general it serves as a tool for conservation and, at the same time, a tool for improving the quality of life. It also serves as a tool to bring the community together to consult, discuss and work together in solving community problems. Further, such tourism provides opportunity for exchange of knowledge and culture between tourists and the community and helps to provide supplementary income for individual members of the community and for community development (REST, 2002).

#### **2.2.4 Responsible Tourism**

Responsible tourism refers to the type of tourism where tourism organizations take care of tourist destinations while providing visitor satisfaction. As a result, the resources and attractions—both natural and cultural—are not spoiled for local people or future visitors. Further, it denotes care for the environment and cultural resources, and opportunity for locals in terms of employment or other kinds of involvement, sufficient information regarding local resources for visitors, and implementation of the policy of Corporate Social Responsibility (Gyawali *et al.*, 2003).

#### **2.2.5 Pro-Poor Tourism**

Pro-poor tourism is another form of tourism where the benefits to the poor are greater than the costs that tourism entails to them. This

approach emphasizes the need to extend tourism opportunities for people living on less than US\$ 1 per day. This category of people should be involved in tourism for realizing poverty reduction through tourism. By definition, it is obvious that not all community based tourism is pro-poor tourism (Goodwin, 2000). Pro-poor tourism strategies emphasize on unlocking opportunities for the poor within tourism, rather than expanding the overall size of the tourism business (WTO, 2002).

The following observations are based on case studies in Ecuador, Namibia, Nepal, South Africa, St Lucia and Uganda carried out by the Pro-Poor Tourism team on how tourism can be made pro-poor (WTO, 2002).

- Though poor involved in tourism still remain poor, they are better off than before. They are less vulnerable to hunger.
- Due to access to regular employment, the tourism income helps uplift some households from 'poor' to fairly 'secure' livelihoods.
- Tourism benefits are spread widely among the poor households yet such distribution remains highly uneven.
- In exceptional cases communities can actually be said to have 'escaped' poverty.

Therefore, these examples suggest that tourism must be judged on the basis of opportunities provided for pro-poor growth or the diversity of opportunities it provides for the poor (Goodwin, 1995).

As for Nepal, a Pro-Poor Tourism Policy is being prepared by MoCTCA/ TRPAP. The Policy document is anticipated to support the planning and implementation of pro-poor tourism activities in Nepal (TRPAP, 2004).

### **2.2.6 Village Tourism**

Village tourism denotes tourists visiting villages and staying in or near the villages. Successful cases have shown that the village should have special features to attract visitors. This is also associated with tourist behavior in that they stay in a village and explore the surroundings (McIntyre, 1993). The special feature of this kind of tourism is that the visitors become part of the village for the period of their stay. Such visitors normally do not expect the kind of accommodation and food that they are accustomed to. In other words, they rely on locally available accommodation and food.

Since village tourists depend on locally available accommodation, with minor modifications in some cases, accommodation does not require large investments. A house in the village serves as an accommodation for the visitor. Therefore, villages could serve visitors even with minimum entrepreneurial skills. Visitors are served local food and cultural programs are organized for entertainment. Such an opportunity allows visitors to immerse themselves in the local socio-cultural environment. It also allows them an opportunity to get to know local social, cultural and religious practices. Since it is these special features of any typical destination that attract tourists, hosts soon understand the need for preservation of the local tourism resources, including their culture and religion.

Evidence from Sirubari (Box 2.2) shows that this form of tourism has high potential for bringing resources to the villages which eventually becomes an important tool for poverty alleviation. However, since cultures are subject to influence by visitors, there is the possibility that village tourism destinations are affected by the influx of visitors.

Therefore, special care is needed to minimize the social and cultural impacts of tourism.

**Box 2.2: Sirubari Village - pioneer of Village Tourism**

The Sirubari culture of welcoming visitors is very different from others. If informed in advance, the hosts welcome visitors at the entrance to the village with traditional musical instruments, the *panchai bajaa*. Visitors are then guided to a main house where plans are made for each individual's stay. Then each visitor is taken to his/her place of stay. Visitors do not have the privilege of making the choice; it is the hosts who decide.

The houses are all traditional Nepalese homes constructed for the residents themselves. Except for some internal adjustments and toilets, no new construction has been undertaken for tourism purposes alone. The houses are kept clean. Unlike other villages, no traces of dirt can be seen in the streets. The streets are paved with stone that helps keep the walkways safe. This has also added to the beauty of the settlement. Although each house has its own ever-running water tap, there are no problems of sanitation. Overall, the village is well managed in terms of sanitation and drinking water.

In the morning, the host prepares breakfast, which is mostly made up of local food products. It is served in the dinning room, which is next to the kitchen. Lunch is served at around 12 noon, and dinner in the evening. Special attention is paid to preparing healthy food in tidy surroundings. The host serves the meals him/herself.

During the day, tourists have the opportunity to see the local tourist attractions, which include sunrise watch and mountain views from atop the hills. In the evenings cultural programs are arranged.

Visitors normally stay for two nights. At the time of their departure, visitors are offered garlands and presented a farewell dance with typical Nepali songs. Finally, hosts see visitors off at the point where they were received.

Village tourism in Sirubari has strong linkages with conservation. In the beginning, Sirubari was visited mainly by Nepalese who came to see the community forest. Slowly, with the hard work of villagers, these visits were converted into village tourism. In this sense, village tourism is closely linked with ecotourism.

Source: Pradhan, 2001.

### 2.2.7 Cultural Tourism

The earliest accounts of cultural tourism can be traced back to ancient history. One such visitor was Huen Tsang from China who visited Nepal and India in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD. One of the important things he did during his visit was to describe the cultural sites in Kathmandu Valley. However, cultural tourism as we know it today was conceptualized by UNESCO during the 1970s. Cultural tourism is regarded as a “force for cultural preservation”. It is also defined as “the absorption by tourists of features resembling the vanishing lifestyles of past societies observed through such phenomena as house styles, crafts, farming equipment, dress, utensils and other instruments and equipment that reflects the lifestyle of any particular community during a particular time” (Smith cited in Kunwar, 1997). Further, Zins (cited in Kunwar, 1997) identified handicrafts, language, traditions, art and music, paintings and sculpture, history, work and technology, architecture, religion, educational system, dress and leisure activities as elements of cultural tourism.

As cultural tourism also involves education for visitors and promotes sensitivity towards cultural environment, provides direct benefits to host communities and helps in preservation of culture, it is also closely linked with ecotourism.

The resources that comprise cultural tourism (Kunwar, 1997) are categorized hereunder:

1. Cultural landscape and distinctive cultural aspects	Settlement pattern, lifestyle, dress and jewellery, folk songs and dances, local cuisines.
2. Local art/ craft	Art and architecture, sculptures and paintings, folk dance/ music and musical instruments, and local craftsmanship.

3. Fairs/ Festivals	Fairs - religious, specific local fairs, commercial/trade, popular festivals, and mode of their celebration.
4. Historic/ Archaeological heritage	Monuments heritage - forts, places, temples and mosques of historical and artistic value, ancient ruins, museums, excavation sites and other places of archaeological importance and sites of important historical events.

Although cultural tourism is different from other forms of tourism, it often becomes an integral part of the total visit. For instance, one of the main interests for tourists to Kathmandu is to see the temples and historical monuments in Kathmandu Valley. Similarly, visitors to Ghandruk in the Annapurna Conservation Area are unlikely to miss the local cultural museum.