

**ECOTOURISM AND CONSERVATION
IN THE AMERICAS**

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ECOTOURISM AND CONSERVATION IN THE AMERICAS

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Preface

Among today's contending conservation and development strategies, ecotourism is one of the most popular. It seeks to curb the often deleterious effects of large-scale, conventional tourism on local communities and ecosystems. But more than that, it holds the promise of overcoming a number of today's biggest environmental and social challenges. Ideally, ecotourism can help conserve biological and cultural diversity, alleviate rural poverty, strengthen ties between parks and neighbouring peoples, increase public awareness of environmental concerns, and manifest a new 'triple bottom line' for business that includes profit, social benefits and environmental conservation.

For these reasons, interest in ecotourism has never been greater. According to the World Tourism Organization, ecotourism is now the fastest growing segment of an already mammoth tourism industry. By some estimates, ecotourism generates as much as US\$300 billion in revenues annually. International development and lending agencies channel millions of dollars into projects that include ecotourism. Major conservation organizations sponsor ecotourism projects in biodiversity 'hotspots' around the world. Most countries with parks and protected areas now have some kind of marketing strategy to attract ecotourists. Increasing numbers of universities in the USA and abroad now offer courses and degree programmes in ecotourism. The United Nations declared 2002 the 'International Year of Ecotourism' and marked it as a time to take collective stock of the lessons learned. At the Ecotourism World Summit in Quebec, Canada, thousands of delegates from over a hundred nations gathered to assess the pros and cons of ecotourism for peoples and ecosystems around the world.

But does ecotourism actually measure up to the environmental, social and economic ideals it has promised? Has ecotourism sensitized tourists to tread more lightly on the destinations they visit? Has it created

economic incentives to conserve wildlife species and natural habitats? Has it augmented benefits to locals from established protected areas? What are the tangible impacts for people in surrounding human communities? Are there lessons for how to ensure net positive impacts in the future?

In preparing this volume, we gathered experts in the fields of conservation, ecotourism and community development to try to answer some of these questions. We first joined during the International Year of Ecotourism in a workshop entitled 'Ecotourism and Conservation in the Americas: Putting Good Intentions to Work', in the Department of Anthropological Sciences at Stanford University. Delegates came from the private tourism sector, community and non-profit organizations, research institutes and academia from seven countries. The 3-day workshop became the catalyst for this book. In the interim, we screened original contributions for current relevance to the field and worked with the authors to revise and update each of the chapters several times. We also selected a cross-cutting sample of topics and cases from the broad spectrum of geographic regions and ecosystems in the Americas.

We hope this book fulfils its mission, and offers professionals in conservation and ecotourism organizations, non-governmental organizations and government offices, particularly in the USA and Latin America, a worthy assessment of ecotourism's tangible impacts in the Americas. We also hope the volume will provide useful case studies, testimonies of 'ecotourism at work' in the field, and regional overviews for students and their professors in university classrooms. The time has come to take stock of what works and what does not in ecotourism, and ask why. This book is a step in that direction.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the many people and organizations who contributed to this book. At Stanford, these include the Department of Anthropological Sciences, the Continuing Studies Program, the Center for Latin American Studies, the Center for Social Innovation at the Graduate School of Business and the Stanford Alumni Association. In the later stages of the book, we appreciated the support of the Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development based at Stanford and in Washington, DC. Thanks also to several students for their help at various stages of the process, particularly Audrey Davenport, Fernando Galeana, Joanna Levitt, Biasha Mitchell, Christina Shaheen, Thomas Kohnstamm, Nico Slate, Carter Hunt and Fernanda Pegás. We also thank our colleagues: Charles Junkerman, David Brady, Terry Karl, Duncan Beardsley, Pamela Matson, Flora Lu, Alison Pearce, Vernita Ediger, Constanzo Ocampo-Raeder, Emma Stewart, Susan Charnley, Dominique Irvine, Suki Hoagland, Larry Goulder, Cynthia Lang, Nancy Lonhart, Tracy Pizzo, Jen Paris and Tracy Robinette. Several participants from the original workshop provided important insights and made our original workshop especially worthwhile. These include: Ron Mader, Robert Healy, Daniela Vizcaino, Stephen Edwards, Alberto Mesquita, Eduardo Nycander, Candido Pastor, Zenon Limaco, Miguel Pesha, Kurt Kutay, John Shores and Sharon Matola.

Every book has its challenges and vicissitudes – we particularly enjoyed the opportunity afforded here to work through them together.

Finally, we thank the editors at CAB International, especially Sarah Hulbert, Claire Parfitt and Lesley King, for their support and willingness to invest in this book as a valuable addition to their Ecotourism Series.

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Part I

Introduction

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1

The Bold Agenda of Ecotourism

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Introduction

A century into the age of modern travel and tourism, few corners of the planet remain truly off the beaten path. Tourism is a mammoth industry that generates an estimated US\$300 billion in annual revenues and nearly 10% of all employment in the world (Honey and Rome, 2000). Under globalization, the numbers are expected only to rise, and by the year 2010, more than one billion tourists will be roaming the world (TIES, 2000; WTO, 2004). For environmentalists, development specialists and indigenous rights advocates, the predictions are both promising and worrisome.

A hundred years or more of tourism have revealed that the industry can, and often does, leave considerable 'baggage' for the people and natural environments of local destinations. Some of the problems introduced historically by tourists include crowding and disruption of local communities, commercial exploitation of cultural traditions, social conflict, entrenchment of ethnic stereotypes, disturbance to wildlife, degradation or outright conversion of habitats, increased economic dependency, the emergence of black markets, and increased illicit trade in everything from exotic pets to drugs and sex (Greenwood, 1989; Eadington and Smith, 1992; Giannecchini, 1993; Lanfant *et al.*, 1995; Butler and Hinch, 1996; Stonich, 1998; Burns, 1999; Desmond, 1999; Chambers, 2000). In short, so many experiences with tourism, both on and off the beaten path, have proved disruptive, damaging and, in a word, unsustainable.

Ecotourism: A Better Path?

Today's approaches to tourism are aimed at eliminating the baggage and introducing an array of benefits to natural environments and local

peoples. These alternative tours, variously labelled 'sustainable', 'eco' and 'responsible', strive to make tourism profits work for local environments and communities rather than against them. Among these new approaches, ecotourism stands out for its promise both to advance conservation goals and improve the livelihoods of local peoples. Ecotourism is thus broadly defined as nature-based tourism with three special features: (i) it minimizes the negative environmental, economic and social impacts often associated with mass tourism; (ii) it delivers a net positive contribution to environmental conservation; and (iii) it improves the livelihoods of local people (Lindberg and Hawkins, 1993; Cater and Lowman, 1994; Barkin, 1996; Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996; Honey, 1999; Wearing and Neil, 1999). In other words, it is tourism that attempts to minimize negative impacts and make instead serious positive contributions to a number of today's environmental and social challenges.

Economically, this form of tourism can be a real boon to people in host destinations. In addition to raising foreign exchange and investment on a national level, ecotourism offers the potential of new jobs for local labour and new markets for locally produced goods and services. The cash and employment benefits from ecotourism, however, may actually be modest compared with its non-economic benefits. The latter can include revalorization of cultural traditions and beliefs, improved community organization and leadership, increased self-esteem and pride in the community, new skills and languages, and contact with an expanded network of people and potential sources of support, including international tourists and tour companies, private foundations, universities and researchers, and non-governmental organizations (Stronza, 2001; Landell-Mills and Porras, 2002).

Community-based ecotourism has an advantage with regard to ecotourism's conservation and development goals. In community-based ecotourism, a local community or group of communities has substantial involvement in, and control over, ecotourism's development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community (Denman, 2001). In a community-based approach, local voices, values and knowledge are proactively channelled into strategies for managing resources (Brosius *et al.*, 1998). Many proponents argue that such participation is an essential element of sustainability, giving rise to a sense of ownership and empowerment in the community (Schevyens, 1999; Alexander, 2000; Stronza, 2005). Conversely, other authors see unequal relations of power among locals and visitors in tourism destinations as a potential source of environmental problems (e.g. Stonich, 2000; Gossling, 2003). The debate is currently not *whether* local communities should be involved in the development of tourism to their areas, but *how* they should be involved.

Meanwhile, conservationists are hopeful that the array of social and economic benefits from ecotourism will generate incentives for local residents to protect the landscapes and resources tourists pay to see. In this light, ecotourism is sometimes viewed as the quintessential 'integrated

conservation and development project' (ICDP). It has the potential to make economic development work in the service of conservation in various ways. First, ecotourism can minimize or eliminate local economic dependence on activities that exploit natural resources directly and are therefore more damaging to biodiversity, such as commercial agriculture, hunting, logging, cattle ranching and gold mining (Langholz, 1999; Jones and Young, 2004). Second, ecotourism can generate visitor fees to help finance parks and protected areas (Groom *et al.*, 1991; Borges Hernández *et al.*, Chapter 12, this volume). This is especially noteworthy in places that are rich in biodiversity but poor in revenues. Ecotourism can also help build the managerial and organizational capacity of local communities to manage natural resources (Borman, 1999; Gordillo Jordan *et al.*, Chapter 3, this volume). By establishing ecotourism operations in their own territories, local peoples may become better prepared to defend resources and even resist outside interests, such as timber or mining companies (Rodríguez, Chapter 10, this volume).

Finally, in addition to bringing benefits to local communities and supporting conservation, ecotourism also has the potential to raise public environmental awareness. Many ecotours include interpretative activities that help visitors learn about conservation and ecology as they are exploring new landscapes and communities (Orams, 1997; Kimmell, 1999; Thaites *et al.*, 2002). Many also present information on cultural history and human–environment interactions of a region, encouraging visitors to consider not only the beauty of the destination but also the environmental challenges it is facing (Bidwell Pearce and Ocampo-Raeder, Chapter 7, this volume). This mix of leisure, learning and discovery may help build new popular bases of support and advocacy for conservation (Kohl, Chapter 8, this volume).

Will It Really Take Us Where We Want To Go?

For its many promises, ecotourism has captured considerable attention. Most international financial institutions and development agencies have begun channelling significant amounts of economic and technical assistance to potential ecotourism destinations around the world (Epler Wood, Chapter 14, this volume). Much effort has been aimed at building local capacity for ecotourism so that communities can begin making tourism work for their own development goals. With similar optimism, a number of conservation organizations have begun sponsoring ecotourism projects in biodiversity 'hotspots' around the world (Christ *et al.*, 2004). Tropical countries have been particularly encouraged to invest in ecotourism as a possible solution to raising much-needed foreign exchange while also curbing environmental degradation. In fact, most countries with protected areas now have some form of national or regional marketing strategy to attract ecotourists (Ceballos-Lascurain, Chapter 13, this volume).

Ecotourism has also become a subject of significant study and policy debate (Hawkins and Lamoureux, 2001). In the international arena, for example, the United Nations declared 2002 the 'International Year of Ecotourism', marking it as a time to take collective stock of lessons learned. At that year's Ecotourism World Summit in Quebec, Canada, over a thousand delegates from 132 different countries, representing public, private and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, national and international development agencies, as well as local and indigenous communities, gathered to discuss the pros and cons of ecotourism for peoples and ecosystems around the world. Now plans are taking shape for discussions of certification and accreditation on a global scale. Likewise, much attention is also being paid at national and regional levels. The scholarly literature is booming, a steady stream of workshops and training sessions is under way, and national policies on ecotourism are being written daily. A number of universities in the USA and abroad now offer courses and degree programmes in ecotourism.

Despite the optimism, there have been few careful appraisals of ecotourism. Few ecotourism projects to date have been audited, accredited or even evaluated in any systematic, objective way (Redford and Agrawal, 2006). Few studies of any depth and duration have been undertaken (Kiss, 2004), and untold numbers of operations and companies are calling themselves 'ecotourism' even when they may not conform to its definition (Honey, 2002; Kruger, 2005). Though ecotourism may well be making strides towards its environmental, social and economic promise, there remains high variance and plenty of room for scepticism.

Some critics argue that ecotourism is firmly 'locked into notions of green capitalism', so that concerns for profit will always outweigh those for conservation (Duffy, 2002, p. x). Others observe that, despite the rhetoric, ecotourism is hardly culturally sensitive. The problem, they say, is that ecotourism remains embedded in a neoliberal political and economic system, which precludes real respect for local customs, real opportunities for sustainable development or real empowerment for local communities (Mowforth and Munt, 1998; West and Carrier, 2004; Cater, 2006).

Meanwhile, other sceptics note that even the business side of ecotourism has come up short. By some accounts, ecotourism has created only a few jobs (Lindberg, 1994) and even then is increasing local dependency on a single income source, compelling local communities to shift away from more stable, diversified economies (Belsky, 1999). The industry is prone to boom–bust cycles and dramatic seasonal fluctuations, which can create great vulnerability, especially for subsistence producers (Epler Wood, 2002). Operations labelled 'ecotourism' have also been associated with increased social differentiation and a growing gap between the rich and the poor (Stonich, 2000). At the same time, leakage of profits is a persistent problem, and though tourists often pay heavily for their eco-expeditions, some tour operators have been reluctant to pass on the returns to local communities (Lindberg, 1991; Landell-Mills and Porras, 2002). In fact, analysis indicates

that relatively few local communities have realized significant benefits, regardless of their proximity to tourism operations or protected areas (Bookbinder *et al.*, 1998).

Further scepticism arises from the fact that the links between ecotourism and conservation are tenuous. Some studies have shown that few people in host destinations actually gain enough economic benefits from ecotourism to provide sufficient incentives for conservation (Kellert *et al.*, 2000). Furthermore, in the great majority of protected areas, tourism revenues are not able to cover even basic management costs (Davenport *et al.*, 2002). But even if ecotourism were lucrative enough to offer economic incentives for conservation, there are signs of direct impacts from the industry that cause more harm than good. These include converting habitat for tourism activities, cutting trails and disturbing wildlife (Butynski and Kalina, 1998). Biologists have also found instances of disease transmitted to wildlife or subtle changes to wildlife health through disturbance of daily routines or increased stress levels (Isaacs, 2000; Ananthaswamy, 2004). Such changes may translate to lowered rates of survival and breeding.

These criticisms of ecotourism have emerged at a time when sustainable development and market-based approaches to conservation in general are being questioned (e.g. Kramer *et al.*, 1997; Brandon *et al.*, 1998; Oates, 1999; Terborgh, 1999). As successes of ICDPs have been few and far between, the barrage of critical literature has fuelled concern among conservationists over just this kind of endeavour (Chapin, 2004). Nevertheless, a number of prominent biologists continue to endorse ecotourism as a potentially effective tool for conservation (see Terborgh *et al.*, 2002, pp. 6–7; Daily and Ellison, 2003). Perhaps it is because some ecotourism projects are effective at linking business, economic benefits for locals and biodiversity conservation that ecotourism is a holdout among failed experiments in sustainable development. Though many other market-based approaches to conservation are being dismissed as wishful thinking, ecotourism warrants continued appraisal. The questions now are: how, when, where and under what conditions can ecotourism truly deliver on its promises?

Ecotourism and Conservation in the Americas

The volume assembled here presents views of scholars, practitioners, tour operators, educators and policy makers who are pioneers of ecotourism. Written in a style that combines reports from the field with detailed case studies and regional overviews, the authors share insights and lessons from on-the-ground efforts to make ecotourism an effective tool for conservation and development. Included are honest evaluations of both the pros and cons of ecotourism for local communities and ecosystems in places as far ranging as the Galapagos, the Peruvian Amazon, Cuba and the Rocky Mountain West. Together, the chapters tell the story of ecotourism not as an end result, but rather as a work in progress.

Why focus on the Americas? Although ecotourism has spread everywhere, it is in the Americas that the idea got an early start (Honey, 1999), and today it is arguably the region with the greatest amount and diversity of ecotourism activity in the world. In assembling the book, we drew upon that scale and diversity of activity to gain cross-cutting coverage of the issues. The contributions are organized into seven main sections of the book, each of which contains ‘couplets’ of complementary chapters. We hope readers take the opportunity to read these chapters together, as they provide useful counterpoints and comparisons on several subjects, including community-based ecotourism, marine ecotourism and ecotourism in US settings.

Community-based ecotourism

We begin with a focus on community-based ecotourism. Interest in ecotourism is especially strong today on the part of indigenous communities because it offers a potential means to secure homelands, foster economic development and promote cultural survival. As Randy Borman explains, this was not the case in 1983 when a small group of individuals belonging to the Cofan ethnic group of north-eastern Ecuador began to take groups of paying visitors into the more remote forests of the Cofan ancestral territory. Although none of those individuals realized it, they were establishing themselves at the forefront of a process that would later be known as community-based ecotourism. In subsequent years, the Cofan experience became a leading example of how to go about conserving a cultural system and its multiple environments using ecotourism – rather than raw materials – as the link to Western markets. In recent years, however, the delicate nature of ecotourism has forced the Cofan to diversify from their initial success and to pursue additional routes to cultural survival. The Cofan case thus represents in microcosm both the potentials and pitfalls to ‘bottom-up’ ecotourism in indigenous communities.

Javier Gordillo and colleagues follow the Cofan case study with a description of the successes and challenges of a community-based ecotourism project in south-eastern Peru. The Posada Amazonas lodge is a joint venture between a private ecotourism company, Rainforest Expeditions, and a community of 150 indigenous and mestizo families, called the Native Community of Infierno. This ‘from the field’ account is especially illuminating for understanding how ecotourism can both deliver benefits for communities and ecosystems while also presenting new social and ecological challenges. The two partners signed a 20-year contract in 1996, agreeing to split profits and share in the operation and management of the ecolodge. Not only has the project proved successful in economic terms, providing an initial 5-year income of over US\$600,000 to the community, but it has also spawned and promoted a range of conservation activities and other benefits. Some conservation effects are

indirect, such as the tapered clearing of new forest by ecotourism employees. But some are direct and visible to all, including the protection of harpy eagle nests and a self-declared 'protected area' around the oxbow-lake habitat of some endangered giant otters of the region. This innovative project is far from perfect, yet by all indications it is delivering on ecotourism's conservation promise.

Ecotourism in marine environments

Next we turn the focus from rainforests to marine environments. Susan Stonich brings the critical and timely concern over climate change to the discussion of ecotourism, especially in marine environments. She lays out several of the unresolved social and environmental issues related to the growth of ecotourism (and tourism more generally) in and near marine protected areas (MPAs). Then she explores the answers to two questions: can ecotourism be a tool for conservation and support of MPAs, and can successful MPAs likewise enhance ecotourism and ecotourist experiences? Understanding the power of ecotourism and MPAs to alter coupled human and natural systems becomes even more important, as well as challenging, in the context of climate change. Coastal, near-shore marine and estuarine environments are especially vulnerable. She forecasts that climate change will present complex and unpredictable new challenges for people, communities and regions that are already dependent on tourism. Yet, there are still opportunities to create cooperative, flexible and adaptive arrangements to deal with this unpredictability through the integration of ecotourism and MPAs.

In 'Fishing for Solutions', William Durham argues that parks and protected areas themselves are doomed without the support and engagement of surrounding local people, who may be recruited to such cause through incentives like those from ecotourism. Durham bases his argument on the headline case of Galapagos, where a world-famous National Park has been repeatedly attacked and damaged in recent years by locals who feel themselves excluded from both the decisions and revenues of conservation. Durham reviews the historical development of the issue, showing that ecotourism has been both a major boon to conservation in Galapagos and also indirectly a threat, because locals have historically played so little a role in the conservation process. In this famous 'showcase' of conservation and biodiversity, the hope is now that fishermen can be re-trained for and perpetually sustained from a variety of new roles in ecotourism. The Galapagos case suggests that social instability is an inevitable problem for protected-area conservation that fails to provide decision- and benefit-sharing for local peoples – the very kinds of outcomes that ecotourism is designed to provide.

Ecotourism in the USA

In this section, our paired contributors note that most ecotourism initiatives in the Americas have occurred outside the USA, where climates are warmer, seasons longer, biodiversity greater and labour relatively inexpensive. William Bryan, a founder of Off the Beaten Path, an adventure travel company and tour operator in the Rocky Mountain West, explores the challenges and opportunities to developing ecotourism in the USA. Bryan makes a series of recommendations for more successful ecotourism in the USA, including elements of a profitable yet responsible business plan, and the essentials of building an environmentally sustainable facility with interesting, educational activities plus local community involvement. He argues that we need to accept the fact that responsible travel is a business first, and then work to make it sustainable. As one way to grow more successful ecotourism operations in the USA, he urges the creation of networks and organizations that can interact and build on each other's experiences.

Alison Bidwell Pearce and Constanza Ocampo-Raeder build on Bryan's chapter, addressing challenges in the marketplace to the development of ecotourism and responsible travel options in the USA and other 'developed' settings. Whereas Bryan highlighted structural challenges, this chapter points to obstacles that stem from preconceived notions within the travel industry and ecotourism community. The authors suggest that ecotourism efforts in the USA have often been categorically dismissed on superficial grounds related to geographic or socio-political setting, rather than on any thorough analysis of the social and environmental impacts of these operations. As a case in point, they examine the privately-owned Papoose Creek Lodge just outside Yellowstone National Park in the Madison Valley of south-west Montana. Their study of Papoose Creek reveals that such ventures do have the same laudable goals and intentions as those abroad, and that they are beginning to produce the same tangible benefits to conservation and local livelihoods. If the travel industry can get beyond geographic restrictions on the term, there are many local benefits to be gained from ecotourism in the USA and beyond.

Educating tourists

Our fifth section focuses on environmental education as a more global kind of benefit from ecotourism, but one that may have equally important implications for conservation. Authors address questions such as what do ecotourists actually learn and under what conditions are visitors more likely to absorb environmental lessons? Do the lessons learned truly translate into changed behaviour back home and thus enhanced efforts at biodiversity conservation? What are the ways in which that happens? An important lesson from this section is that the associated cultural dimensions of ecotourism – for example, learning from local and

indigenous guides – adds greatly to the take-home value of travel-based learning.

In Chapter 8, Jon Kohl highlights the oft-neglected benefit of travel-based learning. Kohl distinguishes between interpretation and environmental education, and uses ‘concept modelling’ to explain how interpretation improves conservation in public-use areas. Interpretation is the more appropriate conservation strategy when dealing with ecotourists, says Kohl, because it improves visitor experience, delivers environmental messages, and helps set up a system of soliciting and tracking visitor contributions to conservation activities.

In Chapter 9, Julie Ivker Dubin looks at what ecotourists actually learn as a result of their responsible travel to natural areas. She draws upon data from a case study of middle- and high-school students who participated in a series of Children’s Environmental Trust workshops in the Peruvian Amazon. Her study objectives were: (i) to determine the relative educational effectiveness of ecotourism in four realms, i.e. ecological literacy, cultural lessons, personal growth and advocacy/conservation; and (ii) to identify existing correlations between ecotourists who report they had a successful learning experience and their demographic characteristics. She reports that the incidental *cultural* aspects of ecotourism – from travel contact with individuals from culturally distinct backgrounds – have the greatest impact on ecotourists, probably from positive emotional reactions to meaningful human contact. The results of her study indicate that measures to help ecotourists prepare educationally for their travels will enhance their learning in all areas, whether biological or cultural.

Outcomes for communities

In this section, we consider the multiplicity of ways ecotourism alters social and political realities for people in host destinations. Arnaldo Rodríguez begins with comparative assessments of several ecotourism projects among indigenous populations in Ecuador, including the Achuar and the Huaorani. Against a historical background of indigenous exploitation and environmental degradation, Rodríguez explains how ecotourism in indigenous communities emerged as a hopeful alternative in Ecuador in the 1990s. He describes duality between a market economy and a gift economy as a factor that affects ecotourism’s potential for success among indigenous communities. Another factor of equal importance is the difference between the principles governing a community and those that govern a business.

Fernanda Pêgas and I put the ecotourism ‘equation’ to the test and ask: do benefits for people equal benefits for conservation? A key premise of ecotourism is that economic returns from tourism can provide compelling incentives for people to protect the landscapes and resources that tourists pay to see. In some places, ecotourism has indeed served as an effective tool for biodiversity conservation; in others, it has thus far failed to

achieve this goal. The factors that determine success remain unclear. Some studies suggest that failure follows when economic benefits from ecotourism have been too limited to build enduring conservation incentives in local communities. Other studies indicate ecotourism also fails when it does not include local community participation in decision making. This point builds on the lesson from Durham's analysis of ecotourism in the Galapagos. Here, we try to evaluate which factors lead communities to support ecotourism endeavours. Based on case studies from Brazil and Peru (including Posada Amazonas), we suggest that when communities share in both the benefits and decisions of an enterprise then the benefits to people of ecotourism are more likely to translate into tangible benefits to conservation.

National perspectives

The authors of this section describe national-level policies for ecotourism. Teresita Borges and colleagues present the case of ecotourism in Cuba where the regulations for ensuring responsibility and sustainability in tourism are mandated by the central government via a constitution that includes 'sustainable development' as a basic policy principle. In collaboration with the tourism sector, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment created a nationwide system for granting recognition to tourism operations showing concern for environmental sustainability. Implemented in 1999, their National Environmental Strategy set guidelines for tourism development and established an environmental regulatory body for the tourist sector. While it is still early to assess the success of the programme, the rate of growth in tourism is also higher in Cuba than in any other Caribbean nation. As a member of the Association of Caribbean States, Cuba has also publicly committed to working towards a 'Sustainable Tourism Zone' in the region.

In Chapter 13, Hector Ceballos-Lascurain offers brief descriptions of ecotourism projects in Peru, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Belize and Brazil. An architect by training, Ceballos-Lascurain devotes special attention to the design aspects of exemplary ecolodges in several countries. He emphasizes five main principles of ecodesign, including the idea that solutions grow from a sense of place, ecological accounting can help inform design and that successful ecolodge designers go out of their way to 'make nature visible' to visitors.

Guidelines and standards

In our closing section, we address the need for setting and maintaining standards in ecotourism. Here authors explore the pros and cons of certification and accreditation programmes for ecotourism. Though such an assessment must be an ongoing endeavour, there are good reasons to

reward projects and companies that are already making positive contributions. Yet the challenges to certification are numerous. Which companies and projects should be spotlighted as effective ecotourism operations and according to what criteria? Who shall decide on criteria and carry out the assessments? How will certification gain operator buy-in and public recognition? These are crucial questions if ecotourism is to remain free of counterfeit 'greenwashing'.

In Chapter 14, Megan Epler Wood provides a framework for evaluating ecotourism projects from the perspective of international development donors. She documents the ways in which donors – including private foundations and bilateral and multilateral agencies – comprise one of the most influential sectors in the ecotourism development process. Donors are striving to develop clear and transparent guidelines for ecotourism project development, and standards for evaluation, to ensure that the ecotourism projects they fund worldwide meet 'triple bottom-line' standards for conservation, development and profitability. The chapter includes a review of the literature regarding standards for ecotourism development projects and a draft framework to use for conducting better evaluations of ecotourism projects in the future.

Martha Honey provides a global, historical context for the emergence of certification – not just in ecotourism – and explains why ecotourism is an especially difficult commodity to certify. Honey characterizes common components of certification programmes (voluntary enrolment, logo, fees, assessment), the pros and cons of different methodologies for creating sustainability in tourism (i.e. process- versus performance-based standards), and the different certification programmes that exist for conventional tourism, sustainable tourism and ecotourism. If ecotourism is to continue to fulfil its social and environmental promise, Honey asserts, it will need its own global accreditation system to 'certify the certifiers'.

The challenge ahead

In the final chapter, co-editor William Durham brings us back to an integrated assessment of ecotourism as it stands today. The chapter highlights five major conclusions from this volume.

1. Ecotourism cannot work everywhere and cannot solve all problems of conservation and development; it requires special natural attractions or draws, and even then, it should be but part of a bundle of complementary activities for conservation and development.
2. Community involvement in ecotourism is a predictor of success with regard to development as well as conservation; more than a matter of economic benefits alone, successful involvement entails decision making authority.
3. Ecotourism can be empowering for marginalized and disenfranchised people, and can help in their efforts to gain recognition, rights and resources.

4. Ongoing adaptive management (with feedback and corrective responses) is crucial to the long-term viability of ecotourism efforts.
5. Although tourists appreciate many different aspects of ecotourism (aesthetics, entertainment, communion with nature, etc.), what sustains successful ecotourism is its educational/interpretive value, and this is important to remember.

Durham's chapter concludes with the argument that ecotourism is unique among commercial activities in rural areas because, unlike so many other activities, ecotourism works best when it builds on local knowledge and authenticity. In at least this one domain, outsiders have a built-in disadvantage compared with locals. Carefully designed ecotourism initiatives do have the potential to contribute both to biodiversity conservation and to local community development.

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