

## **‘Eco tourism’ and wildlife tourism.**

**Tourism** - is defined by Shorter Oxford English Dictionary as ‘The business of attracting tourists and providing accommodation and entertainment to tourists; the organisation and operation of holidays, especially commercially’<sup>1</sup>.

**Tourist** – ‘a person making a tour or a visit as a holiday, often as part of a group; a person travelling for pleasure’.<sup>1</sup>

### **What is Ecotourism? and what makes ecotourism different to other kinds of tourism?**

One of the most used definitions for Ecotourism is ‘Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people’ (TIES 2005). Being responsible means that it should :

- Minimize impact on the environment
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate.

#### **- *Minimize impact on the environment***

Business or industry that occurs without damage or causing change to the environment is often described as sustainable, because it can keep going without any negative impact on the environment or natural resources, and without depleting natural resources.

#### **- *Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect***

This means to make people, both tourists and those who live and work in the area, more knowledgeable of local environmental and cultural issues and to promote behaviours that are sympathetic to local traditions and environment.

#### **- *Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts***

The presence of tourists and tourism should not be detrimental to the local population, equally the host communities should not cause problems for the visitors.

#### **- *Provide direct financial benefits for conservation***

Tourism should generate money, through taxes or otherwise, that supports the cost of conservation.

#### **- *Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people*, also referred to as**

**‘Improving the well-being’**, means making people’s lives better in one way or another.

There are many ways in which touristic activity in an area can improve local people’s lives – pride from knowing that people in faraway places want to visit and know about their area makes people feel good; we learn all sorts of things from meeting and seeing visitors from different places. Tourism brings many other related activities, support services, a supply

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<sup>1</sup> Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. 5<sup>th</sup> edition. 2002. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK

industry and so on. A key issue is ensuring that benefits are felt by the local people. In 2004 the UNWTO<sup>2</sup> listed six elements required to enable the economic benefits of tourism to reach the local populations:

1. Employment in tourism enterprises;
2. Supply of goods and services to tourism enterprises by the local populations or by enterprises employing locals;
3. Direct sales of goods and services to visitors by the local populations;
4. Tax or levy on tourism income or profits, with proceeds benefiting the local population;
5. Voluntary giving/support by tourism enterprises and tourists;
6. Investment in infrastructure and social services stimulated by tourism that also benefit the local community, directly or through support to other sectors.

This is more or less the same as ‘Sustainable tourism,’ as defined by the UNWTO - Sustainable tourism should:

- Make optimal use of environmental resources, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity;
- Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance;
- Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities and contributing to poverty alleviation.

### **TASK - Summarise the characteristics of responsible, sustainable, and / or eco-tourism.**

#### The Case of Wildlife Tourism

Ecotourism that is focused on wildlife is more complicated because the wildlife as well as the habitats, human population and business aspects have to be taken into consideration. Great apes are particularly sensitive creatures, their social systems are refined and can easily be disrupted. This is a challenge for those involved in tourism. Because there is much that we don't know about great apes, researchers, conservation experts, planners, tourism experts and many other professionals are needed, and have to work together to make sure everything stays on track.

The main objective of gorilla-based tourism is to contribute to gorilla conservation – through raising awareness, assuring protected habitat, and bringing in revenue.

Three key issues of concern for conservationists, site managers, governments and others planning and or evaluating great ape tourism, are -

1. How great ape tourism can be managed in a way that is compatible with conservation of the species and associated habitat?
2. Whether there is a realistic market demand for tourism managed in this way?
3. How local communities can benefit from such tourism?

<sup>2</sup> The United Nations World Tourism Organisation

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UNEP<sup>3</sup> proposed four areas that need to be addressed to improve the sustainability of “wildlife-watching” tourism, especially when in developing countries:

- Improve understanding of the biology of watched species and monitoring of the effects of tourism on them;
- Improve guide training and interpretation;
- Evaluate the conditions required for wildlife watching tourism to be a viable option particularly for generating net revenues for conservation and benefits for local communities;
- Improve planning and management of tourism in protected areas and wildlife viewing sites.

Creating a sustainable eco/tourism programme, therefore, involves different sets of skills and expertise, including the ability to access tourism markets, to work with local communities and to manage wildlife resources. It is therefore necessary to bring together many different stakeholders together - including the tourism sector, local communities, local authorities and wildlife managers. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them. It is evident that the foundation of sustainable tourism and basic concepts of durable, fair and healthy great ape-based tourism are the same. When the main accent of a tourism programme is species and / or habitat protection, it is clear that the conservation sector, likely championing the programme, must work with all stakeholders, especially local communities.

The Convention on Biological Diversity’s Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development ([www.cbd.int/programmes/socio-eco/tourism/guidelines.asp](http://www.cbd.int/programmes/socio-eco/tourism/guidelines.asp)) identify a number of potential benefits of tourism for wildlife conservation in protected areas that include:

- Revenue creation for the maintenance of natural resources of the area;
- Contributions to economic and social development, such as:
  - Funding the development of infrastructure and services;
  - Providing jobs;
  - Providing funds for development or maintenance of sustainable practices;
  - Providing alternative and supplementary ways for communities to receive revenue from biological diversity;
  - Generating income;
  - Education and empowerment;
  - An entry product that can have direct benefits for developing other related products at the site and regionally;
  - Tourist satisfaction and experience gained at the tourist destination.

The IUCN<sup>4</sup> has produced a book - “Best Practice Guidelines for Great Ape Tourism”. The purpose is to minimise risks, including that pressure to generate income does not over-ride other issues. WWF have also produced a booklet called ‘Gorilla tracking at Bai Hokou’, Bai Hokou is an established gorilla tourism site in Central African Republic. The booklet includes rules for visitors.

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Environment Programme

<sup>4</sup> International Union for Conservation of Nature

The following nine principles have been suggested<sup>5</sup> to great ape conservationists considering tourism as a way to support conservation -

1. Tourism is not a panacea for great ape conservation or revenue generation
2. Tourism can enhance long-term support for conservation
3. Conservation must be the primary goal of great ape tourism
4. Conservation benefits must significantly outweigh risks
5. Conservation investment and action must be assured in perpetuity
6. Great ape tourism must be based on sound objective science
7. Benefits and profit for local communities should be maximized
8. Profit to private sector partners must not be a driving force
9. Comprehensive understanding of impacts must guide tourism development

**What do you think? Is it realistic to follow these principles? How does this differ from tourism as you know it?**

**Discuss the pros and cons of developing tourism around great ape species. Consider the perspective of conservationists, and the various local and national communities.**

Complete the table below

<b>Benefits – of gorilla tourism to conservation</b>	<b>Benefits – to the community</b>
Donor support (flagship spp)	Income through employment
Increased protection (umbrella spp)	Support infrastructure
Increased political will	Revenue sharing
Income tourist fees	National pride
Awareness of conservation needs through media	Increased international attention
Tool for environmental education	
Applied research	
<b>Costs / risks to conservation</b>	<b>Costs / risks to the community</b>
<i>Potential for increased hunting</i>	<i>Increased demographic pressure</i>
<i>Disease transmission</i>	<i>Increased numbers of domestic animals in park area</i>
<i>Behavioural changes</i>	<i>Division of natural resources between indigenous and immigrant populations</i>
<i>Increased road building</i>	<i>Dilution / loss of local cultures</i>
<i>Vegetation damage</i>	
<i>Pollution of national park</i>	

<sup>5</sup> Macfie and Williamson, 2010 p.30-31