Ecotourism is a sector of tourism, based on nature travel and including the principles of sustainability. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as: “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.” Whatever definition is used, ecotourism should have a positive impact on both natural areas and the local community.

Ecotourism is one kind of sustainable tourism, based on nature, and usually following a distinct set of principles and good practices. It is viewed by many as a beneficial by-product of the sustainability agenda due to the notion that ecologically fragile and natural areas can be protected through the financial returns of ecotourism activities. Indeed, ecotourism aims to promote conservation through a sustainable management regime under a ‘protection through usage’ approach with the objective of creating a greener tourism industry and an increase in the ecological and socio-cultural awareness and behaviour of tourists (Pforr, 2001).

While ecotourism has been defined by many, most definitions hold that ecotourism should be minimally disruptive to the natural and cultural setting in which it occurs; that is, it should be sustainable (Weaver, 2008). For instance, the UNWTO (2001) defines ecotourism as:

- Nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.
- Containing educational and interpretation features.
- Generally, but not exclusively, organized for small groups by specialized and small locally-owned businesses. Foreign operators of varying sizes also organize, operate and/or market ecotourism tours, generally for small groups.
- Minimizing negative impacts on the natural and socio-cultural environment.
- Supporting the protection of natural areas by:
  - generating economic benefits for host communities, organizations and authorities that are responsible for conserving natural areas;
  - creating jobs and income opportunities for local communities; and
  - increasing awareness both among locals and tourists of the need to conserve natural and cultural assets.
Ecotourism, at the same time, as a niche tourism market, is considered to be one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry, with claims that interest in ecotourism is increasing by 25% to 30% a year (Hassan, 2000; Jones, 2005; Pforr, 2001; Sharpley, 2006; Wood, 2002). This demand is being fuelled by, among other things, tourists’ desires for nature-based experiences in uncrowded, pristine environments. Arguably ecotourism has been enthusiastically embraced by the tourism industry yet many still do not really understand what it means: what activities qualify, who participates, where it occurs, what impact is acceptable, or how it can be optimally managed (Weaver, 2008). Although there are numerous criteria and guidelines that have been developed to guide operators these are often difficult to identify, require a financial commitment or accreditation and/or simply provide a list of ‘dos and don’ts’ for operators.

Ecotourism is that section of sustainable tourism which is related to visitation of relatively undisturbed natural areas, including protected areas. It has been estimated that 15-20 % of all international tourism might be classified as ecotourism. The 15% per year rate of growth of ecotourism and other nature-based tourism activities is higher than most other tourism segments.

By definition, ecotourism is a tool for conservation of natural and cultural resources (including biodiversity) and an instrument for sustainable development for local communities, especially in rural areas. There is no absolute distinction between ecotourism and other forms of tourism; rather the different types of tourism form part of a continuum. The challenge to biodiversity and tourism planners is to match the appropriate type of tourism with the aspirations of stakeholders and assimilative capacity of land, culture and communities. In reality, many tourists combine ecotourism with conventional tourism activities. Creating linkages between types of tourism can introduce and attract more conservative tourists to ecotourism practices.

Biodiversity planners should focus on ecotourism as an important ally in meeting the three main objectives of the CBD. It is the biodiversity resource base which mainly attracts an ecotourist to a destination, but this use of the resource is a non-consumptive one. The first task for biodiversity planners and protected area managers considering developing an ecotourism venture should be to develop an inventory of ecotourism attractions found in the proposed area. This will not be identical to a purely biological inventory — a biodiversity hotspot may not necessarily be a good or viable ecotourism prospect.

Ecotourism attractions in a potential project area may be divided into three categories:

(i) focal or flagship attractions (which may provide the main reason for visiting an area),
(ii) complementary attractions (which give added value to the area and encourage a longer stay for the tourist), and;

(iii) supporting attractions (the physical facilities and tourist services found in that place).

The two first categories correspond to the natural and cultural heritage of the area. The latter category facilitates visitation to the area. An ecotourism inventory is not equivalent to an exhaustive scientific inventory of all the biodiversity resources in a given region. Rather, it is a selection of those most attractive, or “marketable” elements of the biodiversity resource base and other natural and cultural components of the area. The inventory should be the basis of promotional activities, because ultimately, it will contribute to conserving the whole environment.

Ideally, best practice ecotourism development destinations should satisfy several criteria, such as:

- conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection
- promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, by providing jobs to local populations
- sharing of socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous people by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism enterprises
- tourism to unspoiled natural resources, with minimal impact on the environment being a primary concern.
- minimization of tourism's own environmental impact
- affordability and lack of waste in the form of luxury
- local culture, flora and fauna being the main attractions

**Good practices in Europe**

1. **AUSTRIA**

Austria’s existing six national parks cover a total of 2,356 square kilometres representing 2.8 per cent of the national territory and two of them even cross the border to neighbouring countries. The Thayatal valley in the north of Lower Austria, which was formerly divided by the Iron Curtain, nowadays represents a national park area in both countries i.e., Austria and the Czech Republic. With its declaration as a national park and its trans-national contribution to sustainable development, it represents a special example of the reunion of a formerly separated continent (Nationalparks Austria 2004).

Over the last couple of years, Austria has created national parks which are definitely modern and adequate places of Austrian nature conservation policies. The current situation and the international reputation of Austrian national parks are partly based on three principles:

- “Voluntary agreement of landowners”
- Adequate compensation for economic drawbacks
• Acting in accordance with the international criteria for the IUCN - protected area category II National Park”11

Principles like these can be viewed as the substance for the Austrian national park development as they guarantee that quality requirements are met and landowners, inhabitants and regional environmental organizations can be incorporated in the management process.

National parks play an important role in diminishing counteracting interests among inhabitants, politics and tourism. Adequate tourism management inside national parks is able to demonstrate that nature conservation and tourism activities can co-operate successfully. National parks Austria has recognized that environment, nature and ecosystems stand for predominating resources for modern tourism development as there is a rising demand for recreational activities in intact and life-enriching landscapes. Although, in Austria there is still a lot of sceptic attitude among citizens towards modern tourism development, the acceptance of national park projects has increased over the last couple of years. Positive changes in attitudes are fostered by a co-operation between national park managements and national tourism associations, which is considered a very favourable and collaborative development. In Austria, nearly every group which is concerned with national park services or sustainable tourism development tends to recognize favourable presentations of national parks and the integration in the regional tourism development is seen as the main goal that has to be reached (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit 2011a).

2. SWEDEN

The Swedish Ecotourism Association defines “ecotourism” as “playful exploration, meeting locals, and adventure with passion”. This is very different from the official UN definition, which includes sustainable management, active contributions to conservation, interpretation of natural and cultural heritage, and local community involvement. The Ecotourism labelling system ”Nature’s Best” is one of the World’s first. Behind it is primarily the Swedish Ecotourism Association, in co-operation with the Swedish Travel and Tourism Council. ”Nature’s Best” has two main objectives: to enhance the quality of Ecotourism in Sweden, and significantly increase its volume. The main goal is to create a well-known Ecotourism quality label that defends both ethical values and high quality travel experiences. It is a label that guides the customer’s Travel Choice towards ecotourism operators and their tours. A label that aims at inspiring Ecotourism operators into an even better performance, making their operations more environmentally sound, and making sure they are firmly embraced by the local communities. In this way, “Nature’s Best” contributes to nature conservation and the long-term viability of the destination. It
also promotes the integrity of cultural values while at the same time developing the local economy and a fair trade of services and local produce.

What are the benefits of the Nature’s Best Ecotourism label?

- makes it easier for the customer to find tours with fantastic experiences in nature and culture.
- guarantees high quality of delivery of the services.
- contributes to nature conservation, is eco-friendly and it defends cultural values.
- makes it easier for the approved tour operators to find their customers.
- contributes to the growth and quality of ecotourism.
- becomes a reassuring factor for the customer, and gives direct answers to important questions about the tour.
- makes it easier for the approved tour operator to communicate environmental issues to other stakeholders in the field, especially business partners in foreign countries, landowners, authorities and active out-door people.
- spurs increased work motivation among the staff.
- becomes an image- and marketing tool for all approved tour operators.
- is a prerequisite for the creation of joint marketing channels for ecotourism.
- forms a creative network of ecotourism operators.
- drives forward the development of innovative, new and genuine travel products.
- will increase the demand for skilled nature guides.
- will in a wider perspective also be able to be linked to, or work in close co-operation with other acknowledged labelling systems (WWF Arctic-LINKS, the Green Key, NEAP).

3. SWITZERLAND

Chanaz is a small rural town with 500 inhabitants by the Savière Canal, which links Lake Bourget to the Rhone River. Chanaz has a rich natural and cultural heritage, and is currently experiencing a boom in tourism with over 150,000 visitors per year. It also lies on the route of the Saint Jacques de Compostelle pilgrimage. Mr Husson has been the mayor of Chanaz for 30 years, and from very early on in his career, has been very involved in sustainable development. The town's current marina has reached its maximum capacity (115 places), and its tourist accommodation facilities are now insufficient, as it does not cater for groups. Since no private investors have come forward with any proposals to deal with this situation, the town council has decided to create an artificial lake in order to develop high quality accommodation.
The "new" marina area will cover 7,200 square metres, upgrading the capacity of the current marina by 48 rings. Eight cottages (50 beds) will be built following strict environmental rules (high environmental efficiency standards), and in line with the local architectural style. Water quality will be monitored to prevent pollution.

The cottages will rely on solar energy, and implement energy and water saving measures. The construction and operational phases will both involve local players.

The activities offered in the surrounding will be pollution-free: cycling, kayaking, roller-skating and fishing.

The actual accommodation caters for families and pilgrims, but also for groups. The expected clientele should partly be motivated by the town's sustainable tourism ethos.

The town of Chanaz has been committed to sustainable development principles for over 20 years, thanks to the vision of Mr. Husson, its mayor. Solar panels were installed in the local campsite back in 1984, the school uses a woodchip heating system, the town's heritage is being restored, and it provides financial help for the use of renewable energies and water saving measures (water consumption monitoring), etc.

The town lies alongside the Savière Canal. This line of water forms an umbilical cord between the Rhone River and Lake Bourget. Because of this particular geographical situation, Chanaz stands as a key tourism partner to the great Lake Bourget area. Chanaz, with its sustainable culture and its location, is quite logically part of a number of networks, exchanging experiences and sharing in promotional operations.

4. ITALY

The "Ecomuseo Cusius" is an innovative "outdoor museum" project aimed at protecting and enhancing the territory's specific features. It is a perfect tool for promoting the area's history, culture and tradition, stands as a testimonial to its heritage, and is looking towards its environmentally-friendly future economic development compatible with environment.

Ecomuseo Cusius is a multicultural project consisting of a network of museums, workshops, botanical gardens and routes located around Lake Orta on the Strona Valley and Mottarone sides. The connection between these varying topics and places will encourage visitors to explore every aspect – cultural, environmental and artistic – of the land around Lake Orta, as well as its local crafts and industries, and as a result, help them to get a feeling for the life and customs of Cusio and gain an insight into the geographical features of this quietly charming region and the future opportunities it represents.
The main topics covered by the Ecomuseo project are "Man and the environment" (for example, the Girolago Museum, Alpinia Botanical Gardens and the Natural Agricultural Centre), "Cultural heritage and handicrafts" (e.g. Woodturning, Ethnographic wind instruments, Umbrellas and sunshades, tap production and technology), "Art and history" and so on.

Two examples:
- "Alpinia" Botanical Gardens
  The "Alpinia" Botanical Gardens, founded in 1934, lie at the foot of the Mottarone, from where the view of the Alps looking down to the surrounding lakes and plains is quite superb. The award-winning gardens are home to a rich collection of herbaceous alpine plants, some of which no longer grow spontaneously in the wild. A visit to "Alpinia" is a chance to learn about and appreciate not only a vast selection of botanical species found in the Alps, but also a range of more exotic plants.
- "Alpe Selviana" Natural centre
  Set serenely amid the tree-covered hillsides of the Mottarone, near the Pescone River waterfalls, "Alpe Selviana" was once an abandoned alpine pasture that has been transformed into a natural agriculture centre now committed to organic farming and fruit growing. The centre is also used for educational purposes, giving people a living example of the mutually beneficial way in which man and nature can cooperate; human activities are carried out with respect for the natural environment and without affecting it. In addition to its teaching activities, the centre also arranges visits to a microscopy laboratory and a small museum exhibiting local finds.

Ecomuseo Cusius caters for different kinds of tourism (cultural, relaxation) and different people (researchers, students) interested in sustainable tourism and the area's cultural heritage.

The creation of the association has brought together a variety of parties (museum, population, local authorities...) who all have in common the will to change. They are working together to make Ecomuseo Cusius a success and to safeguard the link between man and his environment.

For many countries, ecotourism is not simply a marginal activity to finance protection of the environment but is a major industry of the national economy. For example, in Canada, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nepal, Kenya, Madagascar, and Antarctica, ecotourism represents a significant portion of the gross domestic product and economic activity.

*World Ecotourism best practices*

- Canada - “Partnerships: The Road to Success!”– Excursion Mauricie

*BEST PRACTICE – ANALYSE THE SITUATION*
Until the mid-1980s, the regional accommodations sector in the Mauricie area of Québec was primarily made up of hotels which attracted Québec workers who had very little time to spend on tourist leisure pursuits. At that time, the region was defined solely as a "drive through" region. The Mauricie tour sector began developing rapidly at the beginning of the 1990s. A number of excellent country inns and B&Bs were set up, managed by competent and forward-looking owners. The arrival of new clients provided promising prospects for development.

**BEST PRACTICE – DEFINE THE PROBLEM**

The Mauricie is a territory where nature and culture coexist. Lakes and forest were waiting to be discovered. The reputation of its experienced outdoor guides was not exaggerated. Since the seigneurial period in New France, regional craftsmen have been masters in the exploration of uninhabited regions and in the construction of canoes, and their reputation goes beyond our borders. But how can these advantages and natural riches be made available to tourism clientele?

**BEST PRACTICE – DO YOUR RESEARCH**

With the help of statistical research and through discussions with the owners of the B&Bs and country inns in the region, we have gradually developed a precise market portrait, including the number of tourists that stay in the country inns and B&Bs, the number of nights they stay in the region, the number of times they come back, their mode of transportation, and the activities they are interested in.

**BEST PRACTICE – SELECT AN OPERATING METHOD**

Once the data had been analysed, we decided to develop a business which would organize day excursions for small groups of up to eight people, either by canoe, bicycle or hiking, with equipment and lunch provided. Clients would be met directly at the places they were staying, and returned to the same spots by dinner time. They would be transported in a very comfortable four-wheel drive truck with a trailer for the canoes and bicycles, so that they would really get the feeling of beginning the adventure as soon as they left.

**BEST PRACTICE – APPLYING RESEARCH TO BUILD THE BUSINESS**

A market study allowed us to identify the European clientele staying in the B&Bs of the region as 85% Francophone. They travel in very small groups, either in couples or in families, and they adore the wide open spaces. A partnership with the B&Bs was therefore the most direct way to gain access to this clientele.

The advantage that made advertising our product effectively possible was **direct contact of the owner of the B&B with his clients** during breakfast. These owners have the time to talk about the advantages
of an excursion and to describe the advantages of a guided excursion to those who are sensitive and open to nature.

At the same time, the B&B owner creates a better impression of their property and themselves by allowing the client to experience and share a stimulating adventure before and after the excursion. They give their clients the option of staying one more night at their property, of eating meals, of keeping the client in the region, and showing them that the Mauricie has a lot to offer. When clients go to the Gaspé or other far-away regions, they are often in a hurry. They stay at a country inn for one night and would like to take an excursion, but they don't have enough time. We do not try to pressure clients. When they are on their way back to this region, we encourage them to come back and choose an excursion, if their timetable is not so full.

**BEST PRACTICE – IDENTIFY YOUR POTENTIAL CLIENTELE**

**Baby boomer clients:**
The rapid increase of the age group of young retirees aged 50 and over is a possibility for development that will succeed if activities are arranged based on listening to their needs, the experience is authentic, and there is a shared involvement in the activity between the guide and the client. The level of experience the client has in an outdoor environment will need to be assessed and this will require the professional to develop high-quality personalized activities.

**Paraplegic children:**
It is important to provide everyone with the opportunity of experiencing and enjoying nature. Excursion Mauricie has developed safe ways of making the natural environment accessible to paraplegic children. For example, during excursions on a river in calm water, special benches in the Rabaska canoes provide secure support, protective headgear is worn, and the ratio of guides is increased.

Excursion Mauricie caters to physically challenged children in collaboration with Kéroul (the Québec association for people with limited abilities).

**BEST PRACTICE – PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS THROUGH PARTNERS**

Excursion Mauricie maintains partnerships with a number of regional partners and businesses. Active partners include 21 accommodation properties representing 550 rooms in the area, and 517 campsites at the Mauricie National Park:

**Fixed Roof Accommodations:**
- 11 B&Bs (Bed & Breakfast)
- 10 country inns/hotels

**Camping:**
• 517 camping sites in the Mauricie National Park. We have built our business by promoting our products via country inns.
How do we do this? • A publicity card about Excursion Mauricie's products is inserted into the B&B's brochure, and distributed free.
• A FAM tour is provided to B&B owners to acquaint them with the adventure activities and sites to keep them up to date on information concerning the product.
• An alliance with the B&Bs is formed to promote their products by joining international information networks. For example, five tourist B&Bs in Trois-Rivières have been listed for the past four years in the Guide du routard, a very well-known guide popularly used by Europeans.
• An annual dinner party in a maple sugar house is hosted by Excursion Mauricie to discuss the summer product offering with eleven B&B owners.

_Mutual Benefits of Partnerships_
Excursion Mauricie has a dynamic partnership with the Mauricie National Park whereby they provide adventure experiences to enhance the range of services offered by the National Park. This is a win-win partnership with mutual benefits for both partners; Mauricie National Park is able to offer products provided by Excursion Mauricie, and Excursion Mauricie is able to tap into park visitors. As well, the partnership is enabling the National Park to attract new visitors through its affiliation with Excursion Mauricie. Overall, the client is the winner as they receive a more diverse experience than that which can be provided by one partner alone.

_BEST PRACTICE – KNOW YOUR PARTNER’S BUSINESS_
For the partnership to be successful, however, each partner must be very aware of each other’s business in terms of strengths, opportunities, and constraints. For example, the National Park is limited in their ability to offer adventure experiences because of budgetary and staffing constraints. Excursion Mauricie was able to identify this as an opportunity to forge an alliance to expand the experiences and services provided to park visitors. It is also important to understand your partner’s operating philosophy. For the National Park, it was important that Excursion Mauricie understood their conservation mandate and that they were a professional operator. Both partners feel their alliance is a unique way to provide complementary offerings rather than compete for the same market.

_BEST PRACTICE – INVEST IN PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE LONG-TERM_
Developing a solid partnership is a long-term initiative. Partnerships do not evolve over night. If your attempts to develop a partnership fail the first time, persevere! Work together with your potential
partners to figure out each other’s needs and strive to identify how you can work together to build stronger businesses.

**BEST PRACTICE – GOOD PARTNERSHIPS ARE BUILT ON A SPIRIT OF TRUST AND COMMUNICATION**

Excursion Mauricie’s partnership with the accommodation sector in the region is a profitable one. For example, Excursion Mauricie brings 500 additional room nights to one property alone. All businesses share a common philosophy and mutual respect and are achieving success in their partnerships.

**Partnership With Le Baluchon Country Inn: - The Quality of Partners: A Sign of Success!**

Excursion Mauricie began working with Le Baluchon Country Inn in 1995 by providing guide and skidoo services for groups of Europeans staying at the inn each week during the winter seasons. Le Baluchon established a formal business partnership with Excursion Mauricie when they became aware of our high-quality expertise and the stability and professionalism of our business. The way the partnership operates is this: Excursion Mauricie maintains an adventure centre kiosk with equipment rentals and guide services offered at Le Baluchon. Excursion Mauricie provides a high level of expertise in outdoor activities, and also ensures a human presence on the site. Le Baluchon could not provide these services on their own. In the beginning, Le Baluchon provided the equipment and Excursion Mauricie acted as an adventure concessionaire. But when the popularity of the relationship resulted in a massive influx of summer tourists, Excursion Mauricie offered to purchase all the outdoor equipment in addition to enhancing the inventory with additional equipment. The partnership with Le Baluchon was then reinforced and consolidated by an agreement between the two parties. Overall, the partnership is a highly valuable one as more services are now available to guests and Le Baluchon is able to operate much like a destination resort with equipment rental (e.g., kayaks, mountain bikes, canoes, skis, snowshoes) included in the price of the accommodation. Excursion Mauricie also provides guests with a range of guided adventure trips and snowmobile rentals on a fee basis.

The partnership has also resulted in a significant improvement in accommodation demand at the inn, and has enabled Excursion Mauricie to operate a viable adventure business year round.

Other advantages for Excursion Mauricie are;

- No rent to pay for the adventure centre kiosk.
- Great visibility, since there is a lot of traffic and all clients going to the inn that pass right by the on-site outdoor facilities.
- The outdoor equipment is located centrally, to facilitate easy access for transportation to other sites, easier surveillance, rapid inventory taking, and maintenance facilities.
**Details of Agreement between Excursion Mauricie and Le Baluchon Country Inn:**

The partnership agreement between Excursion Mauricie and Le Baluchon Country Inn involves the following;

- Excursion Mauricie maintains guide staff at Le Baluchon 300 days/year to provide for guided tours and equipment rental.
- A small surcharge is levied to *each* room night at the inn to offset the expenses associated with equipment rental and maintaining a constant presence on the site. (The surcharge is levied whether or not the client uses the equipment, and is included in the room rate.)

This surcharge ensures:

- That fixed costs of Excursion Mauricie are covered;
- The frequent replacement of equipment to maintain quality;
- Someone on-site 300 days per year;
- The presence of experienced guides who are faithful to the business.

In return, commissions on guided activities from clients not using Le Baluchon accommodations are remitted to Le Baluchon.

In a similar fashion, Excursion Mauricie works with its other 20 accommodation partners by offering guided trips to their guests. These trips are operated throughout the region and include guest pickup and drop-off at the respective hotels. In return, these accommodation properties receive a commission.

**Partners That Work at Le Baluchon - Daily Collaboration!**

The partnership with Le Baluchon Country Inn involves daily collaboration with their staff. For example, staff at the inn inform guests about the outdoor activities available on site, and when the guides are temporarily absent, they accompany guests to the kiosk to return equipment. The grounds staff work in close collaboration with Excursion Mauricie to ensure that the infrastructure, paths, and river docks are always easily accessible and safe, and by keeping informed of weather conditions. Similarly, the horse stable staff provide a horse carriage shuttle service for clients to certain activity sites such as skating or cross-country skiing in the winter. There is also a complementary relationship among the region's adventure tourism operators. When a product is not provided by one operator, they will inform their clients about what is available in the region, such as rock climbing, whitewater canoeing, sea kayaking, etc., and refer them to other businesses.

**Other Best Practices – What Sets Us Apart**

**BEST PRACTICE – TAILOR YOUR EXPERIENCES TO YOUR MARKETS**

Excursion Mauricie caters to families. For example, what sets us apart is;
• Interpretation adapted to a family-based clientele (the guide adapts his interpretation to the interest level of children and parents)
• Freedom of movement for parents
• Increased safety and quality of equipment
• Ease of observation of fauna

**Examples:**

• When catering to a family, we typically place children in the canoe with the guide. The guide oversees the safety of canoeing, entertains the children, and tells them about the flora and fauna at an age-appropriate level. The parents then have the opportunity to paddle on their own in a second canoe. This allows them a much deeper appreciation of nature and the experience, and ensures they relax and enjoy their surroundings, while the guide oversees the children’s experience. This arrangement has been very successful as both children and parents enjoy and appreciate the experience.

• In another example, Excursion Mauricie has an innovative way of maximizing trips with only a few clients. On such occasions, we take them to new areas so we can explore and learn too. This offsets our costs and enables us to continue providing customized experiences for small groups.

**BEST PRACTICE – USE INCLEMENT WEATHER TO YOUR ADVANTAGE**

Even rain becomes a source of pleasure and amusement for our clients! In rainy weather, we ensure guests enjoy their adventure experience by:

• Providing guests with complete equipment including spare rain gear
• Encouraging clients to test their limits by motivating them to succeed and enjoy the difference of doing an activity in the rain
• Having a positive attitude to help see and appreciate the weather in another light

For example, we provide an excursion by canoe on a lake in the Saint-Maurice Wildlife Preserve, or hiking in Mauricie National Park, in a fine rain with lunch under the trees. In these situations, the guides tailor the experience and encourage clients to be open to new experiences such as;

• The beautiful scent of conifers in the rain
• Foggy and mysterious landscapes
• Creative photography

• **Costa Rica** has earned a reputation as a leading ecotourism destination, and has been a pioneer in many ecotourism practices. Most national parks and private reserves include ecotourism planning and management as a key component of their management plans. Over the last 15 years or so, tourism, with a strong ecotourism emphasis, has been one of the two main foreign
exchange earners of the country, and it is widely recognized that this has contributed to conserving Costa Rica’s biodiversity by providing a viable alternative land use to forest clearance, etc. In the early 1990s the Costa Rican National Park System established a tourism concession program in the Irazu and Poas National Parks. Concessions for tourism-related services such as entrance fee collection, tour guides, groundskeepers, security guards, food and beverage, and souvenir stands are competitively bid to local small businesses and residents living in the buffer zones of these parks. These commercial concessions, generally awarded for a three-year period, are a real and effective way in which communities can participate and benefit from protecting a natural area. FUNDECOR, a national environmental NGO, administers the concessions program for the Costa Rican National Park Service, and provides oversight and quality control of the concessions. Concessionaires pay a percentage of their gross profits to a fund (coadministered by FUNDECOR and the National Park Service) that finances capital improvements for the parks and training and equipment for staff. Currently there are more than 80 concessionaires working in the two parks. The concession mechanism has greatly improved the facilities and services provided in the national parks and has contributed to their financial sustainability. Most importantly, surrounding communities have formed a strong alliance with the park service in protecting the biological resources of the national parks, which provide many of them with an alternative source of income. During 1995-2000, the concession mechanism generated more than $250,000, which has been reinvested in the management and operations of the two parks. Source: www.fundecor.or.cr

- **Kruger National Park, South Africa**: Kruger National Park (KNP) covers around two million hectares of mostly bush-field and is the most celebrated and most visited of South Africa’s protected areas. Community development forums are carried out regularly between the Social Ecology Department of South African National Parks (SANP) and neighbouring communities. Products from local rural entrepreneurs and black empowerment companies are giving preferential treatment. Also encouraged is the facilitation of entrepreneurial activities that financially benefit the local communities and the park. The Makuleke people have recently regained ownership of a piece of land within KNP from which they were forcibly removed in 1969. They have full rights to commercialize this land but it will be managed within the context of the KNP Management Plan. A number of community associations have been formed, and economic partnerships and training opportunities in ecotourism are being developed.
• **Hato Pinero, Venezuela**: Hato Pinero, a private reserve in the Llanos, originally a cattle ranch, has become a well known destination for international ecotourists especially US bird watchers. The ranch owners decided to conserve a major proportion of the land in its natural condition, and converted some of the ranch facilities into lodging facilities, so that ecotourism has become a prime source of income generating many additional jobs, and complementing the traditional cattle raising activities. (IUCN-WCPA (World Commission on Protected Areas). 2000)

• **Rocktail Bay, South Africa**: The local community neighbouring Rocktail Bay benefits from its presence by owning shares in both the lodge owning and lodge operating companies. Therefore, the benefits are dependent upon tourism revenue and the proportional size of their equity. The community receives dividends from its shares in the lodge owning company on a quarterly basis from lease payments paid by Wilderness Safaris, and also from the lodge operating company when operational profits are sufficient. Wilderness Safaris runs Rocktail Bay as a small, luxury coastal lodge with opportunity for fishing, diving, snorkelling, sea turtle tours and beach activities. The presence of Rocktail Bay contributes financially towards biodiversity conservation in the provincial nature reserves through its lease payments to the commercial arm of KZNCS. WS also finances loggerhead and leatherback turtle monitoring along the coastline. Conducted by the conservation authority for many years, turtle monitoring would have been restricted to a minimum had it not been for WS’ donations. Guests at Rocktail Bay are encouraged to ‘adopt’ a turtle, and thereby assist in funding the conservation authority’s satellite tracking of adult turtles. ‘Hippo tours’ were initiated for Rocktail Bay guests, where members of the local community are used to guide guests to where hippos are living around their village. Previously, the hippos had been considered a great pest to the villagers. Now they are tolerated because the tours generate a fixed monthly fee for the community, and money per tourist if hippos are seen. This initiative has benefits including increasing awareness of the value of biodiversity conservation in rural areas by generating a regular income for local guides. (IUCN-WCPA (World Commission on Protected Areas). 2000)

• **Sian Ka’an, Mexico**: Soon after Sian Ka’an was declared both a Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Area by UNESCO, an NGO called Amigos de Sian Ka’an (Friends of Sian Ka’an) was set up, to collaborate with the Mexican government on the conservation and sustainable use of the natural resources of the area, which include extensive marshlands, mangroves and forest. Ecotourism has become a key part of Amigos’ activities and it provides an important funding source for the reserve and the local communities. Tours by foot and by boat, guided by local
people, are offered to the national and foreign visitors. (Chandra, A., Kandari O.P., Tourism, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development, Volume 5, 2001)

• The Lerato Case, Namibia: “In 1999, the Lerato company started negotiations with a number of Namibian conservancies to develop several 10-bed lodges in Namibia and elsewhere in Southern Africa. Conservancy representatives and advisors came together to assess the proposals. These assessments identified many problems, such as lack of clarity on the size and exclusivity of proposed use areas; lack of proposals for joint management or local Training; risk of environmental damage; and Lerato’s “domineering attitude”. The Conservancy group developed a counterproposal of the kind of issues they would like to see reflected in an agreement, which reflects the benefits the communities seek from tourism on their land, and better addresses negative impacts. Main themes were: major community concerns about issues on control, partnership, land-use, environmental management, and securing their future”. (Chandra, A., Kandari O.P, Hristova (Terzieva), L.Tourism and Sustainable Development, Beijing International Studies University Press, volume 13, 1998)

• The Bergsig Negotiations, Namibia: “Between 1994 and 1996 residents of the Bergsig area were involved in negotiations with two different tourism investors, who wanted to set up luxury lodges. The Residents Committee negotiated two joint ventures but decided to proceed with only one, for a 16-bed tented camp. The other offer, for a small exclusive lodge, was discussed for three years and finally reached the point where the company demanded a “yes or a no”. The community decided against it. The prospect of high cash returns was outweighed, in the eyes of the community, by a number of disadvantages, namely high risk, alienating people and livestock from a much larger land area, and a much longer lease agreement”. (Chandra, A., Kandari O.P, Hristova (Terzieva), L.Tourism and Sustainable Development, Beijing International Studies University Press, volume 13, 1998)

• Seychelles Rules: “Local legislation specifies that there must be local partners in any tourism business, and that licensed-out services (e.g. boats, outfitter equipment) must hire a minimum specific percentage of Seychelles citizens”. (Chandra, A., Kandari O.P, Hristova (Terzieva), L.Tourism and Sustainable Development, Beijing International Studies University Press, volume 13, 1998)

• Cofan Community, Ecuador: “The Cofan Community Ecotourism Programme in Zabalo (Cuyabeno Reserve) is a good example of a self-managed ecotourism enterprise, carried out by an indigenous group of Amazonian Indians. The area was relatively isolated until the first
foreign tourists came to the area in the early 1980s, introducing the first shifts towards a market economy in the region and altering the social structure. In response to this, the Cofan people explored several new marketing opportunities, but decided that only eco-tourism could provide adequate sustainable income. Initially, canoe trips were offered to backpackers hiking in the area. After it was observed that the cultural aspects of the community appealed to visitors as much as the natural features of the area, anthropological and ethnic components were included in the planning of the tours. Slowly, the operation expanded. Simple tourist cabins, as well as a small ethnic “museum”, were built alongside the Aguarico River about one mile further downstream and on the opposite bank from the Indian village. A strict zoning scheme has been set up, including 60-km of nature trails for tourists (with walks guided by the local Cofanes), and subsistence hunting areas used solely by the local community. Rare and attractive wildlife species (eg. macaws, hawks, eagles, waterbirds, wild felines) are protected as the main assets of the ecotourism operation. The tourism activity is managed directly by the local council, which administers the community funds. In 1999, the total revenues of the project were US$120,000.


KwaZulu Natal, South Africa: “The Simunye Zulu Natural Heritage Site (KwaZulu Natal) has developed an ecotourism project which attempts to strengthen local traditions through the active participation of local communities in all aspects of the project. The project has built a simple but comfortable lodge close to the village”. (Chandra, A., Kandari O.P, Hristova (Terzieva), L. Tourism and Sustainable Development, Beijing International Studies University Press, volume 13, 1998)

Statistics for Ecotourism Destinations

USA

Domestic and international travelers made nearly 275 million recreation visits to the 378 recreation areas administered by the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) in 1998 compared to the 287 million visits in 2011. This is an increase of 4.4% (Travel Industry Association of America, 2011). Travel to the United States National Parks Service areas generated direct and indirect economic impact for local communities of US$14.2 billion and supported almost 300,000 tourist-related jobs during 2010. It is unknown what portion of these visitors represented participation in ecotourism activities (Tourism Works for America, 2011).

Nepal
The Annapurna area is the most popular trekking destination in Nepal. Since 1989 the number of trekkers coming to the area has increased at an annual rate of approximately 18%. In 2011, 50,708 international trekkers visited the area. Out these 12,000 visited the Annapurna sanctuary (Gurung, no date).

*Belize*

In 2011 49.4% of 172,292 tourists to Belize visited Mayan sites, 12.8% visited Parks and reserves. Important reasons for visiting Belize are: to observe scenic beauty, to be in a natural setting and to observe wildlife (Higgins, 2011). Cayes and Barrier reefs were visited by 87% of visitors. 82% of visitors to Belize were in the age group of 18 to 50 years old and 65% were college graduates (Higgins, 2011).

*Galapagos Islands*

Galapagos nature tourism has grown steadily since the pioneering days of the 1970’s, to the present level of over 60,000 visitors a year, making a $100 million-plus contribution to the Ecuadorian economy (estimates vary) (Charles Darwin Research Station, 2011)

*Kenya*

From 1983 to 2011 visitor arrivals to Kenya grew by 45% (372,000 to 826,000). The Kenya Wildlife Service (2011) estimates that 80% of Kenya’s tourist market is drawn by wildlife and that the tourism industry generates one-third of the country’s foreign exchange earnings. Revenue from Kenya’s wildlife parks increased to 70 million in 1995. (In 1997 US$1=60KS).

*Australia*

There are an estimated 600 ecotourism operators in Australia today, approximately 85% of these employ fewer than 20 staff. Ecotourism businesses are estimated to have an annual turnover of some $250 million and to employ a total staff of around 6500, the equivalent of 4500 full-time staff (Sport and Tourism Division Australian government, 2011). There has been a considerable increase of international visitors to Australia’s national parks where from 1.2 million in 2000 tourists have risen to more than 1.6 million in 2010, meaning a total increase of 36%. This underlines that in 2010, 47% of all inbound visitors to Australia aged 15 and over reported having visited national parks (Bureau of Tourism Research, cited by Sport and Tourism Division Australian government, 2011). In Australia, recent research found ecotourists to represent nearly 30% of domestic travellers (ecotrends 2011,cited by Wight, in press).

*Peru*
An estimated 10.3% of tourists that visit Peru prefer to go birdwatching in natural areas (Proyecto PRA, 2000). According to studies carried out by PromPerú (2010) 47% of foreign tourists to Peru visited natural zones. Of this number, 44% combined visiting natural zones with visiting cultural attractions and 3% came only to visit natural zones. The flow of visitors to 26 of the 52 Áreas Naturales Protegidas por el Estado – ANPE (Protected Natural Zones by the State), increased 250% during the 2000-2010 period. Just in 2010, the number of visitors was estimated in 642 336, according to the figures provided by the Instituto Nacional de Recursos Naturales - INRENA (National Institute of Natural Resources) (Promperú, 2010).

**Brazil**

Five million visitors came to Brazil in 2011, five times as many as in 2001. Brazil has more than 150 conservation areas, of which 40 National Parks. An estimated number of 3.5 million visitors went to these National Parks in 1998. Especially the last two years the number of foreign ecotourists has grown, it had 600,000 Brazilian ecotourists and attracted 200,000 foreign ecotourists in 1998 (Janér, 2010).

**South Africa**

In the period of 2000 until 2010 the number of visitors to game and nature reserves in South Africa has grown by 108% annually. In 2001 the number of visitors to the reserves was 454,428, in 2010 this number has grown to 5,898,000 visitors. Game and nature reserves are the number one activity for visitors to the country in 2010 (60%), rising by 2% over the previous year (South African Tourism Board, 2010).

**UK**

Research conducted by MORI for ABTA indicated that 85% of UK holidaymakers believed that it is important not to damage the environment, 77% think that it is important that their visits include experience of local culture and food and 71% feel that tourism should benefit the people of the destination visited, through jobs and business opportunities. 52% said they would be interested in finding out more about local issues (environmental and social) in their chosen resort before they booked their holiday. The majority (64%) stated that they would be prepared to pay between £10 and £25 extra for environmental, social or charity guarantees- representing a 2-5% increase on a holiday of £500.

The success of ecotourism activities at an operational level depends upon an array of factors owing to its nature. Ecotourism can be the thin edge of a wedge, which opens the door to mass tourism and has every possible scope to be used by general tourism practitioners as brand name. This very concept could be misused to fulfill their economic motives. Scope of implementing certification concept is strong in the process of sustainable development of Ecotourism. Therefore, there is need to develop an applied tool to
measure threshold of tourism impacts and change in socio-economic and environmental status of the site through Criteria and Indicator (C & I), under the framework of sustainability. The development of C&I is not an end in itself, it is a continuous process which encompasses the societies responsibility for sustainable livelihood generation through community based Ecotourism without environmental degradation and erosion of cultural values.
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