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Defining Canadian Ecotourists

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The definition of an ecotourist is an issue of much debate. Many define an ecotourist based on a list of specific requirements that the tourist must meet, such as age, education level, or income level. We propose that while these characteristics may be useful in forming a general description of an ecotourist, they do not necessarily serve as a basis for a prescriptive definition. For the purposes of this study, a set of three criteria is developed based on knowledge gained from studies on known ecotourist groups. A group of Canadian tourists to Kenya is evaluated against these criteria and found to qualify as ecotourists. We propose that such criteria; a social motive (travelling to learn about nature), a site attraction motive (visiting wilderness or undisturbed areas) and time commitment (33% of trip), can be used to define ecotourists.

Introduction

The question of the definition of an ecotourist is frequently posed in the literature. Often the approach is to provide a list of characteristics that ecotourists should fulfil (Valentine, 1992). For example, Butler (1992) has proposed that if an activity is to be considered ecotourism, it should fit eight characteristics.

- (1) It must promote positive environmental ethics.
- (2) It must not degrade the resource.
- (3) It concentrates on intrinsic, not extrinsic values.
- (4) It is biocentric, not homocentric.
- (5) It must benefit wildlife and environment.
- (6) It is firsthand experience with the natural environment.
- (7) It has an expectation of education and appreciation.
- (8) It has high cognitive and affective dimensions.

These characteristics could be used to categorise the ecotourist, as well as the recreational activity. However, such definitions are more a wish list of what ecotourists should be, according to the author's opinions, than what they really are. Many authors have proposed such criteria, often without the use of systematically-obtained information on the actual characteristics of ecotourists and their desires for the travel experience. Also, an extensive, eight-point scale, as proposed by Butler, is quite difficult to operationalise.

We suggest that sufficient information is now available to enable tourism analysts to define ecotourists through the use of information on a few key characteristics. This approach bases the definition on the genuine characteristics of the traveller as revealed in travel survey research. We also suggest that a small, three-point scale is adequate.

Generally, ecotourists are seen to be outdoor enthusiasts who are well-off financially, well-educated, older people who have the free time to travel. Some have suggested that females are a growing proportion of nature-oriented travel-

lers (Keenan, 1989; Ingram & Durst, 1989; Payne & Graham, 1991). Such features are informative, but do not lend themselves to an exclusionary definition.

Methods

Ballantine (1991) surveyed a group of Canadian tourists who had visited Kenya. The group represented the clientele of one travel company specialising in Kenyan vacations. This company, based in Switzerland and Kenya, is a major tourism operator that concentrates on the European market. The company takes over 50,000 tourists a year to Kenya and services them through its suite of resort hotels, aircraft, lodges and camps. Most of the company's hotels are located along the Indian ocean beaches near Mombasa. The company provides a wide range of recreational activities, including safaris, cultural events, ocean cruises, beach use, arts and crafts displays. Our survey dealt with the complete Canadian clientele list of the company, people who had purchased trips to Kenya through the Toronto office over a three year period (1988–1990). As many recreational alternatives were available during their vacation in Kenya, it could not be assumed that the respondents were ecotourists solely because they were visiting a country that has known ecotourism features.

An eight-page questionnaire was administered early in 1991. A key focus was the collection of information on the travel motives, using the approach and choices developed by the Canadian Travel Attraction and Motivation Study (CTAMS, 1983). A total of 67 travel attraction and motive choices was provided in two major categories, travel attractions (examples were casinos, national parks or big cities) and social motives (examples were visiting family, finding thrills or doing nothing at all). Each respondent was asked to indicate the importance of a specific attraction or social motive to the Kenya vacation on a four-point scale (very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important).

A total of 195 surveys was sent out and 120 were returned, for a return rate of 62%. Complete analysis of visitor attitudes, sites visited and programme satisfaction is presented in Ballantine (1991).

Developing an Ecotourist Definition

It is necessary to develop specific criteria to identify whether any particular travel group is composed of ecotourists. Such criteria should be few and easy to apply in a broad range of situations. For this study, criteria are based upon the results obtained from several previous studies conducted with known groups of Canadian ecotourists (Fennell, 1990; Kretchman & Eagles, 1990; Williacy & Eagles, 1990). These studies show that ecotourists are distinguished from other Canadian tourists by their responses to motivational and attraction-oriented questions (CTAMS, 1983; Eagles, 1992).

Three criteria are chosen to assess whether the respondents of this survey could be defined as ecotourists. One criterion deals with the social travel motivations and one with the travel attractions of the tourists. 'Learning about nature' is selected as the prime social motivation for ecotourism travel, from a list of 30 social motivations. The desire to travel to 'wilderness or undisturbed areas' is chosen as the prime travel destination attraction, from a list of 37 travel attrac-

tions. A minimum amount of time spent on safari is chosen to represent dedication to firsthand field experience in Kenya.

The justification for choosing these particular motivation and attraction criteria is based on knowledge gained from previous studies of known ecotourists groups. It was found that Canadian travellers to different ecotourism destinations share similar motivating characteristics. The general Canadian tourist emphasises socially-oriented motivations, such as being with friends and family, and having fun or being entertained (CTAMS, 1983); whereas, ecotourists emphasise environment and adventure-oriented motivations, such as learning about nature, photography and seeing as much as possible in the time available (Fennell, 1990; Kretchman & Eagles, 1990; Williacy & Eagles, 1990; Eagles, 1992). Learning about nature was the highest ranked social motive found with nature-oriented travellers in previous studies (Eagles, 1992). While all tourist groups seek the outdoors as an attraction, the average Canadian enjoys warm climates and predictable weather; whereas the ecotourist seeks more nature-oriented environments such as parks, tropical forests or wilderness areas. The desire to visit wilderness or undisturbed areas was the highest ranked attraction motivation of Canadian ecotourists found in previous studies (Eagles & Cascagnette, 1994). The ecotourists also exhibit a desire for intense and lengthy levels of contact with nature during their vacation.

The criteria to determine whether a respondent is an ecotourist are as follows:

- (1) The respondent must answer 'very important' or 'somewhat important' to 'learning about nature' as a motivation when planning a trip to Kenya.
- (2) The respondent must answer 'very important' or 'somewhat important' to 'wilderness/undisturbed areas' as an attraction when choosing a trip to Kenya.
- (3) The respondent must spend at least one-third of their Kenyan vacation days on safari.

These criteria were chosen before the survey data collection was undertaken and were applied during analysis.

These criteria are consistent with several of those proposed by Butler. Criterion one deals with learning, similar to Butler's desire to see ecotourists have high expectations in this area. This criterion narrowly deals with learning about nature, and makes no assumptions about where or how this learning is to take place. Criterion two concentrates on visiting the natural environment, in the form of a wilderness or an undisturbed area. This criterion narrowly deals with the location of the trip, and does not make assumptions about the activities or intrinsic motivations for such a visit. Criterion three ensures that ecotourists get a defined amount of firsthand experience. Each of the criteria deal indirectly with many of Butler's more difficult to measure concepts such as intrinsic values, and a biocentric philosophy.

Tourist Characteristics

Overall, the tourists in this study have characteristics similar to those found for the Canadian ecotourists in previous studies. The group is older than the average Canadian traveller, with an average age of 49 and with 72% of the group

over the age of 40. More females (55%) than males (45%) travelled to Kenya. Bell (1990) also indicated that a greater number of females are now choosing trips to Kenya.

The group is highly educated, with 79% having had some post-secondary education and 47% with at least a Bachelor's degree, compared with the Canadian average of 11%. This group is well off financially, with an average household income of \$72,523 compared to the Canadian average of \$42,686 for 1989. The average income level of the respondents may be underestimated as 12% of the group indicated incomes of over \$130,000, the maximum amount listed on the survey. This study shows that Canadian tourists to Kenya have the time and money to travel. Respondents spent an average of \$9391 and travelled for 47 days during 1990.

Safaris, an accepted ecotourism activity, are found to be the primary reason for these Canadians taking the trip to Kenya and are indicated as the recreational activity engaged in most often while on vacation in Kenya. The group expresses a strong interest in nature and indicates that it is very important to their experience. However, the travellers combine safaris with cultural and entertainment activities. Kenya's tourism industry is more developed than that of many other ecotourism destinations and emphasises the African culture as well as environmental attractions. Moscardo & Pearce (1989) said that environmental attractions are strongly tied to cultural activities in the ecotourism experience.

The only dissatisfaction this group find with their trip is a need for more information on conservation issues. This suggests a weakness in the interpretation programmes of both the safari operators and the parks visited. It also suggests a strong interest and dedication to education about conservation issues by the tourists. These tourists search for information and understanding in their travel. Therefore, they are critical if the knowledge component of the trip is below their expectations.

The travellers were also asked questions that might show their dedication to ecotourism outside the particular trip to Kenya. It was proposed that ecotourists would probably own recreation equipment associated with ecotourism activities, such as expensive cameras, and that dedicated ecotourists would have memberships in conservation-oriented organisations.

These hypotheses are confirmed. In this study of tourists to Kenya, 62% own camera equipment valued at over \$800. Therefore, most of the ecotourists own sophisticated camera equipment suitable for the photography of subjects such as wildlife. It is probable that this equipment is used in travel experiences beyond those experienced in Kenya. In addition, 42.5% belong to a conservation-oriented organisation, particularly a wildlife-oriented group. Filion *et al.* (1987) found that only 6.9% of Canadians belong to nature-oriented organisations. Therefore, these travellers are much more likely to be supporters of the conservation efforts of the voluntary sector than are members of the general public.

Conclusions

At total of 99 respondents (84%) met all three criteria for the definition of an ecotourist. It can be concluded that these Canadian tourists to Kenya qualify as ecotourists.

We feel that these criteria are of general utility and can be used to define ecotourists in many contexts. The combination of a social motive (travelling to learn about nature), an attraction motive (visiting wilderness), and a time commitment (33% of one's vacation time spent in the field) is a reasonable approach to defining ecotourists. This set of travel attributes has come from a series of studies of core Canadian ecotourists and now has been confirmed in this study of tourists to Kenya.

In the future, these criteria can be incorporated into surveys of tourist groups to help with the determination of whether the respondents are ecotourists. The use of a simple, three-point scale should be of direct utility to a wide variety of tourism analyses that are struggling with the determination of ecotourism definitions.

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