

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Ecotourism to support sustainable development in Vietnam and the Philippines

Ecotourism as a tourism product: Ecotourist behaviour,
ecotourism attributes, and ground rules for business
opportunities

ECOVIP Online Training Module 2: Ecotourism and sustainable development

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December 12th, 2023



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Global trends that are changing the nature of tourism

As negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts of mass tourism become more common, the appeal of alternative forms of tourism, especially **ecotourism**, continues to increase.

Rise in eco-tourism: Consumer awareness of the environmental footprint of their travel is on the rise, with 81% of travellers stating that sustainable travel is important.
(Corporate Traveller, 2022, *Sustainability in Travel: How to Make a Positive Impact*)

Demand for premium – yet, sustainable – travel: Many travellers that are seeking premium tourism experiences also want these experiences to be environmentally sustainable.

- Due to the increasing importance of ecotourism, there is the need to understand the functioning of the markets and the tourist segments that comprise them → meeting expectations of diverse consumers of ecotourism products.
- Sustainable consumption is a current issue in the development of ecotourism.

Profiling Ecotourists

- Ecotourism organisations, such as accommodation providers, tourism operators, and nature activity organizers, should understand the distinct characteristics and preferences of their customers to develop effective marketing strategies for success.
 - For any entrepreneurial venture, **knowing your customers** is crucial to ensure that products or services meet the specific needs and preferences of distinct groups, ultimately enhancing market relevance and increasing the project's chances of success.

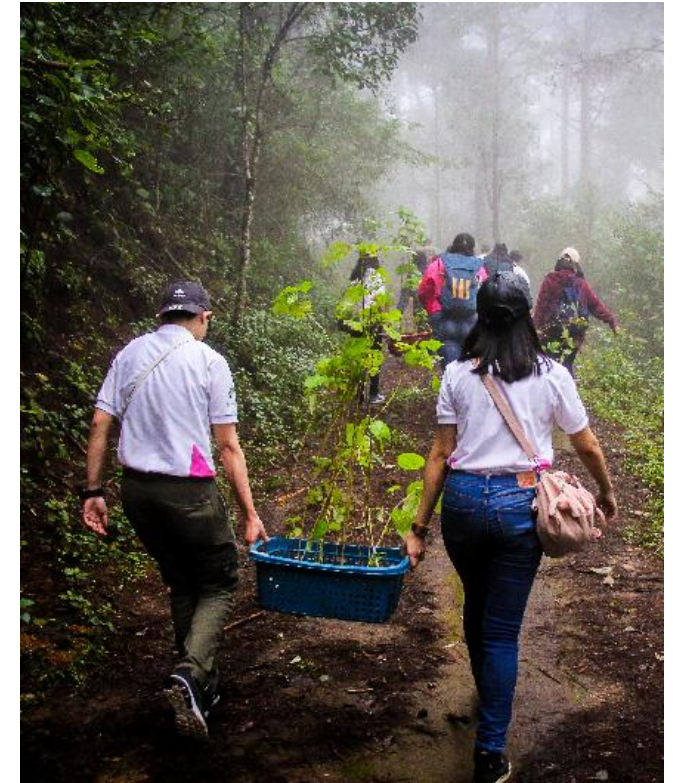


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Profiling Ecotourists

Lee (2007) identified that definitions for ecotourist in literature are based on three basic criteria:

- (1) **type of sites visited by tourists** (i.e., tourist entering a nature-based site as ecotourists)
- (2) **on-site activities** (i.e., tourists engaging in particular activities) and
- (3) **motivation to visit** (i.e., underlying motivations of traveling to an ecotourism destination – e.g., appreciating pristine natural areas, having deep commitment to conservation and environmental issues, desire to have deep interaction with nature).



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Lee, T. H. (2007). An ecotourism behavioural model of national forest recreation areas in Taiwan. *International Forestry Review*, 9(3), 771–785.

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What is an Ecotourist like?

15 responses



Profiling Ecotourists

According to the International Ecotourism Society (TIES):

Profile of Ecotourists in Europe (prevalent characteristics):

- Experienced travelers
- Predominantly from urban backgrounds
- Higher education
- Higher income bracket
- Age: middle-age to elderly
- Opinion leaders
- Ask & tell their friends & colleagues about trip

Relying solely on **sociodemographic characteristics** is not enough to segment this market; rather, more consideration should be given to criteria concerning **attitudes** and **behaviours** related to ecotourism.

“Ecotourists span a wide range of ages and interests, being consumers with significant social, economic, and environmental responsibility, seeking authentic experiences and opportunities to benefit the communities they visit, making a conscious choice of the type of travel undertaken to reduce the carbon footprint.”

10 common attitudes and behaviours:

Profiling Ecotourists

+ personal values
+ interests
+ specific context of travel experiences

High consciousness; Keen interest in nature, wildlife, and conservation issues; well-informed of impacts

Environmental Awareness

Drawn to destinations that offer opportunities to experience and appreciate natural landscapes, wildlife, and biodiversity

Interest in Nature and Wildlife

Prioritize sustainability (environmentally friendly and socially responsible practices) in their travel choices

Sustainability and Responsible Travel

Interested in learning about the ecosystems they visit, the local cultures, and the conservation efforts in place

Educational Focus

Attracted to adventure and outdoor activities that allow them to directly engage with nature

Adventure and Outdoor Activities

Show respect for local cultures and communities; interested in meaningful and respectful interactions

Cultural Respect

Interest in more intimate and less disruptive experience, with smaller group sizes

Small Group Preferences

May be willing to pay higher prices for the alignment with their values of sustainability and conservation

Higher Willingness to Pay

Seek out less-visited and more remote locations to minimize their impact

Preference for Off-the-Beaten-Path Destinations

May actively participate in or contribute to local conservation projects and community initiatives

Involvement in Conservation Efforts

A study by Lorenzo-Romero & Crespo-Jareño (2023) explored if there are any segments of ecotourists based on their attitude and behavior towards ecotourism, and profiled the segments according to their sociodemographic characteristics.

Basic ecotourists (12.4%)

Also termed ecotourists of thought, have a significant awareness of the problems facing the planet but engage in less ecological tourism. Group characteristics: men (58.0%), under 36 years old (50%), lodged in hotels (45.8%), interested in visiting tropical forests, whale/turtle watching and ethnic or indigenous tourism (higher values)

- + independent travellers
- + travelling with partner or family
- + university-level studies

Average ecotourists (57.1%)

Largest segment with intermediate position with regards to attitudes such as awareness of consequences, intention to do ecotourism, and intention to pay more for ecotourism. Group characteristics: men (51%), ages over 46 (49.9%), lodged in rural accommodation (48.2%), interested in hiking and excursions on delimited trails, and observation of natural landscapes (higher values)

Active ecotourists (30.5%)

Display greater awareness of the consequences, are more responsible toward the environment, and have a greater bond with caring for nature and pursuing ecotourism and activities that are more respectful of the environment. Group characteristics: Women (56.8%), membership of environmental group (21.7%), lodged in camping/tents/cabins (61.5%) and guest houses/hostels (57.1%), interested in visiting natural/national parks, hiking and excursions on delimited trails, and observation of natural landscapes (higher values)



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An ecotourism industry



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- The growth of ecotourism industry can be primarily attributed to growing environmental awareness and emphasis on more sustainable living.

According to Allied Market Research (Ecotourism Market Report, 2021), the global ecotourism industry generated \$181.1 billion in revenue in 2019 and is anticipated to reach \$333.8 billion by 2027, reflecting a compound annual growth rate of 14.3% from 2021 to 2027.

An ecotourism industry

Different forms and business opportunities

Wide range of tourism business opportunities – in terms of size, products and services offered, location, model, ...

Eco-lodging

Eco-tours and outdoor recreation

Cultural and community-based activities

'Combined' eco-projects

Ancillary products/services related to tourism activity

An ecotourism industry

Different forms and business opportunities

Eco-lodging

- **Eco-Lodges and Green Accommodations** → Lodging facilities that prioritize sustainable practices, use eco-friendly materials, and minimize their environmental impact.



Bukubaki Eco Surf Resort (Central Portugal)
<https://www.bukubaki.com/>



Coccon Eco Design Lodges (Central Portugal)
<https://www.cocoonlodges.com/>

An ecotourism industry

Different forms and business opportunities

Eco-lodging

- **Camping + Glamping** → Luxurious and comfortable form of camping that combines the experience of being in nature with high-end amenities and accommodations.



Reserva Alecrim EcoSuite & Glamping (Alentejo, Portugal)
<https://www.reservaalecrim.com/>



Senses Camping (Central Portugal)
<https://www.sensescamping.com/>

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Different forms and business opportunities

Eco-tours and outdoor recreation

- **Nature Tours and Wildlife Watching** → Guided tours that focus on observing and appreciating natural settings and/or wildlife, often led by knowledgeable naturalists or specialised tour guides.
- **Photography Safaris/ Photography 'hunting'** → Tours designed for photography enthusiasts to capture natural landscapes and wildlife.



Futurismo (The Azores, Portugal)
<https://www.futurismo.pt/>



Wildlife Portugal (Portugal)
<https://www.wildlifeportugal.pt/>

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Different forms and business opportunities

Eco-tours and outdoor recreation

- **Hiking, Trekking, Cycling and/or Mountain Biking Expeditions** → Guided or self-guided trips that explore natural landscapes, national parks, and protected areas (usually in delimited trails).



Portugal Nature Trails (Portugal)
<https://portugalnaturetrails.com/>



Portugal Bike Tours Trails (Portugal)
<https://portugalbiketours.com/>

An ecotourism industry

Different forms and business opportunities

Eco-tours and outdoor recreation

- **Visit to natural/national parks** → Immersive experiences in protected environments, may include the visit to tropical forest and indigenous bush (and also the visit to cultural or heritage sites).
- **Geological exploration and speleology tours** → Guided tours that focus on geological formations, geoparks, caves, and subterranean environments.



National Park Peneda-Gêres (North of Portugal)
<https://natural.pt/protected-areas/parque-nacional-peneda-geres>



Geopark NaturTejo (Lisbon region, Portugal)
<https://www.naturtejo.com/>

An ecotourism industry

Different forms and business opportunities

Eco-tours and outdoor recreation

- **Eco-diving, boat tours and water activities** → Guided tours that focus on observing and appreciating natural settings and/or wildlife in the marine context, rivers or lakes.



Seaberlenga (Central Portugal)
<https://www.seaberlenga.com/>



Wildsea Europe (Portugal & other countries)
<https://www.wildsea.eu/>

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Different forms and business opportunities

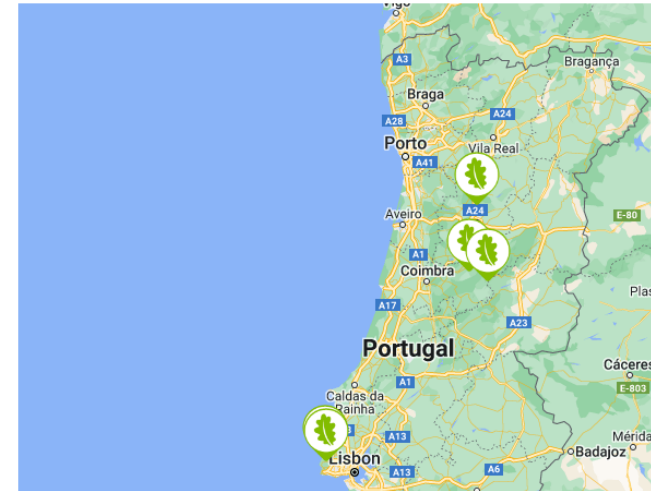
Cultural and community-based activities

- **Cultural and Community-Based Programmes** → Programmes that provide authentic interactions with local communities, emphasising cultural exchange and supporting local economies (e.g., ecovillages)



Portugal Farm Experiences (Several locations, Portugal)
<https://www.portugalfarmexperience.com/>

- Eco Retiro de Galamares
- Eco Aldeia de Cabrum
- Eco Aldeia em Janas
- Eco Aldeia Vida em Transição
- Eco Quinta – Figueirinha



Eco Life Experience (Several locations, Portugal)
<https://ecolife-experience.com/experiencias-em-eco-aldeias-quintas/>

An ecotourism industry

Different forms and business opportunities

Cultural and community-based activities

- **Volunteer and Conservation Programmes** → Opportunities for travelers to actively participate in conservation efforts or community projects in ecologically sensitive areas.
- **Culinary/Gastronomy Ecotourism** → Experiences that introduce visitors to local, sustainable food sources and traditional culinary practices.
- **Creative Tourism Programmes** → Immersive and sustainable experiences that intertwine local culture, arts, and craftsmanship, allowing travellers to engage with communities, promote creativity, and contribute to the preservation of cultural and natural heritage.

An ecotourism industry

Different forms and business opportunities

'Combined' eco-projects

- **Agrotourism** → Travel experiences that connect people with agricultural activities, rural life, and local food production. May include farm stays, tours, animal interactions, workshops, u-pick experiences (e.g., harvesting), etc.
- **Nature Retreats and Camps** → Retreats that blend outdoor experiences, nature exploration, and educational workshops, providing participants with a deeper connection to the environment.
- **Educational Nature Camps for Schools** → Camps designed for students to learn about ecology, conservation, and outdoor skills in a hands-on, experiential setting.

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Different forms and business opportunities

'Combined' eco-projects

- **Wellness Retreats** → Retreats that combine wellness practices with nature immersion, fostering a sense of mindfulness and connection to the environment.
- **Adventure Challenges** → Team-based challenges that incorporate adventure activities like hiking, biking, or kayaking, emphasizing teamwork, navigation, and appreciation for nature.
- **Competitions** → Competitive events that promote environmental awareness and learning about natural settings and wildlife (e.g., nature photography competitions, bird watching competitions, trail running, eco-races).

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Different forms and business opportunities

'Combined' eco-projects



Cerdeira - Home for Creativity, Lousã (Central Portugal)

<https://www.cerdeirahomeforcreativity.com/>



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Different forms and business opportunities

'Combined' eco-projects

- **Eco-Festivals** → Events that celebrate nature, conservation, and sustainability, featuring workshops, speakers, eco-friendly vendors, and outdoor activities.



CineEco - Serra da Estrela International Environmental Film Festival (Central Portugal)
<https://www.cineeco.pt/>



Eco Festival Azores Burning Summer (The Azores, Portugal)
<https://azoresburningsummer.com/festival>

An ecotourism industry

Different forms and business opportunities

Ancillary products/services related to tourism activity

- **Sustainable Transportation Services** → Eco-friendly transportation options, such as electric vehicles or low-impact modes of travel.
- **Eco-Friendly Travel Products** → Sustainable travel gear, eco-friendly travel accessories, and products that promote responsible tourism.



Organiko Sustainable Store (Online store)
<https://www.organiko.pt/>



Ride South Portugal (The Algarve, Portugal)
<https://www.organiko.pt/>

Ecotourism opportunities

Some relevant takeaways

Ecotourists are very likely to:

- Enquire about the environmentally sustainable practices of the providers for their holidays.
 - Maintain their general environmental behaviours, even when on holiday.
 - Appreciate and reward businesses that exhibit environmental and social accountability.
 - Be willing to pay more for environmentally and socially friendly practices.
- It is essential that **ecotourism organizations** understand the necessity of ensuring that their practices and working methods are focused on sustainability and respect for nature
→ must endeavor to **communicate** their ecological operating methods so that ecotourists recognise these practices as valuable and in line with their attitudes.

BUT... 

Ecotourism opportunities

Some relevant takeaways

- Although a growing number of studies have found that visitors are willing to pay for 'sustainable' tourism products and services, very little of this 'willingness' is actually translated into practice.

e.g., Needham (2011) found that 71% of travellers reported willingness to pay more for an environmentally friendly hotel, yet only 12% committed to the pay of 10-20% more.

- Some restraint is recommended in the use of the catchphrase "ecotourism" → "sustainable" or "eco" label is not synonymous to an ecotourism experience

Many consumers are aware that 'green' and 'sustainable' claims may be a façade, served to 'green wash' consumers and used solely for the purpose of good relations → lack of evidence about the benefits

Ecotourism is constantly misrepresented in promotions → undermines consumer confidence + frustrates genuine providers of ecotourism or green products

Thank you!

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