

2020, THE YEAR OF SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL?

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***Abstract:** Traveling, a good way for each of us to get rid of the worries of the everyday life, by practicing it, has now become a controversial topic, sparking intrigue and in-depth discussions about the impact that the tourist has on the environment. But even if we do not want, tourism, regardless of the type in which it fits, is in a relationship of interdependence with the environment around us.*

In the conditions of an alarming global warming, which despite numerous researches in the field and attempts to decrease their impacts, seems to maintain the same upward trend, tourism, unfortunately, also contributes to this phenomenon that creates a bleak landscape of reality in which we go to for days. However, tourism, one of the main sectors of the world economy, can make a significant contribution in terms of reducing environmental problems, all by encouraging the practice of ecotourism in a fully responsible manner.

Therefore, the main subject of this article is intended to be a topical one, as I will present in detail using many statistical data, as well as general information, attesting that ecotourism should be regarded by travel lovers as a necessity nowadays, when it comes to tourism.

***Keywords:** ecotourism, sustainable development, environment, impact, travel.*

METHODS

The present article has a thorough research of the subject analyzed, for this purpose, the bibliographic sources consulted being both the specialized books, the research reports and the online sources, which were the basis of a good statistical interpretation. The main analytical steps followed in this paper are the following:

- identification of keywords;
- selecting the required documentation;
- the application of the deductive, inductive, comparative method, as well as the investigation, were useful in order to obtain the most accurate results.

Why Ecotourism?

We live in a period of great changes, both social, economic or political, as well as environmental ones. Since ancient times, man has been forced to travel, making this phenomenon a necessity that is intensifying nowadays, from day to day.

Since the earliest periods of humanity, the movements of individuals from one area to another, depending on their purpose, have acquired a tourist character. Thus, we can recall in this sense the displacements in practice of the different populations to find places where the climatic conditions favored the practice of a prosperous agriculture or the development of different species of game. Later, in conjunction with the evolutionary process of man, forms of tourism were born much closer to the present ones, conclusive examples being religious tourism, recreational tourism, tourism for commercial purposes, but also the one practiced for maintaining political-social relations and economic between the civilizations of the times. Thus, in the case of religious tourism, the practice of Christianity and the making of pilgrimages to Rome and Jerusalem is representative; Islam is also noted for its iconic locations, namely Medina and Mecca, while the god Gautama Buddha was worshiped at Rummundeï and Kucingara.

Referring also to tourism for commercial purposes, its undeniable importance has been proved by the necessity of its practice in order to develop various peoples; the main access roads becoming real street markets. At the same time, resorts such as Baiae, one of the most appreciated Roman resorts in ancient times, have acquired a well-established tourist character, especially among the wealthy Roman families.

With the passage of time, not only that the man and the society regarded in the broad spectrum have had a continuous development, but of course, the tourism sector, by the appearance of the new tendencies in this field, as a result of the necessity of satisfying the tourist demand. In this sense, the reality of the present day is a living proof that, according to the WTTC-World Travel & Tourism Council, (2019), tourism is an economic sector that brings a significant contribution to the gross domestic product worldwide.

The human desire to discover places, people, traditions, new experiences, but also the need to relax in a conducive environment, was the starting point for the phenomenon that led to the emergence of several types of tourism. In this sense, the present is marked by tourist forms that influence in a positive as well as a negative way, depending on the case, both the physical and social environment. Therefore, in the conditions of

practicing different forms of tourism, the manifestation of environmental problems, in which the tourist, conscious or unconscious of the impact of his actions on the environment, have not ceased to appear.

Ecotourism can be understood as a "reaction" coming to the practice of classical forms of tourism, thus, the concept itself contributing to the protection of natural areas, as well as to the preservation and capitalization of the customs and traditions of local communities. The daily lives of individuals characterized by stressors and polluting environmental factors found in urban areas, along with the desire to escape to an environmentally friendly place, have led to the awareness of the importance of respecting nature through the implementation of ecotourism principles. So, we will ask the question "Why Ecotourism? Why should this type of tourism be understood as a necessity of today, who should practice it, and who benefits from it? ".

First, according to the work "Tourism - A Privileged Relationship with the Lasting Development" (Mirela Mazilu 2007), we must keep in mind that "the tourism-environment relationship is of particular importance, the protection and conservation of the environment being the primary condition of development and development of tourism ". Thus, we find the answer to the first question above, but is very important understanding that nature, man and tourism must be in a lasting relationship, of permanent communion, made possible only by respecting environmentally-friendly policies and strategies (Fig. 1.).

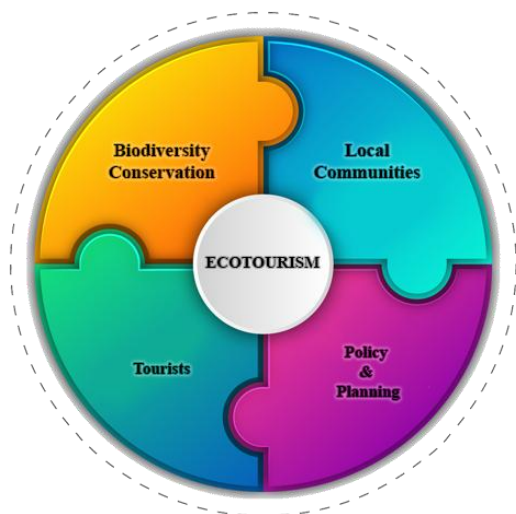


Fig. 1. The vital components of Ecotourism
 Source: author

The ecotourism, understood as an essential component of the phenomenon of sustainable development, seems to have gained great popularity among travel lovers worldwide. In this regard, according to the annual report on sustainable travel, made by the booking.com platform, on April 17, 2019, 72% of the total number of tourists who used the services of the platform, expressed their belief that the need to prepare trips in the a sustainable way, it is vital not only for one's own well-being, but especially for maintaining the environmental balance, and implicitly the possibility for future generations to enjoy travel on a "still green" planet.

Considering that the phenomenon of ecotourism has been gaining popularity since 1980, as a result of environmentalists' efforts to sound an alarm about environmental changes, and as a consequence of irresponsible tourism activities, (Honey, M. , 2008), we can create an image of the whole landscape that presents the current situation of the trips made in a sustainable way. In this sense, the statistical data denote the fact that the adult generations, more specifically Generation X and Boomers, have reached a point in life when the maturity is transposed in the tourist choices. Thus, of the people who chose the tourist services offered by the booking.com platform, 74% of those between 46 and 55 years of age, and 71% of the tourists over 56 years of age, expressed their interest for choosing a trip that has no negative effects on the environment (booking.com, 2019). In another order of ideas, the same source provides us with a general statistic, regarding the percentage of 55% of global tourists who have expressed interest in choosing to practice tourism in a sustainable way.

However, even if the aforementioned data seems to be some good ones, we have to look deeply into this trend, which may be one that will only remain at the optimistic stage. The preparation of a trip of a sustainable nature, can face multiple impediments ... the lack of information of the tourist about what the term of "sustainable" implies and the preparation of a trip that respects the principles of sustainability; the existence of more significant expenses than in the case of choosing a traditional trip; the difficulty of making a decision regarding the preparation of a pro-sustainable holiday to the detriment of the classic one; the existing constraints regarding the activities that will only be of a sustainable nature, therefore, the possibility of a tendency of inactivity or the inability to keep the tourist's attention throughout the sustainable journey (Fig. 2).

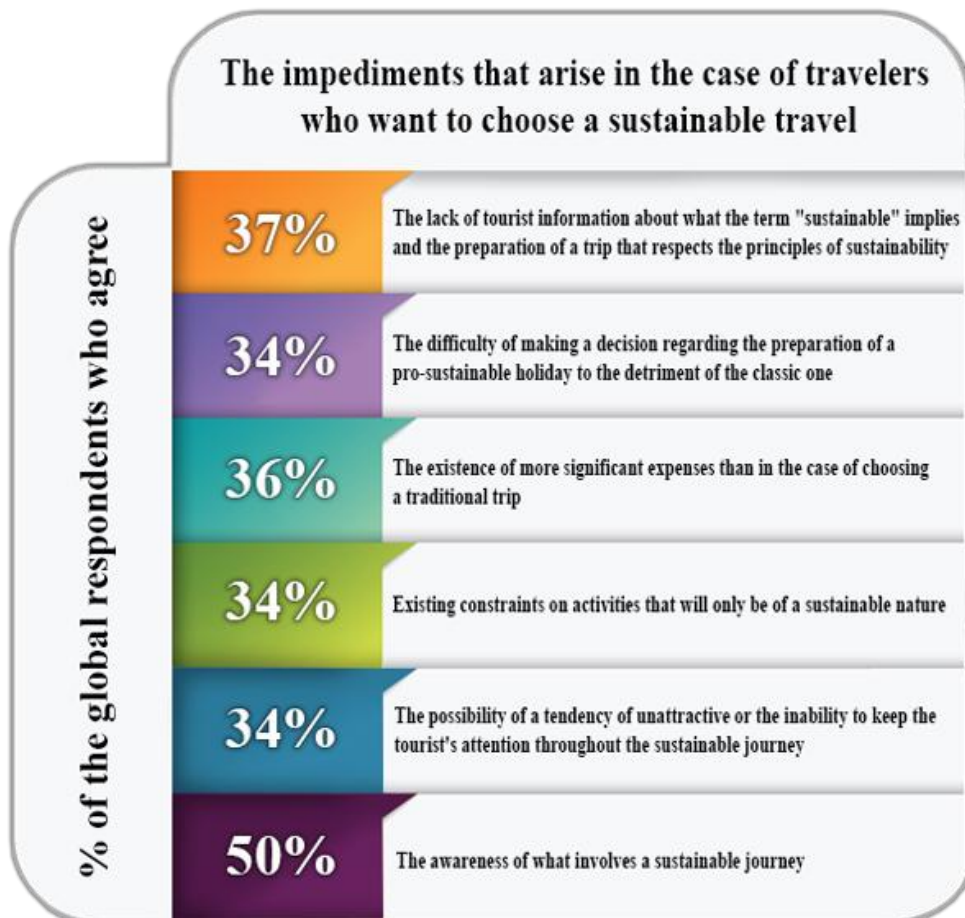


Fig. 2. The vital components of Ecotourism
 Source: Statistical data taken from booking.com

Sustainable stays require special attention from both tourists and the authorities. Every effort must be taken to ensure that ecotourism is perceived as a necessity, a priority in our choices, by travel enthusiasts. In this sense, even if there are cases where the motivation for such a choice is present, the information facilities of the general public may be insufficient or even non-existent. The promotion of sustainable forms of tourism must be perceived as a complex link between the sustainable destination itself and the tourist. In this sense, the studies undertaken so far, debate a big problem, namely: “Is ecotourism properly promoted or not?”

According to the report provided by booking.com on April 17, 2019, 71% of the total respondents, global travelers, consider that the permanent involvement of the travel agencies in the decision making process of the tourist regarding the choice of a sustainable trip is vital. The agencies, not only should include in their offer a wide range of tour packages that include sustainable activities, but also inform the clients about how the chosen trip can be more sustainable through the individual actions. Also, cormerative companies that sell tourist packages, which also have online platforms, need to pay more attention to optimizing the site interface, by implementing a section in the main menu, which includes a filtering option specially dedicated to travel. sustainable. Only 45% of booking sites have such an implementation (booking.com, 2019).

Eco-Friendly behavior of the tourist

Nowadays more and more people are traveling and more and more people will be traveling in the future, this is for sure. Although travel is a relaxing activity, unfortunately often it is a major source of pollution, so a new trend of tourists begins to take shape, eco-friendly tourists, whose concern is the preservation of the environment.

In order for a traveler to become nature-friendly, there must be several conditions: planning an eco-friendly itinerary, carefully choosing the destination and period when it is visited, choosing an environmentally friendly accommodation option, avoiding hotels first, avoiding as much as possible the materials made of plastic, such as bags, glass bottles, etc., choosing local restaurants, which have a low carbon footprint, purchasing souvenirs created by the locals, practicing eco-friendly activities, choosing transport methods as much as possible. environmentally friendly, air travel should be as low as possible and avoid stopping.

These are some of the measures that every tourist can take when traveling because thus, if more and more travelers proceed such pollution risk can be greatly reduced and the next generations can enjoy the same destinations.

”Green” transport is an alternative to traditional methods of public transportation

Every tourist destination in the world can become an important source of pollution if certain aspects are not managed properly. If in the tourist areas where the flows of travelers are seasonal, the level of pollution can return to better parameters, what happens to the big cities where the number of visitors is high?

Human activities disrupt many of the planet's natural processes, and this is most evident in urban areas. By constructing new buildings, new road networks, railways, industrial spaces, by expanding the cities themselves, the air and the environment is becoming more and more polluted.

The means of public transport have a high degree of pollution, and their number is increasing in the preferred cities for city-break packages. However, the choice of environmentally friendly alternatives can reduce the risk of pollution.

There are numerous studies that show that the transport sector comprises 90% vehicles that run on petrol and diesel. However, there is also an encouraging fact, that more and more people either choose electric vehicles or want to buy a car that runs on electric power in the near future. Also, the authorities in more and more cities want to purchase electric means of public transport, be it buses, trains, etc.

Therefore, it is advisable for each tourist to consider protecting the environment when choosing a trip to a tourist destination. And cities with a huge flow of tourists encourage alternative transport, such as bicycles, electric bicycles, electric scooters, electric cars and even on foot.

Bicycles are one of the ideal transport methods to enjoy a tourist destination, they are easy to use, practical, but especially friendly with the environment. The fact that it is an important source for a healthy life is another benefit. Those who do not want the classic bicycles can opt for an electric bicycle, where physical effort is reduced to a minimum. The authorities are investing heavily in building an infrastructure as large as possible for them.

Electric scooters are a new trend in urban transport, so there are many electric scooters in different areas of the metropolis and can be rented by anyone paying different taxes. This method of transport is well received by tourists, being often chosen.

The market for electric motors has developed massively, at present there are electric trucks, electric cars, but also electric buses. Electric buses are gaining more and more land, being bought in increasing numbers in European countries, such as: Great Britain, Sweden, Holland, Belgium, Spain, France etc. These must become an important option when an eco-traveler wants to travel through a tourist destination. Also, tourists who want to visit more lenses using cars, can always request the hire of an electric car, car rental companies provide travelers with more environmentally friendly car models.

Last but not least, one of the most useful methods of transport through the tourist cities is walking, which has many benefits, being a healthier alternative, but in this way it can be much easier to get in touch with the whole local community, to get to know the locals, the cultural elements, interesting information.

Therefore, any tourist must be aware that in order to preserve a tourist destination, whether urban or rural, they must choose visiting methods that are as friendly as possible with nature, but also with the environment.

Supporting the local economy

Tourism is an industry that in recent years has received a special interest, given that in 2017 alone the number of travelers was over one billion, some destinations being completely swallowed by tourists. The fact that more and more people are traveling determines that many locals build their own businesses in which to make available to tourists different cultural elements in the form of magnets, views, ornaments, etc.

To be a true traveler, it is imperative to do everything possible to integrate into the community he visits, to know the cultural and historical character of the area. It is known that tourism can preserve the traditions and customs of the destination, which is a major reason for giving up niche tourism. There are several methods by which tourists can encourage the development of the local economy, some of them can be: serving a snack from a local with the destination specific, choosing a local guide presenting all the tourist objectives in the area, buying souvenirs created by the locals, accommodation in the homes of the locals.

In each destination there are local restaurants that want to promote the gastronomic values of the area, so it is important that each tourist choose at least once to enjoy the local delights. Also, each destination has locals who want to share many cultural elements, traditions, customs, etc. cultural values that you cannot discover in any other way. Each tourist wants to keep a small part of the trip he has made, most want souvenirs in the form of magnets, views, key chains, and locals speculate such opportunities by investing in the creation of small businesses to deal with the creation and the distribution of souvenirs, in this way each traveler ensures the survival of the local economy. An important factor in supporting the economy of the area refers to the accommodation possibilities. In all the abundance of hotels, motels it is good for tourists to consider renting some local properties at much cheaper prices.

One of the most sought after alternatives for accommodation in the hotel regime is the AirBnb platform, a business started in 2007 is today one of the most profitable businesses in the world, based on the renting of personal accommodation for tourist purposes. The app offers accommodation options in over 220 countries, in over 100,000 cities on the planet and over 7 million rental homes. A study revealed that more than 250 million tourists stayed with the app in 2018 (airbnb.com, 2018). There are of course alternatives for those who do not want to rent a home through AirBnb, and some of these can be: VRBO, HomeAway, Flipkey, Homestay etc.

As you can see there are many alternatives to the classic means of accommodation, so any tourist can reorient when they want to rent rooms. And by choosing these types of accommodations the local economy has to gain.

Choose an off-season trip

Journeys are increasingly sought after by every person, this is understandable, it is in the DNA of the human race from ancient times. But most of the population prefers mass tourism, which is more oriented towards the development of large international tourism companies. Of course, there are locations that have a special charm during certain times of the year, such as destinations where coastal tourism or winter sports tourism is practiced.

What does the term extraseason mean? At that time of year when the number of tourists is the minimum level, for example in tropical or temperate areas, if the peak season is summer or in dry periods, the off-season is rainy or winter. Between the peak and the off-season there is a transitional period, when the tourist flow is increasing or decreasing.

A good example can be given in the case of Romania, because the Romanian Government had an initiative to encourage the purchase of holidays during the off-season. Thus, the measure was taken according to which the Romanian state will grant holiday vouchers with a higher value, of 2,080 lei, for those who choose an extra-season travel. (<http://turism.gov.ro/>, 2019).

Why an off-season trip? For several reasons, such as: cheaper flights, more accommodation options, but also cheaper as in peak season, food is cheaper, the number of tourists is lower, more available for museums etc., authentic experiences, more more interesting.

An environmentally-oriented tourist is considering out-of-season travel, and today numerous Internet pages offer tips for a perfect vacation in times of low tourists.

Feedback from tourists

The emergence of the Internet has revolutionized every economic sector from its foundations, access to the Internet has pushed tourism to a new level, led to the discovery of new destinations, new trends. A new branch continues to develop, E-tourism, and an important part is the feedback a destination receives.

Feedback is one of the oldest methods of promoting tourist destinations, because, even 50 years ago, a source of information on a tourist area was through the transmission of relatives, friends, acquaintances who visited that destination.

Now sharing these experiences is done through interactive applications, through blogs, videoblogs, etc., and now the tourist feedback has a huge impact on the correct perception of a destination.

One of the largest sources of feedback worldwide is the TripAdvisor application, a business started in the 2000s that works by providing reviews for several tourist areas. The reviews can be about the destination itself, about the elements of the tourist infrastructure, etc., and these help potential new travelers to effectively plan a vacation. Another application that is close to TripAdvisor and that works like this is Yelp, and newer major companies such as Google attach great importance to user feedback. In addition to these applications there are numerous web pages that offer various information about tourist destinations, such as accommodation options, restaurants, different activities, etc.

Thus, a tourist who is preoccupied with a clean environment attaches great importance to the feedback, because this way he can provide information about suitable activities in certain areas, but he can consult with other such tourists to choose the best solutions in so as to preserve the environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The general trend towards the tourism sector is definitely an upward trend, and will remain a giant of the world economy in the near future. However, there must be an awareness among us, of all lovers of travel, that the mother nature has, as well as the man, a degree of

tolerability. The environmental disturbances are like a "black spot" that the tourist leaves soaked on the "green blanket" of our planet.

The present work, through its contents, must be understood as an alarm signal that the environment has been presenting to us for about four decades. Thus, from the position of potential tourist, tourist itself or tourist returning from vacation, in all three cases, the above mentioned tips must be taken into account. Ideally, they should be taken into account even from the moment of the motivation for a trip, so the tourist is familiar with the principles of sustainability, before reaching the desired destination. On the other hand, from the position of tourist, once you have done your duty to respect nature, implicitly yourself, as well as those around you, you can set an example for the least responsible, but who, seeing Your involvement and devotion may follow your example. Ecotourism is a new tourism trend, and practiced by the new generations, generations that are some more aware, more involved and more eager to change the world for the better, it will become an emblem of world tourism.

Even if during a vacation, not all the aspects discussed in this paper can be fulfilled, each of us can contribute to some extent to diminishing the impact of the anthropic factor on the environment. Everything consists of our choices, for example choosing to adopt an eco-friendly behavior, preparing a trip in the off-season, thus avoiding overcrowding, or using the green means of transport as much as possible.

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