

## THE BUSINESS CASE FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM – AN OVERVIEW IN THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CONTEXT

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**Abstract:** *Currently, tourism is considered one of the sectors with the greatest potential to deliver economic growth and development. Thus, tourism is one of the most dynamic economic sectors, which records permanent changes and an upward evolution. Also, in the current global socio-economic context, the major issues currently facing humanity can be overcome through the sustainable development of tourism industry, which involves finding ways to protect and preserve the environment able to satisfy the needs of the present without compromising the quality of life for future generations. Moreover, it should be noted that the natural areas have advantages for the development of recreational activities that can bring significant income, both to those managing them, and to the local communities. Considering these aspects the present paper aims to provide relevant information on the business case for sustainability in tourism.*

**Keywords:** *protected areas; recreation visits; responsible tourism; sustainable business.*

### Introduction

The essential condition for the further development of the tourism phenomenon in a certain area is the need to maintain a high quality of natural and anthropic resources. Changing the environment either due to unfavorable natural factors or by the destructive human intervention, may result in, the reduction or cancellation of the tourism potential and the destruction of the ecological balance (Snack *et. al.* 2001:46). Therefore it becomes necessary the sustainable development of tourism as a vision of progress on medium and long term.

Sustainable development in tourism is a requirement and a tendency of modern economy, the two are closely linked and interdependent. In this respect, tourism can promote sustainable development by (Choi and Sirakaya 2006: 1279): providing opportunities for economic development and creating jobs as well as stimulating investment and supporting local services; better use of all categories of resources; contribution to the peacekeeping in the world and inter-cultural understanding.

At the same time, we are witnessing to a modification in the clients' habits and preferences; these new tourists have a higher level of environmental

and cultural awareness and are changing the dynamics of supply and demand within the tourism market (UNWTO, 2015).

Thus, to adapt to the growing demand of tourists for environmentally responsible products more and more tour operators are seeking to improve their environmental and social performance, by changing their current practices in the production and commercialization of tourism products and services.

Integrating sustainability into their business will provide tour operators not only a good reputation and recognition in the marketplace, but also an efficiency development of their activity by reducing the costs of operations and attracting more clients; which can finally show that nature and business can thrive side by side.

### **Analysis of the business case for sustainability in tourism**

Worldwide more and more tour operators are concerned with tourism, in terms of the idea of sustainability, due to the growing demand for educational holidays in the middle of nature. In addition, implementing sustainability practices in tour operators business will bring them a series of benefits, including: reducing operating costs without reducing the quality of service; a marketing advantage capable of attracting more clients and meeting the current demands; a long term profitability due to the fact that tourism products are protecting the environment and the cultural heritage.

Therefore, the need to orientate the business towards sustainability is supported among others by the tendency recorded among the consumer demand, namely:

- mostly tourist consider that is the tour operators responsibility to develop their products in accordance with the protection of the environment and support of local communities;
- travelers are beginning to be aware of needs and values of sustainable tourism;
- travelers are expecting environmental quality in their holidays and are looking for accommodations with responsible environmental attitude.

In this context it is opportune to present several examples of good practices of some tour operators demonstrating the economic and strategic benefits of sustainability for their businesses:

- Starwood Hotels and Resorts has announced a 30% reduction in energy, a 20% reduction in water consumption per built hotel room by 2020 (Starwood Hotels and Resorts. Global Citizenship Sustainability).
- After a comprehensive audit led by LightBlue Environmental Consulting Company, Soneva Fushi Resort in the Maldives was able to cut food waste by 50% (Lephilibert, 2016).
- Chiva-Som resort in Thailand replaced its air conditioning systems and thus has reduce with 26% the monthly electricity consumption and with

20% the carbon footprint, after working with the Clinton Climate Initiative's Energy Efficiency Building Retrofit Program (Anderson 2015).

- The Rainforest Ecolodge in Sri Lanka became the first hotel in the country to be awarded the Leadership in energy and Environmental Design Platinum Certification by the US Green Building Council (Coray 2016).

At the same time, according to World Travel & Tourism Council over 55 of its members have set carbon emission or energy reduction targets and over 40 are using renewable energy in their operations (WTTC, 2015).

Furthermore, sustainable tourism is a very useful way for promoting conservation in protected areas. International Union for Conservation of Nature has shown that increasing the number of visitors to protected areas can result in high revenues and effective community development. In this regard the data contained in the table below indicates a progressive increase in the interest of tourists for holidays in protected areas.

**Table 1. Summary of Visitor and Recreational Trends in National Parks**

Year	Recreation Visits	Tent Camper Overnights	RV Camper Overnights	Backcountry Camper Overnights
2001	279,873,926	3,326,852	2,404,840	2,032,886
2002	277,299,880	3,357,513	2,404,824	1,906,473
2003	266,099,641	3,302,637	2,400,232	1,816,088
2004	276,908,337	3,128,014	2,321,669	1,725,309
2005	273,488,751	2,974,269	2,168,287	1,668,558
2006	272,623,980	2,882,297	2,109,404	1,659,484
2007	275,581,547	3,003,270	2,107,541	1,704,059
2008	274,852,949	2,959,761	2,012,532	1,797,912
2009	285,579,941	3,184,255	2,150,170	1,860,162
2010	281,303,769	3,277,151	2,256,692	1,763,541
2011	278,939,216	3,229,241	2,155,330	1,715,611
2012	282,765,682	3,203,413	2,121,646	1,816,904
2013	273,630,895	2,768,708	1,791,921	1,573,734
2014	292,800,082	3,246,320	2,053,965	1,888,095
2015	307,247,252	3,680,809	2,260,198	2,020,068

Source: IKP International (2015). ITB World Travel Trends Report

Thus, in 2015 the number of recreation visits have increased with 4.93% compared to 2014 and with 12.28% compared to 2013. Regarding the tent camper overnights we can also see a increase with 13.38% in 2015 compared to the previous year; similar an increase with 10.04% in the rv camper overnights and 6.98% in the backcountry camper overnights.

Considering these issues, it becomes opportune to know the evolution of recreation visits by Park Units, comparing recorded data in 2015 and 2014 (see table 2).

**Table 2. Visitation by Park Units-A comparison between 2015 and 2014**

<b>Administered by Type</b>	<b>Percent Increase/ Decrease</b>	<b>Recreation Visits 2015</b>	<b>Recreation Visits 2014</b>
<b>National Lakeshore</b>	10%	4,131,668	3,766,729
<b>National Monument</b>	2%	24,888,632	24,454,576
<b>National Park</b>	9%	75,290,221	68,928,098
<b>National Parkway</b>	4%	29,557,215	28,525,215
<b>National Preserve</b>	4%	3,348,168	3,226,362
<b>National Recreation Area</b>	2%	46,230,396	45,218,953
<b>National Reserve</b>	11%	105,289	94,825
<b>National River</b>	5%	4,690,768	4,463,836
<b>National Seashore</b>	1%	18,706,214	18,546,676
<b>National Wild &amp; Scenic River</b>	-1%	1,330,776	1,345,168
<b>Park (Other)</b>	-2%	8,496,867	8,642,253

Source: National Park Service Annual Reports (2016)

Consequently, worldwide destinations are being recognized for their efforts in responsible tourism, which includes: sustainable management destination; minimize the negative impact on the environment and maximize the economic and socio- cultural benefits for the local communities and visitors.

Among the destinations that are constantly making sustainability efforts we can mention:

- Ljubljana, Slovenia, has a sustainable development plan to make the capital city more eco-friendly, that lead to its selection for the 2015 Destination Award in the World Travel & Tourism Council's Tourism for Tomorrow Awards. Its efforts have materialized in an ecological zone in the city center, and about 46% of the city is forested.
- The Moroccan government has developed strategies to preserve its natural and cultural heritage and created a Charter for Sustainable Tourism to guide tourism operations in Morocco (UNEP 2013).
- Basecamp Explorer Kenya is a destination that aims to enhancing the welfare of the Maasai community. In this destination-project 96% of the employees are from the local Maasai community and there is guaranteed monthly income to over 500 Maasai landowners (Gichimu 2015).
- Uruguay, one of the world's ten best ethical destinations in 2016 – according to Ethical Traveler – supplied 90% of its electricity from renewable sources and aims to create the world's first fully sustainable airport (Ethical Traveler 2016).
- The Caribbean Challenge Initiative is to protect at least 20% of the Caribbean's marine and coastal environment by 2020, and to have a sustainable finance mechanisms that will ensure on long-term the protection and conservation of the environment.

Thus, we can say that the growing interest of tourists to explore the protected areas causes ecotourism to become a market segment with an impact on global tourism, hence the interest of those who develop tourist activities in the integration of sustainable practices in their business.

More and more theoreticians and practitioners in the domain outline some joint objectives for ecotourism and economy, namely:

- the economic activities must ensure benefits in the long run for resources, local communities and industries as preserving resources or for scientific benefits, for social, cultural or economic ones;
- the necessity of ensuring some direct experiences that are to involve the participation and enlightenment of tourists;
- the involvement of ecological education for all categories of actors: local communities, governmental and non-governmental organizations, economic agents and tourists, before, during and after consuming touristic services;
- encouraging the idea that the resources are limited and the necessity of accepting a management directed towards their substitutes;
- the need to support and promote moral and ethical responsibility and the attitude directed towards the preservation and protection of the natural and cultural environment by all agents.

Industry of any kind and mostly the touristic one must not reduce resources but it must develop in such a manner as to protect the environment and provide economic and social benefits for both visitors and local communities.

## **Conclusion**

Taking into account the specificity of sustainable tourism within the market may be mentioned some of the economic advantages of putting sustainability into practice: it is one of the most efficient means to combine nature preservation with the socio economic development; more than any other activity sustainable tourism gives nature a savage economic value; brings more benefits and causes less destructions to nature than conventional industrial tourism; developing sustainable tourism products needs less investments than the conventional industrial one; it creates work places and development alternatives by backing and supporting local nature and culture; it created a persistent image that can be used in the marketing for local, regional products and at a national level.

Therefore, integrating sustainability into tourism operations is not only need but appropriate for the long term benefits of all parts implicated in this target market.

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