

Trends in Ecotourism - April 2014

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"The commonly held perception of ecotourism is that it is a large and growing sector, both in terms of arrivals and income generated ... the indicators however point to a decent, though less optimistic market."

Jessica Rawlinson - Senior Tourism Analyst

This report looks at the following areas:

- Reputed as a large and robust tourism market, what is the status of today's international ecotourism market?
- What markets are gaining in significance for ecotourism and what markets are problematic; also what are the factors driving these trends?
- What are customers doing to drive the trends that are affecting the international ecotourism market?
- · What do companies and destinations need to do in order to service these trends?
- What are the likely future trends that will be significant for ecotourism?

Of all tourism's niches, the most well-known, widespread and the oldest is ecotourism. Tourism industries of many countries such as Costa Rica, Brazil, Belize, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Wales and Scotland, to name only a few, are highly dependent on ecotourism resources such as national parks, coastlines, rainforests and mountains.

The fact of ecotourism's practice across a wide geographical range and of its longevity demonstrates that the niche occupies a well-established, mature marketplace characterised by stability. While the advance of maturity confers upsides, for example, a practised ability to constantly evolve and react to the ever-changing factors of a dynamically subjective industry, at the same time there is no room for complacency. It is instead a natural time for introspection, to both examine performance and see where things could be done better, as well as to look to the future and discern which directions are most profitable.

Being the first of the niche types of tourism, ecotourism was born into a position where it naturally stood out from the crowd. It was the first and only form of sustainable tourism on the market. This made it a radical, fashionable type of tourism with a reputation for double-digit market growth, and it was patronised by the kind of dream customers who would buy into an ecotourism holiday no matter what. Today, with the benefit of hindsight, this looks like the kind of optimism driven by inexperience, as lately even ecotourism is being negatively affected in times of recession.

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