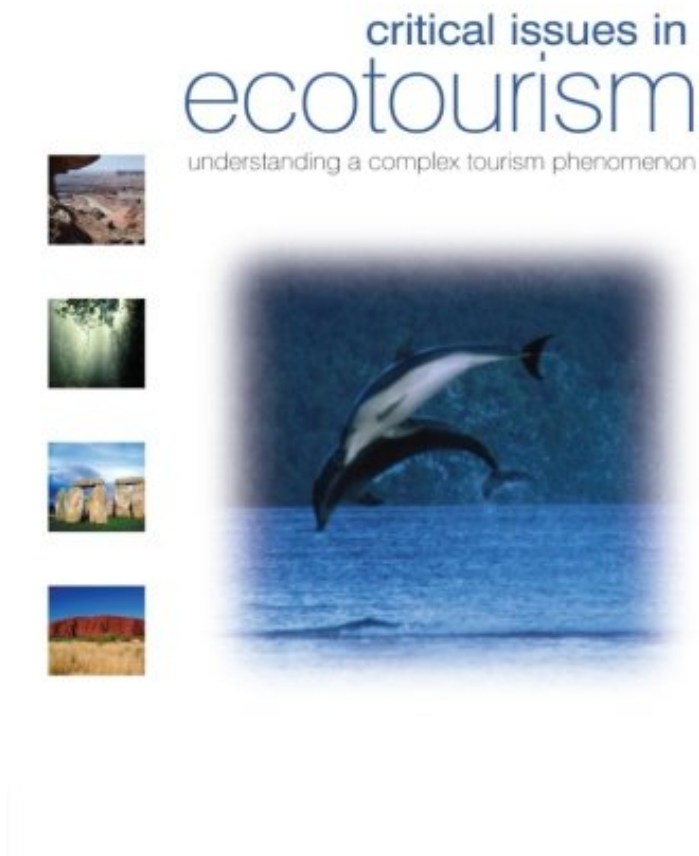


Critical Issues in Ecotourism

James Higham

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Edited by James Higham



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James Higham : Critical Issues in Ecotourism before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Critical Issues in Ecotourism:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A very comprehensive presentation of the paradoxes of the field and the conflicting views among the different schools of thought By Emc2 The book is a collection of 21 academic essays, written by scholars who are representative of the different schools of thought prevailing in the field, ranging from those who believe the concept of ecotourism is simply impossible to those who think that conservation and sustainable economic development can co-exist. Surprisingly, after a bit more than two decades since the field came into existence, there is not even consensus on the definition of ecotourism; therefore, the old controversies and paradoxes still persist, and they are fully discussed throughout the book. Chapter 7 presents an excellent summary of the eight

main paradoxes. The material covered is very comprehensive, from comparisons among the schools of thought, through ecotourism and climate change, all the way to minute concerns as biosecurity. Chapter 5, "Ecotourism, energy use and the global climate" is the perfect example of the paradoxes still prevailing and how the controversies have worsened. The authors criticized international organizations and scholars that promote ecotourism as means for conservation, because they do not recognize its global pollution potential, as a micro/local perspective has been used to analyze ecotourism projects. Because the top originating countries for international tourism, and also the top spenders, are the U.S and the five richest European countries, most ecotourism trips require long-haul travel as most of the popular ecotourism destinations are located in developing countries. This means that there is significant energy demand and greenhouse emissions from ecotourism related air travel. The example presented is that every tourist traveling from London to Costa Rica is responsible for more CO₂ emissions than one Costa Rican in a whole year. Therefore, with an estimated 88.4 million ton per year, the global impact of ecotourism, just as result of long-haul air travel, "is enormous and contradicts" the principle that requires "low environmental impact from ecotourism holidays" (Never mind that in relative terms this amount of emissions is negligible when compared with the world's total emissions). But, on the other hand, the authors also recognize the importance that ecotourism has on the economy of these developing countries, in terms of its contribution to GDP, foreign exchange earnings and employment. So, for the short-term they proposed market-based instruments to reduce air travel emissions. This would mean for the previous example, a 140 euros surcharge per trip for the London-Costa Rica route, and obviously, higher prices will result in reduce travel demand, which in turn, will result in economic losses for the Third World tourism accounts of poor and emerging developing countries, plus, without today's revenues from ecotourism, more pressure will be put by local communities on the ecosystems and natural resources ecotourism is supposed to protect. The paradox is evident. So what are the authors proposing? Nothing concrete in practice, incredibly, their recommendation is just the use of an open-systems approach to ecotourism research. Or, as it is asserted later in the book, that for ecotourism to become a reality and achieve its lofty objectives it is "the values of visitors themselves that must change" or, success is not possible because ecotourism operates today within an "amoral" or "unethical" framework of "global free-market economy." It seems some people did not learn anything from the economic failure of the Soviet Union, or, are these purists simply in denial regarding true human nature? What are these scholars thinking? Do they want ecotourism to become an expensive and exclusive activity? As illustrated by the elitist cases presented in Chapter 3 regarding the Cousine Island Resort in the Seychelles or Tiger Mountain Lodge in Nepal, for the sake of reducing the insignificant carbon foot print of air travel should every pristine ecotourism destination become so expensive that can only be afforded by the royalty and the rich and famous? Or, on the contrary, and accordingly with the "definitive paradox" presented in Chapter 7, is the ultimate ecotourist the one who stays at home or does "urban ecotourism"? As the controversies about the concept of ecotourism continues, and scholars are still debating what ecotourism is or must be, some destinations, such as Belize and Costa Rica, have shown in practice that hard and soft ecotourism, together with mass sun and beach tourism can indeed co-exist, without destroying the natural resources upon which the activity relies while allowing sustainable economic development, including benefits for the local communities, and even helping to create awareness among visitors about the value of nature and the environment. Though the book presents some chapters with a more realistic view, such as Chapter 19 on voluntary certification programs, if a more pragmatic and useful field of study is to emerge from ecotourism research many of these academics really need to abandon their utopian concept of ecotourism and stop their denial of basic economics and business principles. Therefore, the practical value of the book is quite limited, so I do not recommend the book for the laymen, because just a few of the chapters are of general interest or down-to-earth. In the meantime, I am looking forward for Martha Honey's updated *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development, Second Edition: Who Owns Paradise?*, due by the end of July 2008, where she revisits the country cases from her 1999 edition, includes some new materials, discusses how ecotourism has evolved from its infancy to its present form, and provides an answer to some of the issues and questions she raised back then. Was Costa Rica really able to handle effectively and sustainably its dual strategy of promoting both ecotourism and mass tourism?

Critical Issues in Ecotourism seeks to shake the current stagnant literature on the subject of ecotourism out of a state of complacency. Drawing upon emerging insights provided by pre-eminent scholars in the field it identifies and comprehensively addresses current critical issues. Accessible to both academic and non-academic audiences, it provides the reader with the following: * A critical, direct and hard hitting analysis of the real issues that apply to the field of ecotourism * Contributions from prominent international scholars that address issues of relevance to a diverse and international readership * Dissemination of the scholarly works of social and natural science addressing this field * A collection of works by outstanding international scholars, in a comprehensively planned and integrated book Incorporating rigorous scientific insights in specialised fields of research, for example, identifying and protecting critical habitats where tourists engage with endangered species, *Critical Issues in Ecotourism* is an important and ground breaking contribution set to expose the increasingly mythologized field of ecotourism.

About the Author Dr James Higham has published many papers on this topic and also working on a co-authored book titled Sport Tourism Development, which will be published by Channel View publications in mid-2003.