

Ecotourism - The Way Forward

by [B. Xavier, CHS](#)

I am not claiming that Ecotourism will solve Dominica's economic woes. However, it can be used as a springboard to a new approach. I am obliged to write on this subject, as a member of the profession, as one who has participated in various sectors of the industry in doing research, training and development of standards and manuals. I can say with confidence I am willing to take anyone to task on this issue. Having read some entries, in more than one occasion the idea of Ecotourism has been debunked. I will say this, Dominica would be making a huge mistake trying to compete with other Caribbean countries for *Beach* tourism. We can't challenge these island that have been blessed with white, sandy beaches. Unless someone out there has come up with a new idea of how to turn our shores into white, sandy beaches.

Dominica must, because it should, take advantage and the opportunities in the Ecotourism market today. We have what the ecotourism travellers are looking for, undisturbed nature, uncontaminated natural areas with specific interest in studying, and admiring, enjoying the scenery. The top nine motivators for ecotourism travellers are as follows:

1. Wilderness,
2. Undisturbed Nature,
3. Lakes,
4. Waterfalls,
5. Streams,
6. Being physically active,
7. Mountains,
8. National Parks,
9. Experiencing a new life style.

Conventional travellers reported visiting friends and relatives, shopping, nightlife, and entertainment, amusement and theme parks, resort areas and being together as a family.

However, Ecotourism travellers are seeking a unique experience when compared to the conventional travellers. Benefits of most importance to them were seeking as much as possible, being physically active, meeting people with similar interests, and experiencing new and different lifestyles. Having local experiences is one of the most important factors. Wildlife viewing is a very popular activity enjoyed by tourists. The following, in point form, present the characteristic and preferences of the ecotourism traveller.

Who are they?

- (45%) of ecotourism travellers have taken six or more vacation trips in the last three years,
- (57%) belong to a nature oriented club or organization,
- (72%) read nature related publications, and about
- (60%) read the National Geographic Magazine.

Their experience preferences

The main activities they enjoy, other than experiencing and studying local cultures, are:

- hiking (41%)
- Wild life viewing (18%),
- visiting parks (15%)

The most common reasons why a particular location is selected and is of appeal is

- to enjoy the scenery (44%),
- to have new experiences (28%),
- to study cultures (22%),
- to experience cultural attractions (16%),
- to see mountains.

The most often mentioned activities they would like to enjoy when on their next vacation with ecotourism experience are

- hiking (55%),
- experiencing local cultures (21%),
- wildlife viewing (20%)

Ecotourism travellers are sophisticated, discriminating and can be demanding. They are usually knowledgeable and many know what they want in travel, and they will expect their travel agent and tour operator to provide a knowledge enhancing experience. Ecotourism travellers are generally well travelled, both in terms of frequency and destinations. (33%) were repeat customers, and of that (69%) had previous overseas travel experience.

The Ecotourism traveller tend to be affluent, well-educated, mature, well travelled, and environmentally conscious. They are often focussed in their interests and tend to be outdoor enthusiasts. They travel with a purpose, many to experience and appreciate the natural environment, and they seek intellectual or spiritual rewards in their travels. Often nature tourists spend more per day and take longer trips than those with less interest in nature. Their preference is for accommodation that is in harmony with the environment. As environmental awareness spreads, host countries develop a broader array of Ecotourism travel products. Ecotourism will extend to a broader market, especially to those travellers with less incomes and less time.

The accommodation preferences are: hotels(39%), lodge/inns (56%), guest houses(60%), cruise ship (25%).

In terms of travelling: (61%) prefer to travel as couples, (15%) alone, (15%) as a family with children. Now the preferred length of stay is 4-7 days(28%), 8-14 days(55%), more than 14 days(21%). Preferred months of travel, are from May to October. However, there is enough interest in the winter months. You must take into consideration the average Ecotourism traveller is willing to spend in excess of \$1500-\$3000 for a total vacation package.

It is now clear that the growth potential of the Ecotourism market is enormous and already underway. The Ecotourism market is in a period of rapid growth and contains an assortment of traveller types with varied interests and abilities. Distant or long trips attract only those with the time and money. Data now suggests that the characteristics of potential Ecotourism traveller are spreading to other segments of the population, beyond those with higher education and higher income levels.

Nicely summarized, the relationship between the Ecotourism traveller and host country is the proper mix of an appropriate resource base with suitable activities and expectations. It must be the foundation of a successful relationship between the tourist and the destination. In Dominica we have natural areas and features of international interest and have committed selected areas to tourism. However, we must evaluate the extent to which we can withstand certain levels of use and development. Protecting our natural areas against the denigration, often associated with rapid development and exploitation, will ensure their future is a viable Ecotourism travel destination.

If we are serious about making Dominica the model Ecotourism destination in the Caribbean, we must further understand the expectation and patterns of behaviour of our visitors to natural areas and features. This will ensure that they will derive a satisfying experience from their trips without bringing about any negative effect on the sites they visit. Therefore, we must prepare ourselves to do a better job in educating our people in dealing with the issue of sustainable development and conservation as it relates to specific sites or Ecotourism in general. We have the potential, we must take on the challenge and we will realize the opportunity that Ecotourism is the way forward. [UP](#)

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