

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation in Eco-Tourism



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**Abstract** This chapter sets the conceptual foundation for the book. It provides a background on the development of thought around social innovation, as well as eco-tourism. After introducing various definitions and concepts of social innovation and social entrepreneurship, it then goes on to develop a definition of eco-tourism social entrepreneurship. An analysis of the current state of the environment and tourism leads to the discussion of how eco-tourism and social entrepreneurship can transform the industry for the better. The chapter then describes how social entrepreneurship can effectively make changes to the economic and social systems that are no longer working in the world and tourism. The status of eco-tourism social entrepreneurship in industry, academia and education are then discussed. The final section of the chapter lays out the book's contents.

### 1.1 Introduction to Social Development in Eco-Tourism

Tourism is the third-largest contributor to Malaysia's GDP, after the manufacturing and commodities sectors. A report from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) released that the total revenue of tourism sectors in 2019 was 15.9% (DOSM, 2020). A couple of years ago prior to the COVID-19 contagion, the Southeast Asian tourism sector had experienced a significant development stage, therefore, Malaysia initiated the "Visit Truly Asia Malaysia 2020" program which aimed to attract 30 million tourists and achieved tourists' revenue of RM100 billion in 2020 (Chin et al., 2021). The COVID-19 epidemic, however, had a significant negative impact on Malaysia's travel and tourism sector, which caused the campaign to be abandoned. Wijesinghe (2021) mentioned that The National Tourism Policy (NTP) 2020–2030 was subsequently announced by the government on December 23, 2020, to secure the nation's tourism sector and boost Malaysia as a top tourist spot internationally.

Effective tourism marketing salvage based on new rules, enhancing productivity, inclusive and environmentally friendly tourism development, and catastrophic risk management are important strategies for achieving the NTP's agenda. The development of digital technology has impacted the way public travel which has changed how tourism-related businesses operate. Tourism has been a major growth industry

globally comprising the emergence in earnings and wealth, rapid advancement in road transport, moves in consumer lifestyles and values, improved recreational time, globalization and flexibility on a worldwide platform, immigration, special events, effective training, developments in communication and information technologies, travel advertising and promotion, and so on (Aslanova, 2019). Currently, tourist spot which is particularly located in the village area that has been paid attention to globally because of sustainable tourism development to combat environmental issues and global climate change (Rahman & Yeasmin, 2014). Sustainable tourism frequently includes eco-tourism as one of its sub-components. A few of the essential components of eco-tourism are the conservation of the local community's well-being, the inclusion of understanding and educational opportunities, and the engagement of accountable tourist industry performances (Sharma & Sarmah, 2019).

Ecotourism is considered responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. As Malaysia has vast biodiversity, it provides a spark of hope for the tourism sector to move forward, attracting visitors to experience the natural wonders of the country. On the other hand, smart tourism refers to the technological capabilities of a particular destination, attraction, or tourist (Cheng et al., 2019). Such beautiful nature in one country contributes to eco-tourism development by creating plans for preserving the conservation of the environment and generating money for regional communities. The majority of methods used by social entrepreneurs in tourism to build the industry are intended to assist local societies in some way. Wang et al. (2020) demonstrated that to highlight the social entrepreneurship in eco-tourism, community businesspeople are required to design and develop the location of tourist spots to conserve regional traditions and values.

Moreover, Alisa and Ridho (2020) emphasized that community development takes place when travel-connected efforts support the regional people and ecological atmosphere. Through these practices, able to bring communities together that motivate eco-tourism sectors and community development projects such as promoting resources, sharing information, and trust. Other researchers explained these terms through business techniques to enhance regional residents' understanding of occupations and to increase people's awareness of marketing strategies. Thus, it is recognized that ecotourism is a key driver of the socioeconomic and social growth of local communities by integrating community activities into efforts to attain economic sustainability and environmental protection. The success of eco-tourism is referring to the important parties involved in the eco-tourism development process in social entrepreneurship (governments, local NGOs, residents, and tourists).

## 1.2 Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Issues and Challenges

Ecotourism has become popular with the increasing attention and awareness of the ecological environment; however, it brings issues and challenges to the sustainable development of the environment. Thus, it is crucial to review the literature in the field of ecotourism and decide on the key exploration issues that are related to ecotourism and sustainable development of the environment. This book chapter uses a theoretically based outline related to ecotourism and sustainable development of an environment that leads to assisting the development of the local community, economy, and social wellbeing of people. This study searches the literature that depends on internet details for information sources about the role of ecotourism in the sustainable development of environmental issues, the social-cultural role of ecotourism, benefits, challenges, challenges of ecotourism in the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, and the role of information technology in the sustainable development of ecotourism industry. Our findings indicate that ecotourism has been increasingly growing. Ecotourism traverses many disciplines, and it is a comprehensive interdisciplinary subject. Based on the explanation of this study, the advancement of ecotourism can be generated with ecosystem services, human disturbance, and practical turn of events. This study emphasizes the role of ecotourism and sustainable development as well as presents readers with new bits of knowledge through instinctive visual images. There has been concerned about the growth of ecotourism development and environmentally responsible development. Xu et al. (2022) define ecotourism that it is a travel or visit to ecological places which supports environmental conservation including the well-being of surrounding communities, understanding as well as knowledge.

Ecotourism is rapidly developing in the tourism sector all over the planet. In the international business arena, ecotourism development is a significant trend and a key component of the sustainable tourism sector as indicated by (Choi et al., 2021). Conservation of ecosystem balance, ecotourism and sustainability are essential. Over the most recent twenty years of ecotourism development, sustainable development has been considered for people's well-being (Wondirad et al., 2020), because ecotourism promotes natural and fresh assets to keep ecological growth and improvement. Community participation, environmental knowledge, and natural preservation can lead to developing sustainable development of ecotourism which in turn reflects social well-being in society. Ecotourism can protect the natural area, and develop the local community, economy and society (Beall et al., 2020). Recently many countries around the world are encouraging the incorporation of income growth for ecologically responsible development. Rahman et al. (2021) stated that environmentally friendly tourism can reduce the negative impact of environmental issues and enable the country's financial progress. Ecotourism is crucial for generating revenue, providing job scope, promoting culture, and people's lifestyles, and improving the standard of living of the community in society. The principal objective of ecotourism focuses on local participation, infrastructure and economic development, long-term sustainable development and promoting social benefits (Valdivieso et al., 2015). Ecotourism is

turning out to be more in demand for the travel industry with unhindered expanding attention to the development of environmental awareness. This growth can lead to environmental issues and economic challenges in ecotourism development.

For instance, because of the lack of public awareness and community participation in ecotourism, the expansion in travelers adversely affects the local ecological environment, economy and culture. In addition, low public awareness of ecotourism can lead to disrespect for culture, environmental protection, infrastructure, and economic burden to address the needs of tourists (Shasha et al., 2020). These challenges and inconsistencies are dire issues to be handled by the sustainable improvement of ecotourism. Particularly against the scenery of the current COVID-19 epidemic, the travel industry has encountered a serious blow, however environmental change and other ecological issues have not been developed (Xu et al., 2022). In this unique situation, confronting these challenges are crucial for reconsidering the future improvement path of ecotourism to explore how the country's government agencies can form proper management strategies while protecting the climate and natural resources to help the sustainable development of the ecotourism industry. Hence, it is important to counsel literature in the area of ecotourism to comprehend the research progress and basic exploration issues to distinguish challenges, realistic strategies and future research direction for sustainable ecotourism development. Cautiously arranging and dealing with the ecotourism destinations give direct advantages like environmental protection, awareness, resource preservation, and financial advantage to the local community. The sustainable development of ecotourism places may mitigate the problems caused because of the small amount of eco-friendly tourism practices such as natural harm, cultural and social deterioration, and losses of ecology. Accordingly, this study plans to comprehend and explore the previous literature and discussed how ecotourism can assist in accomplishing a sustainable tourism industry.

### 1.3 Ecotourism and Sustainable Development

Several sectors have been contributing to sustainable development such as industrials, consumer goods, healthcare, consumer services, technology, tourism, ecotourism, and so on. Ecotourism confirms environmental, financial, community and social sustainability as well as develop the welfare of human being (Choi et al., 2021). Previously, many scholars defined ecotourism. Mondino and Beery (2019) refer to ecotourism as a system of trip organization that motivates cultural activities and assessment of the natural environment. Prasetyo et al. (2020) found that ecotourism may generate huge incomes for societies and contribute to nature conservation for sustainable development. Ecotourism is sociocultural and naturally sustainable that builds the social assets base of the goal and helps the feasibility of the action. The concept of sustainable development was initiated in the 1960s of environmental deprivation due to vulnerable resource management (Machnik, 2021).

Since the environment has turned into a crucial worldwide issue, sustainability might be implemented as a typical policy of sustainable community, economic,

and environmental destination (Geijzendorffer et al., 2017). The development of ecotourism contains three vital features of sustainable development (Khanra et al., 2021). Financial sustainability confirms individuals can achieve the upper level of life quality and benefits are general alike among all people related to the practices. Wondirad et al. (2020) indicated that ecotourism may be most effective as a component of a large preservation strategy of ecological goals. Ecotourism improvement highlights values, norms, and natural aspects and stimulates a significant responsibility for addressing the difficulties of sustainable international travel. Ecotourism is a form of nature-based and educational concerned travel organization that proposes of being culturally, financially, and ecologically renewable. Society-based ecotourism while individuals from the local community are considered protectors of common efficiency of both resources and the environment. Teshome et al. (2021) indicated that locality-centered ecotourism performance may help socioeconomic growth, which confirms the sustainable utilization of all-ecological assets, for example, community and economic requirements might be achieved via the conservation of biological developments, social harmony, strategy for human survival, and ecological differences.

Ecotourism gradually increases environmental concerns among citizens. Therefore, people need a good understanding of the environmental problem to establish an appropriate choice in environmental sustainability. The purpose of ecotourism is vital for environmental sustainability in reducing the impact of pollution. Uddin et al. (2021) worried that whether ecotourism can beneficially reach its goals to contribute to nature conservation, financial development, and social value, and if it directs to abuse and harm of local areas. It can confirm domestic people's welfare by assisting them with changing policies and profits gained from the tourism organization. Wang et al. (2021) identified that ecotourism can improve financial growth with ecologically sustainable development. They are also concerned about ecotourism and ecological stability is one of the crucial elements including community, ecological and financial. Bhuiyan et al. (2010) contradicted that ecotourism success may be attained through effective environmental education. Thus, there is a link between ecotourism and ecological responsibility.

## 1.4 Role of Ecotourism in Sustainable Tourism Industry

Ecotourism also has been considered a strength that enhances regional development and the economics of regions (Picard, 2015; Qiu et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2021). Ecotourism is a thriving sector in the tourism industry and it consists of advantages through employment rate, attracting investors, and influencing local as well as international business (Hunt et al., 2015; Lerdsuchatavanich et al., 2016). In Costa Rica, it was found that ecotourism made 42% more income in comparison with one of the most popular travel destinations, France (Hunt et al., 2015). Ecotourism has enhanced the increase of revenue from local family businesses (Lyon et al., 2017). In referring to that, two territories of China that were highly impacted by the poverty rate where

the opportunities for job creation in the community as well as financial sustainability have been varied due to the ecotourism's policy system (Li et al., 2018). The empirical data from ecotourism literature had shown that ecotourism could create remarkable profits that might help households in a poverty area. Ecotourism also might be one of the most important sources like other economical contributory activities such as fishing, farming and hunting towards making revenues. These case studies stated above also claimed the beneficial effect of ecotourism booming the economy through creating employability.

## 1.5 Socio-Cultural Role of Ecotourism on Sustainable Tourism

The socio-cultural role is one of the important scopes in the sustainability of the regional tourism industry. The consequences of ecotourism have the impact of optimistic features. The pros of positive socio-cultural advantages of ecotourism have been undermined in constructive and robust effects towards the values and customs of a country (Hall, 2003). Neth (2008) proved Hall's claiming whereas they supported without exceptions that ecotourism consists of a positive influence on social services, the participation of the indigenous community, and creating bonding among them. Furthermore, Acquah et al. (2013) described that the effective implementation of ecotourism tends to maintain cultural unanimity. Nonetheless, Vishwanatha and Chandrashekara (2014) also identified that the positive effects of the socio-culture of ecotourism play a remarkable role in perceiving the customs and values of a regional destination which assists to achieve economic benefits. There is a significant number of researchers who had come up with the findings that the effect of socio-culture in ecotourism has a positive impact in the locality and it also helps in encouraging education, establishing the framework, raising awareness for health and fund, perceiving and respecting the local customs, developing gender equity in the targeted area, cultural establishment (Acquah et al., 2017; Mammadova, 2018; Rahman et al., 2021). Regarding this raising awareness towards ecotourism from the local community, other advantages might be pointed out due to understanding ecotourism, and there are several activities while performing ecotourism which lead to the misconduct of deforestation, fishing, and hunting consecutively (Salman et al., 2021; Walter, 2013).

Moreover, this intends to understand the correlation between protecting the region and the activities of the indigenous community for the conservation of the environment (Chen et al., 2020). Sustainable ecotourism is referred to as the upheld of environmental resources which plays a vital role in tourism principles, therefore, some researchers have identified that ecotourism is the key player. In addition to this, ecotourism contributes to safeguarding the environment by enhancing the green environment, reducing deforestation, conserving flora and fauna, and encouraging energy reserves (Zambrano et al., 2010). Several researchers have also found that

the revenue of ecotourism could collaborate with the development of environmental conservation (Rahman et al., 2021; Picard, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015). Furthermore, other scholars have also identified that ecotourism assists in protecting reserve areas such as marine species, biodiversity, and spaces which is resulting in conserving the biodiversity in the regional area (Fung & Wong, 2007; Lindsey et al., 2005). Ecological stability and preservation are correlated directly to ecotourism to maintain the protection of natural resources and vibes. The practice of effective ecotourism in the area reduces the harmful impact on the atmosphere. Ecotourism encourages to adopt of green upheld commitment through strategies involving the implementation of the least uses of resources therefore, the inhabitants and other occupants in the whole area can be aided substantially (Ashok et al., 2017; Nigar, 2018; Salman et al., 2020, 2021).

## 1.6 Challenges and Benefits of Ecotourism for Sustainable Development

Recently, sustainability based on tourism is crucial for the role of development in the tourism industry. It's been a long time whilst the tourism industry has been captivated by its contribution to eliminating poverty, consuming resources, and global change. Therefore, the importance of the tourism industry relies on the improvement of regional communities to expand benefits such as business opportunities (Ross & Wall, 1999). Sustainable tourism is categorized along with ecotourism development which is explained as a critical issue in the development of emerging purposes (Saha et al., 2015). Ecotourism has been defined with different explanations. According to the International Ecotourism Society (2020), ecotourism refers to “traveling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild animals and plants”. One of the biggest roles of ecotourism is saving and reducing the environmental impact, raising environmental and cultural awareness, promoting better practices for tourists and economic proficiencies among the local community which enables the host country to understand their environmental and financial strategy (Das et al., 2015; Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003). The sustainable travel sector opens the door for visitors to become concerned about aesthetic necessities, conserving regional natural and social atmosphere, and respecting the custom and historical inheritance (Petrovic & Markovic, 2013). Ecotourism has contributed to saving extinct biodiversity and improving economics in isolated areas (Buchley, 2009); nonetheless, some scholars claimed that the specific meaning and result of the term ecotourism generate it distinctively (Ahmed et al., 2009; Hall, 2004). Ecotourism is categorized into three components; firstly, experiencing closeness to nature and individuals from vibrant cultures and society; secondly, it helps shape the income of poorer people rather than vast global tourism organizations; and thirdly, it reduces the total environmental impact due to traveling (Dowling & Fennell, 2003). Ecotourism assists nature to be conserved by



the protection of the environment. This approach also increases the awareness of environmental values and norms that intend to assure financial security for nature as well as enhance the capabilities of natural resources and regions.

There's a unique link between local residents and assets from protected areas and the ecotourism probability of these areas offers an alternative opportunity for earning living in local communities (Xu et al., 2009). Likewise, ecotourism consists of many purposes involving shareholders with multiple interests, liabilities, and functions (Liu et al., 2013; Shams, 2020). A huge variety of stakeholders, including citizens, administrators, governments, and visitors play a vital role in the development of ecotourism (Santarém & Paiva, 2015). The explanation of ecotourism from different perspectives has been based on practicing ecotourism with multiple intentions simultaneously which makes it more complex while ecotourism faces financial, social, and natural dilemmas (Xu et al., 2009). One noticeable phenomenon is that the intention of tourism trades and tour operators in ecotourism can be intrinsic and extrinsic as well (Swan & Morgan, 2016). As such, decision-makers and destination organization experts in ecotourism should obtain an understanding of the intention that motivates businesses along with accurate measurement (Dowling & Fennell, 2003). Furthermore, the purpose requires the "right" equilibrium of motives; while the travel industry organizations and tour operators are driven by the true intentions of motivating low-effect tourism within the specific objective (the intrinsic motive) and it is also crucial to provide customized aids including supportive activities and incentives mechanisms (the extrinsic motive). Thus, it is expected to tour operators and tourism industry organizations to fall apart from the original purpose for the investment in ecotourism if there's one motive that is found irrational.

This underlines the importance of deciding the needs and demands of ecotourism by shareholders more specifically finance owners could identify the requirements from the beginning of the plans for ecotourism (Osman et al., 2018). For instance, if a travel agent wants to engage willingly with ecotourism, however, the policy maker cannot find the possibilities to improve ecotourism for a particular destination therefore, the opportunity for a travel agent for running a business will be stuck within some limitations which will make the investment towards business inefficient without any support. If the policymakers lead to promote ecotourism within a particular set of goals to bring socio-economic growth and conservation of nature, however, a tour operator might engage in a short-term economic goal which will intend to a contradictory interest with the challenges in the development and management of ecotourism as follows (Njoroge, 2015). Ecotourism shareholders should grasp the aspects of operating a business and conserving the environment and they should evaluate the goal of operating a business in a particular destination leading toward the progress of ecotourism synchronously (Stone, 2015). More importantly, it is essential for developing nations where there are inadequate resources and democratic societies of administration might not only challenge the drastic success of ecotourism but also the risk in the long-term fortune of the development of the ecotourism system in the local community (Wondirad, 2019).



## 1.7 COVID-19 and Its Effect on Ecotourism Industry

In the tourism industry, ecotourism has been contributing widely and it represents a new potential business growth for developing countries. In general, the role of ecotourism is to preserve environmental destruction and be responsible for trips to natural regions which develop the lives of the local community. However, the impact of COVID-19 on the ecotourism industry has had a significant influence, especially in the economic sectors. Due to the adverse effect of the COVID-19 outbreak, several countries have taken early steps to combat this pandemic such as travel restrictions, regular entry screening in the airport and maintaining social distancing from crowded public places (Hossain et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2021). Therefore, it indicates that the ecotourism industry is truly one of the most crucially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with a significant effect on both tourist supply and demand. This represents a further drawback hazard in the aspect of a vulnerable worldwide economy, community, geopolitical, and business concerns and inadequate performance among the most important outbound tourism markets. Tourists are generally avoiding the visiting destination if they feel it is a threat and risky to their health (Hasan et al., 2017). Traveling risk and management are linked with tourism destinations which influence tourists' intentions and outcomes are uncertain because of the effect of COVID-19. Ecotourism and the tourism industry are the biggest industries around the world, however, despite this industry, the hospitality and travel industry are recently extremely sensitive to important shocks. It is highly recommended to explore as well as need deep study how the tourism industry will regain from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier studies found that COVID-19 has been carried an economic crisis in many countries such as Singapore, Bali, Barcelona, Rome, Malaysia, Nepal, Switzerland, and many other countries where those countries were once tourist sports and attractions (Weng et al., 2021).

## 1.8 Ecotourism and Information Technology

The ecotourism industry is one of the rapid industries to apply and use information technology almost totally for business activities and this industry has also become a potential service sector for generating income. Ever since the improvement of ecotourism has been supported by information technology and its achievement depends strongly on technology. Arguably, information technology motivates this incorporation and permits ecotourism goods to be tailored to meet the needs of certain individuals. Due to changes in tourist customer behaviour, the business is becoming more apportioned, with every possible customer belonging to many market segments simultaneously. Information technology has brought with it a lot of new opportunities for enterprise and ecotourism, therefore posing prospects to the business and ecotourism operators, in common. Information technology is used to illustrate various computerized devices which enable transferring of information or data in a network.

Law et al. (2014) showed that information technology can promote a crucial role in the ecotourism and travel business because they create strong use of information. The ecotourism industry has a worldwide link with tourism providers and communities. Online communications allow universal traveling to different tourist spots and bearing peaceful cultures and practices (Palmer & McCole, 2000). One of the reasons is that environmental conservation and saving culture are the main mechanisms of ecotourism, thus, this underlines the truth that tourists utilize technology to find information linked to ecotourism. Sadiq and Adil (2021) identified that online media and Internet users are seeking relevant data from the specific network on the subjects such as reducing weight, hair removal, finding new tourist features and destinations, and dieting.

The development of technology has modernized the overall way of searching for information related to whatever thing including ecotourism. It has encouraged tourists in one way and affected the industry and income of tourism agencies in the other (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Ecotourism is currently deemed an effective and useful component to gain sustainability. The core of ecotourism has a strong concern for natural, ecological, human, and community enhancement. While creating preservation and travel strategies, many countries throughout the world have started to promote as well as support ecotourism sustainability. Ecotourism has community, ecological, and economic consequences not only on inhabitants and a single nation but also globally. It also can assist financial stability by attracting more travelers who are concerned about the environment. With the help of ecotourism, socio-cultural and ecological features are also preserved. By promoting local goods and services, ecotourism assists to preserve the native eco functions, and in the meantime, it contributes to protecting the atmosphere and, as a result, aids to create events that help take care of the atmosphere in the region.

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