

FYI HOGAN AND BREAKFAST

One of North America's best examples of ecotourism development can be found on the Navajo Reservation. Navajo families welcome overnight guests who are interested in experi-

encing the unique Navajo way of life. Visitors sleep in octagon-shaped structures called hogans, made of rough-cut logs, which are heated with wood. Breakfast often features traditional

Navajo food such as blue corn mush. The real attraction that keeps guests coming, however, is the opportunity to experience Navajo culture and traditions directly from tribal members.

Source: Based on The Navajo way. East Valley Tribune, pp. G1, G3. (No. 28, 1999).

As mentioned previously, 21st century ecotourism covers a range of tourism experiences on a continuum of hard to soft activities. For example, a **hard ecotourist** might travel to coastal sea turtle nesting areas to aid these gentle giants in propagating their species. A **soft ecotourist** might be a passenger on a cruise ship that stops in Costa Rica and takes a guided day trip to the Cloud Forest.

Hard ecotourism activities (rugged and uncomfortable) are enjoyed by a relatively small proportion of environmentally conscious ecotourists. Soft ecotourism applies to short-duration trips often incorporated into a longer multi-destination or multipurpose trip. This “side-trip” form of ecotourism is thus tacked on to trips that would largely be considered mass tourism. Estimates of the size of the ecotourism segment have ranged from 2% to 25% or even 50% of the tourism market. The low estimates likely represent the original concept of ecotourism and are the proportion of the market we might term *hard ecotourists*. The larger figure represents soft ecotourists, or those whom Weaver calls mass ecotourists.¹¹

Whereas a few of you may have been a hard ecotourist on a past trip, most of you, like the majority of tourists, would probably be classified as a soft ecotraveler based on the activities in which you participated on a recent trip. For example, if during a spring break trip to Florida you spent a day on a guided tour of the Everglades, you would have been considered a mass ecotourist that day. Or you may have taken a whale-watching boat trip off the coast of California. Incorporation of ecotourism activities within trips like these examples has become commonplace, as people around the globe have developed keen interest in the often-fragile natural world around them.

Ecotourism and ecotechniques can be used by both newly developed and fully developed tourist destinations to try to minimize the negative impacts that large numbers of visitors can have on host communities and the environment. As tourism numbers continue to grow, more and more nations and communities need to apply the principles of ecotourism and conservation to ensure that the tourism industry remains viable. “Benefits from ecotourism for the local community include opportunities to gain skills and leadership, heightened self-esteem, expanded networks of support, and better organizational capacity. However, negative changes brought by ecotourism are new restrictions on time, the erosion of reciprocity and other traditional relationships, and new conflicts associated with the distribution of profits” (p. 461).²³

What can we conclude about ecotourism as we see it today? Though use of the term has strayed from its original intent, the key to the idea of ecotourism remains the same: sustaining the natural and cultural elements of fragile environments. Whereas natural and cultural preservation are definitely appropriate for some areas, sustainability is needed in all areas and operations.

Niche Markets

Thanks to the efforts of Jonathan Tourtellot, the Senior Editor of *National Geographic Traveler* magazine, a new form of tourism, **geotourism**, which combines all of the