

FYI IDENTIFYING TOURISM OPERATORS DEDICATED TO CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION

With all of the potential confusion about terms such as *ecotourism* and *sustainability*, the best bet for travelers is to ask some very pointed questions to identify those operators who are dedicated to conservation and preservation. The following questions are a good starting point for initiating the conversation:

- Is there a published environmental policy?
- Are construction materials and supplies provided from local sources?
- How are resources conserved?
- How is gray water used?
- What types of renewable energy sources are used?
- How are local flora and fauna protected?
- Are locals hired as employees and guides?
- What is given back to the local community?
- Are ecotourism education programs provided to employees and offered to guests?

Source: Based on Oko, D. (2006). Four questions on ecotourism. *Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel* (Newsweek LLC), 9(5), 51.

in Chapter 9. Wildlife tourism is growing in popularity as traditional attractions have been increasingly criticized for lacking sustainable principles. In 2013, the documentary, “Blackfish,” raised questions about the management of Sea World when an orca whale attacked and killed a trainer during a show.²⁹ The incident and the increased awareness of the incident from the film resulted in decreased visitation and significant financial losses and Sea World reevaluated their top executives and management.³⁰

As industry participants adopt practices designed to maintain or achieve sustainability, the number of visitors that can be accommodated decreases. So, if sustainability is to be achieved, there is a limit to the number of tourists that can be accommodated in any setting. From a marketing, management, and financial perspective, it is important to note that proactive measures such as targeting these niche segments that are environmentally friendly and economically attractive will allow destinations to limit numbers without having to impose capacity restrictions. By marketing to tourists who are environmentally friendly, thus not requiring education on the importance of sustainable practices, economic benefits can be achieved as these tourists have been found to spend more money. In particular two segments, Nature Lovers (these tourists are educated about the environment and seek to experience nature) and Environmental Wanderers (these tourists are also educated about the environment and seek to actively experience it) have been found to meet these two criteria.³¹ Research has shown that positive attitudes toward ecotourism are likely to influence people's intention to purchase ecotourism products or services as well as to pay a premium for these products and services. However, it was also found that individual's materialistic values may negatively influence these intentions.³²

Establishing Standards

Environmental certification programs lack global standardization, especially within tourism. There is a wide variety of associations providing certifications and governmental agencies setting forth guidelines for use of this title, but there are no universal standards for usage. For example, “a vacationer looking to spend time and money in an environmentally conscious manner might run across names such as Sustainable Travel International, Conservation International, Rainforest Alliance, the International Ecotourism Society, Green Hotels Association, and EcoClub, as well as regional associations such as Eco-tourism Australia and Travel Green Wisconsin” (p. 51).³³ “To confuse matters even more, many not-so-green businesses are jumping on the bandwagon for economic benefit, duping good-hearted tourists with their murky promises” (p. T3).³⁴ Without a global standard, consumers must be skeptical of marketing claims that a business or the products they sell are genuinely eco-friendly.