



Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism

“Tourism: Enabler for Conservation, Livelihood and Sustainable Growth”

18th -19th April, 2013, Bhopal, India

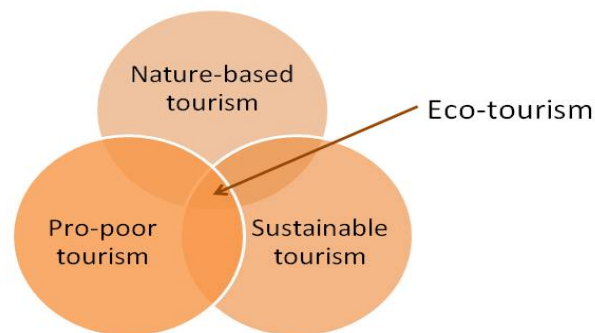
Background Note

Tourism has been labelled as the world’s biggest industry in terms of its contribution to global gross domestic product, the employment opportunities it generates and the number of clients it serves.¹ In most countries that have high levels of poverty, tourism receipts are a significant and growing component of the economy.² It is estimated that between 1990 and 1997, tourism in developing countries accounted for over 2% of gross domestic product, and registered growth rates of 50%.³ Even in the midst of an on-going global financial crisis the tourism industry recorded a growth of 3.8%.⁴ In 2011, international tourism receipts were pegged at more that US\$ 1 trillion worldwide, surpassing records in most destinations.⁵ This ‘growth in the face of adversity’ reflects the resilience of the tourism industry.⁶

Although it is only a small part of global tourism, nature-based tourism has been one of the fastest growing tourism sectors. The IUCN categories of protected areas recognise recreation and tourism as one of the primary objectives of national park creation and management.⁷ A review of nature-based tourism noted increasing visitors to protected areas; in the less wealthy countries rapid increases in tourist visitation to protected areas were tied to international rather than domestic tourists.⁸ In many instances, increasing tourism in protected areas is at least partly associated with the use of flagship species such as the tiger and panda for fund-raising by international conservation organisations.⁹ In fact global conservation organisations such Bird Life have actively encouraged nature-based tourism amongst members to facilitate greater spread of the message of conservation for birds as well as demonstrate the economic benefits of bird conservation to local communities. It is believed that tourism offers the potential to off-set at least some of the costs that local people faced as a result of living in proximity to these large mammals.¹⁰

The growth in the tourism industry, its relevance to economies of developing countries, and the potential for generating win-win outcomes for biodiversity and poverty through tourism has resulted in its advocacy as a conservation tool.¹¹ To prove its mettle as a conservation strategy however, tourism must be sustainable, and contribute not only to poverty reduction but also to biodiversity conservation.¹² Such tourism, referred to as ecotourism in the context of this conference, can be situated in the overlap between sustainable tourism, pro-poor tourism and nature-tourism (See Figure 1). This has the potential to generate positive outcomes for both conservation and development through the development of positive synergistic relationships between tourism, biodiversity and local people.

Figure 1: Conceptualising Ecotourism¹³



Nature-tourism refers to forms of tourism where natural attraction of ecological importance are the destination (Wells 1997). The aims of such tourism include studying, admiring and enjoying the landscape, its flora, fauna and cultural manifestations (Boo 1990).

Pro-poor tourism is defined as tourism that generates net benefits for the poor. Benefits may be economic, but they may also be social, environmental or cultural (Roe et al 2001).

Sustainable tourism is tourism which meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future (WTO 1999).

In Indian conservation policy, debates around ecotourism have become particularly salient as a consequence of recent orders of the Supreme Court of India and the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Competing (and conflicting) perceptions of conservation and the role of ecotourism therein, have become evident in the positions adopted by different stakeholders, mainly the state, the tourism industry and affected 'local' communities. As a result, although the language of 'ecotourism' has been readily adopted in policy, its operationalization as a conservation strategy remains embroiled in contestation.

The aim of this conference is to come up with a meaningful conceptualization of eco-tourism that meets policy requirements, reflects existing ground realities and strikes a balance between conservation, tourism and local livelihoods. To achieve this, the conference will facilitate deliberations among international experts, policy-makers from the Government of India and State governments, academics, NGOs and representatives of communities currently engaged in tourism. The technical sessions of the conference will look at international best practices of multi-stakeholder involvement as well as on the

national level ecotourism framework in India. The platform of this conference will also be channelized for generating specific policy inputs for Madhya Pradesh's Ecotourism Policy as well as for discussions on harnessing the tourism potential of Madhya Pradesh's rich and important religious destinations with special emphasis on its historical Buddhist sites.

¹ Christ C., O. Hillel, S. Matus and J. Sweeting. 2003. *Tourism and Biodiversity, Mapping Tourism's Global Footprint*. Conservation International and UNEP: Washington DC.

² **Roe, D. and M. Jack. 2001. *Stories from Eden: case studies of community-based wildlife management*. International Institute for Environment and Development: London.**

³ Same as 2.

⁴ UN World Tourism Organisation. 2012. International tourism receipts surpass US\$ 1 trillion in 2011. Press Release available at <http://media.unwto.org/en/press-release/2012-05-07/international-tourism-receipts-surpass-us-1-trillion-2011>. Accessed on 15 August 2012.

⁵ Same as 4

⁶ **World Travel and Tourism Council (2012) *The Review Report 2011. Global Travel & Tourism in 2011: A Year of Challenge*. Available at http://www.wttc.org/site_media/uploads/downloads/WTTC_Review_2011.pdf. Accessed on 20 February 2013.**

⁷ IUCN 1994. *Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories*. IUCN and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre: Gland and Cambridge.

⁸ Balmford, A., Beresford J., Green J., Naidoo R., Walpole M., Manica A. (2009) A global perspective on trends in nature-based tourism. *Plos Biology* 7, 1–6.

⁹ Goodwin, HJ and Leader-Williams, N (2000) Tourism and protected areas: distorting conservation priorities towards charismatic megafauna? In A Entwistle and N Dunstone (Eds). *Priorities for the Conservation of Mammalian Diversity: Has the Panda had its Day?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰ Walpole MJ., and Leader-Williams, N. 2002. Ecotourism and flagship species in conservation. *Biodiversity and Conservation* 11: 543-547.

¹¹ Kiss A. 2004. Is community-based ecotourism a good use of biodiversity conservation funds? *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 19:232–237.

¹² Sandbrook C.G. and W.M. Adams. 2002. Accessing the impenetrable: the nature and distribution of tourism benefits at a Ugandan National Park. *Society and Natural Resources* DOI: 10.1080/08941920.2011.644394.

¹³ Adapted from: Chaturvedi, R. 2012. Global evolution of protected area approaches and the emerging salience of tourism. Report submitted to ToFT. *Unpublished*.