

**Protecting Democracy in an Age of Severe Political Polarization and  
Extremism by promoting constructive discourse**

## **GA3 Environmental**

*Contemplating the dangers of  
ecotourism*

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**Forum:** GA3 Environmental

**Issue:** Contemplating the dangers of ecotourism

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## **Introduction**

As the demand for ecotourism increases rapidly in today's world, it is becoming more and more imperative to consider its longer term effects on the environment and nature. While ecotourism may seem eco-friendly and beneficial for the environment at first sight, the disturbances to the native species and wildlife disrupt the natural course, and this requires urgent action and regulations as more and more species are going endangered day by day. Additionally, effective solutions on this topic can only be achieved by democratic decisions, since this topic not only affects a specific region but rather every nature reserve, habitat, endemic and native species all around the world.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

**Ecotourism:** tourism that consists in travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas. (Hector Ceballos-Lascurain) / the business of organizing holidays to places of natural beauty in a way that helps local people and does not damage the environment (Cambridge Dictionary)

**Native Species/Endemic Species:** animals, plants and all types of species belonging or native to a particular people, country or region

**Sustainability:** the quality of causing little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time (Cambridge Dictionary)

**Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** an organization that tries to achieve social or political aims but is not controlled by a government (Cambridge Dictionary)

## **General Overview**

First of all, ecotourism, can mean two similar things: first, a type of sustainable travel aimed at conserving the environment and improving the well-being of local people, and two, as mentioned above, a type of tourism based on travelling to undisturbed natural areas to observe the native

species or get information for scientific purposes. Although, ecotourism is mostly understood as the first definition, this agenda item focuses more on the second meaning, how ecotourism to nature environments disturbs the natural course, species and their habitats. While the concept of ecotourism is mainly based on sustainability, its rapid growth has led to various challenges and negative consequences that eliminate its original purpose. Although the main concern upon ecotourism are related to the health of the humans and travellers, this committee will focus mainly on the poor conditions of the nature, animals, plants, and the environment where ecotourism takes place.

The concept of ecotourism began gaining popularity in the 1980s as a response to the environmental harms caused by mass tourism and it was born from the desire of humans to get away from crowded urban regions. It was seen as a way to protect natural areas and support local economies by creating jobs and income opportunities through tourism. Over the years, ecotourism became more popular as travelers sought for more opportunities to admire and connect with the nature, trying to escape from the rapid flow of city life. Governments and private organizations started investing in ecotourism projects, after they recognized their potential economic benefits. Fast-forward to today, ecotourism has become a significant sector of the global tourism industry. Moreover, popular ecotourism destinations include national parks, wildlife reserves, and remote natural areas. However, this rapid growth and exploitation of ecotourism led to unintended consequences that have become more evident in recent years. Many ecotourism destinations now face over-tourism, leading to environmental degradation, habitat destruction, pressure on local resources and more and more endemic species to go endangered. The influx of tourists and the infrastructure development to support this excessive tourism disrupt wildlife, cause pollution in the region, and lead to the overuse of natural resources such as water and land. Additionally, the cultural integrity of local communities is also at risk as traditional practices and lifestyles are altered to accommodate tourists' expectations.

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

**United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (a.k.a. UN Tourism):** UNWTO has been involved in the field of ecotourism since the early 1990s and developed a set of guidelines focusing on the strong link between protected area and tourism, with the aim of ensuring that tourism contributes to the purposes of protected areas and does not undermine them.

**United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP):** UNEP advocates for sustainable tourism practices, emphasizing the need to balance environmental conservation with socio-economic benefits. UNEP suggests that when ecotourism is managed responsibly and the environmental harm is mitigated, it can serve as a tool for conservation. UNEP has played a significant role in

developing global guidelines and frameworks for sustainable tourism and ecotourism in many international conferences.

**National and Local Governments:** Each and every concerned government and country works upon resolving these issues, contributing to the declarations in summits and conferences. Since natural and cultural heritage sites are found all around the world, every country has equal rights in this issue, and there isn't any major country that dominates these decisions.

### Timeline of Events

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| <p><b>2002: International Year of Ecotourism (IYE)</b></p>                        | <p>The United Nations declared 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism. Various conferences and summits, especially the World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec, that helped to regulate and mitigate the drawbacks of ecotourism, took place in IYE.</p>  |
| <p><b>2002: World Ecotourism Summit</b></p>                                       | <p>The World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec was one of the most significant events in promoting and introducing ecotourism. The <i>Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism</i>, which established a global framework for ecotourism, including minimizing environmental impacts, involving local communities, and ensuring ecotourism benefits conservation efforts, was determined in this summit.</p> |
| <p><b>2002: World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Summit)</b></p> | <p>This summit underlined the role of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, in promoting environmental protection and socio-economic development. Global and individual organizations like UNEP and NGOs emphasized the need for responsible tourism practices to protect natural and cultural heritage sites.</p>   |
| <p><b>2015: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</b></p>                          | <p>In 2015, the SDGs adopted by the United Nations included goals related to sustainable tourism. Specifically, Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and Goal 15 (Life on Land) emphasize the importance of sustainable tourism in preserving ecosystems and promoting biodiversity.</p>  |

### Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

**1)The 2002 UN World Ecotourism Summit (Quebec Declaration):** Although this summit and declaration was the most significant action taken upon this issue to date, over time, the effectiveness of it decreased with rapidly changing conditions, and today new regulations and frameworks are required urgently. Due to economic benefits of ecotourism, unconscious tourist behaviours and lack of implementation of the policies determined here, this declaration is now much less impactful.

**2)Government Regulations:** Several countries have introduced regulations to limit tourist numbers, protect wildlife, and ensure ecotourism benefits local communities. Some examples include protected area management in Costa Rica and Kenya. However, enforcement challenges, especially in developing regions, often undermined these efforts, and more reliable regulations are required.

**3)The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) (2007):** The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) created the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria in order to encourage ecotourism and responsible tourism practice. Despite the fact that it is not a formal treaty, these standards serve as guidelines for travel agencies and business in order to minimize environmental impacts and to improve social and economic sustainability. Although these increased awareness and had an impact on individual businesses, its overall efficiency was constrained by its voluntary nature, lack of enforcement, and resource limitations.

## **Possible Solutions**

**Stronger Regulations and Effective Enforcement:** Implementing stricter government regulations on ecotourism activities, with clear and enhanced enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with sustainability standards is a must, and all regulations should be applicable to every ecotourism destination, maximizing the scope of these regulations.

**Increasing Public Awareness:** Since one of the main reasons why regulations are not effective is because the people's unconsciousness and the lack of adoption of such policies, launching widespread educational campaigns to inform tourists about responsible behavior, the importance of maintaining distance from wildlife, and minimizing environmental impact is a crucial aspect of sustainable ecotourism.

## **Additional Resources**

UN Tourism-Ecotourism:

<https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development/ecotourism-and-protected-areas>

UNEP- Ecotourism Report 2002 Summit:

[https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/9045/-Ecotourism %20Principles](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/9045/-Ecotourism%20Principles).

[%20Practices%20and%20Policies%20for%20Sustainability-2002518.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=](#)

The International Ecotourism Society (Main Website):

<https://ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism/>

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria: <https://www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/>

2002 Sustainable Development Summit Reports:

<https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/johannesburg2002>

[https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/478154/files/A\\_CONF.199\\_20-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/478154/files/A_CONF.199_20-EN.pdf)

Quebec Declaration: <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-646-2.pdf>

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