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Experiencing Natural Wonders with Ecotourism

By Sarah Manners

Ecotourism

Coined by Héctor Ceballos-Lascuràin in 1983 the term Ecotourism was used to describe nature centric travel to relatively undisturbed areas with an emphasis on education. Today ecotourism consists of cultural tourism, nature tourism, leisure tourism and a good dose of adventure. Sound ecotourism involves travel to natural destinations, minimizes impact, builds environmental awareness, provides direct financial benefits for conservation, provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people, respects local culture, and supports human rights and not exploitation. It is an enlightening, participatory travel experience to environments, both natural and cultural which produces viable economic opportunities for the tourism industry and host communities, and makes the use of these resources through conservation beneficial to all tourism role players.

Global Ecotourism

According to the World Tourism Organisation Ecotourism is the fastest growing market within the ever expanding global tourism industry. Eco-travel is a serious player within the global tourism market and is fast becoming the preferred option in vacationing. We are a society trademarked by a heightened environmental consciousness not known in past eras. This combined with easy accessibility to exotic locations is what has drawn so many to eco-travel. Countries have begun to promote their natural resources, unique locals and tourism facilities in a bid to capture the interest of intrepid eco-travellers. Businesses are constructing camps and lodges and trails and tours are being designed to facilitate the wants and needs of the eco-tourists.

Ecotourism in Africa

Africa is synonymous with the concept of ecotourism, its multitude of game parks and reserves conserve some of the world's most magnificent creatures. The bird life throughout the continent is remarkable, natural wonders are scattered throughout the continent and the cultures and traditions of past eras mystically intertwine with modern day. Each country on this diverse continent offers its own unique appeal to eco-travellers and no eco-traveller would be complete without a trip to Africa.

A Jewel at the Tip of Africa

When the path of tourism began to diverge to ecotourism; nature, heritage and recreational

destinations became more important than before and South Africa is a haven for these three cornerstones of eco-tourism. Lying at the very tip of Africa, South Africa is home to some of the most magnificent vistas, sunsets and natural resources one could hope to encounter. It is near impossible to separate SA from a nature experience and the strongest motivations for overseas travellers seem to be the scenic beauty and rich wildlife.

SA Ecotourism Highlights

There are a never ending abundance of activities to keep eco-travellers busy on their journey through South Africa. One of the biggest draw cards are the impressive wildlife reserves scattered throughout the country. The Kruger National Park, by far South Africa's most internationally acclaimed, was established in 1898 to protect South African wildlife and is today an unrivalled leader in biodiversity and environmental management. Each park and reserve offers its visitors a unique experience. Watching a herd of elephants cooling off at a waterhole or a lioness and her cubs playfully taunting one another are truly some of the most amazing sights anyone can behold. The parks are extremely large which

allows the wildlife to roam free and exist as they were created to without borders or unnatural threats. A safari drive is one of the best ways to experience nature up close and personal and it is highly recommended for any one interested in eco-travel.

It is not only the impressive wildlife on the ground that attracts visitors to South Africa; the marine life is spectacularly diverse. From Southern-Right Whale watching in Hermanus and watching schools of dolphins gliding through the waters on a boat trip to exploring the ecosystems in the rock pools along the coastline and scuba diving amongst various marine creatures.

South African is home to some of the most dramatic mountains and mountain ranges. Table Mountain, the Magaliesberg and the Drakensburg Mountain range offer amazing flora and fauna as well as some of the world's best hiking trails and breathtaking vistas. The various botanical gardens that are scattered throughout the country are home to hundreds of indigenous plants and the countries numerous forest regions are much celebrated by eco-enthusiasts.

The traditional villages are a highlight amongst eco-travellers to South Africa who have the opportunity to experience what life was like in years gone by. Apart from partaking in traditional customs such as meals and games visitors gain an insight as to how the tribes lived off and existed in harmony with nature.

Africa is a treasure trove of natural wonders and the jewel at the tip, South Africa, is a slice of paradise for anyone interested in ecotourism.

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in a lifetime overland tours to some of the world's most fascinating cultural landscapes. Experience the natural wonders of South Africa with Oasis Overland.

Mother Earth Hosts Our Travels

By Victor Pryles

As conscious traveling Paupers we must always be concerned about our dear Mother Earth. If you

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think about it, you travel across her face, and She is the host to your journey; without Her we could not find the unfolding adventures that attract and feed our souls.

I have found some valuable resources for us to use and publicize, all of which are dedicated to responsible travel and care of our environment.

International Ecotourism Society 202-347-9203

A well-established nonprofit group which conducts research, publishes articles, provides consumer information, and has a directory of members around the world. With Rainforest Alliance, it recently started an ecotourism certification standards program.

Sustainable Travel International 720-273-2975

Formed three years ago to bridge the gap between research and consumer information and to promote sustainable development and eco-friendly travel. Offers a carbon offset program and last month started an eco-certification program that will follow standards laid out by the International Ecotourism Society.

Responsible Travel Handbook

Created this year for the Educational Travel Conference meeting, this lengthy guide has a wealth of contributors and information. (Click on responsible tourism to download).

Lonely Planet Code Green: Trips of a Lifetime That Won't Cost The Earth by Kelly Lorimer- Lonely Planet Publications

The first "green travel" book to be published by Lonely Planet includes dozens of "responsible travel experiences" and provides traveler information on responsible and eco-travel. Lonely Planet also runs a discussion board on responsible travel at

Better World Club 866-238-1137

The environmentally conscious alternative to the American Automobile Association, offering auto and bicycle road assistance, has resources on hybrid car rentals, green lodging, and carbon offsets.

Let us join and use these groups when planning our trips. By raising our level of consciousness and employing 'green' tactics and travel itineraries we will, each in our own small way, be contributing to a healthier world where we act as stewards to the environment while discovering the rich and breathtaking rewards of travel.

Victor K. Pryles is the author of "Travel Cheap-Travel Well!- Confessions Of A Traveling Pauper available at:

His daily blog is at:

He

also offers a Free E–Course: "The Top 100 Travel Planning Websites" at his website.

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