

C H A P T E R 1

Ecotourism: competing
and conflicting schools
of thought

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Critical Issues in Ecotourism: Understanding a complex tourism phenomenon

Varacious wolf in lamb's clothing, the sensitive traveller is the real perpetrator of the global spread of tourism and in this capacity must take responsibility for some of tourism's adverse impact.

(Wheeller, 1992, p. 105)

Few issues in the academic study of travel and tourism are as contentious, drawing divided and polarised lines of debate, as the concept of ecotourism. Since the term entered the vernacular in the 1960s (Hetzer, 1965), it has been widely espoused as a benign form of tourism that offers great potential for interests in economic development and conservation to walk hand in hand (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987, 1991a, b). In the mid-1960s Hetzer (1965) referred to a form of tourism '*... based principally upon natural and archaeological resources such as caves, fossil sites (and) archaeological sites*'. By the 1980s, following the rise of global environmental issues in the late 1960s and 1970s (McCormick, 1989), the term 'ecotourism' had become firmly established. In 1987 Ceballos-Lascurain coined one of the first of many definitions of ecotourism stating that '*we may define ecological tourism or ecotourism as that tourism that involves 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*' (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987, p. 13). He also made reference to '*any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas*' as an essential part of the ecotourism resource (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987, p. 14).

However, within a short period of time discourses emerged that have drawn attention to the complexities of ecotourism development (Butler, 1990; Wheeller, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995; Hall, 1994). In addressing 'tourism's troubled times' in the early 1990s, Wheeller (1991) has been steadfast in arguing the case that the so-called 'responsible' forms of tourism, including ecotourism, are not the answer. Instead he viewed alternative forms of tourism as an elaborate ruse and effective marketing tool for building further demand for tourism at a time of growing concern for the impacts of popular mass tourism. 'By clothing itself in a green mantle, the industry is being provided with a shield with which it can both deflect valid criticism and improve its own image while, in reality, continuing its familiar short tourism commercial march' (Wheeller, 1991, p. 96). Recent decades have therefore seen the emergence and entrenchment of two competing arguments addressing the merits of ecotourism (Butler, 1990; Wheeller, 1993, 1994), and the potential and pitfalls of ecotourism development (Boo, 1990; Bramwell and Lane, 1993; Wheeller, 1995).

On the surface ecotourism is a passive and appealing form of tourism (Dowling, 1999, 2000). Compelling arguments have been

put forward to the effect that ecotourism contributes to the protection of natural environments, conservation of endangered species, the creation of employment and the empowerment of communities. Examples exist that demonstrate that such claims may be true. This is what Butler (1990) refers to as the 'pious hope' of ecotourism. The work of Dowling and Field (1999) on guiding and interpretation initiatives, and Dowling and Sharp (1996) on conservation-tourism partnerships (both in Western Australia), for example, have been influential in seeking ways to achieve sustainable ecotourism development in a regional context.

It has been widely stated that ecotourism offers the potential for economic transition, regional development, community empowerment and the creation of employment opportunities for peripheral areas (Hall and Boyd, 2003) and indigenous communities (Butler and Hinch, 1996). Advocates for ecotourism also point to the argument that ecotourism businesses may be well placed to make active contributions to conservation through, for example, the communication of conservation messages to the general public (Beaumont, 1998, 2001). Orams (1997) strongly advocates the potential role for well-developed education programmes to contribute to this end. Weiler and Ham (2001) provide detailed insights into the multiple roles of tour guides and the critical interpretation roles that they serve which, if successful, may have enduring consequences for the environmental values and conservation interests of visitors.

The work of Higham and Carr (2003a) addresses the potential for ecotourism businesses in New Zealand to achieve positive outcomes in two different dimensions. In the social dimension of ecotourism they found that ecotourism businesses were able to deliver high-quality visitor experiences and effective visitor interpretation programmes, contributing to conservation advocacy and raising visitor awareness of both global and national/regional environmental issues. Within the ecological dimension they found that ecotourism businesses were actively and successfully providing low-impact visitor experiences while contributing to conservation goals through such initiatives as predator eradication and revegetation programmes. A number of ecotourism businesses were actively contributing to science and research programmes through the collection of observational data and monitoring wildlife populations. Some were committed to ecological restoration through the reintroduction of regionally extinct species into protected areas (Higham and Carr, 2003a). These were seen as defining criteria of ecotourism by many visitors.

Yet the extent to which ecotourism delivers on the high aspirations associated with this form of tourism development is open to heated debate. Critics argue that lacking is the empirical research

that is needed to provide evidence that words and realities actually coincide. Thus Butler (1990) raises the notion of the 'Trojan horse' of alternative forms of tourism. The intriguing insights provided by Hinch (1998, 2001) into the realities and complexities of indigenous-based ecotourism in Canada give a clear example of the 'Trojan horse' in an ecotourism context. So too do Hall's studies of ecotourism as new forms of ecological imperialism and Western domination (Hall, 1994).

One of the most common criticisms of ecotourism has been the sheer breadth of definitions that have been proposed to delineate the phenomenon (Fennell, 1998, 1999, 2001). The development of definitions is accurately described by Fennell (2001, p. 403) as '*one of the most habitual practices in the subfield of ecotourism*'. The weight of academic energy paid to the definition of ecotourism is disproportionate to the general lack of consensus arising from such concerted scholarly effort. This is a situation that hinders the effective and sustainable development of ecotourism due to the uncertain policy, planning and development foundations that underpin the sector (Higham and Carr, 2003b).

Two contrasting approaches to defining ecotourism highlight the ineffective policy and planning contexts associated with a poorly understood phenomenon. Ballantine and Eagles (1994) evaluated Canadian tourists visiting Kenya against a definition consisting of three criteria: a social motive (educational component), the desire to visit 'wilderness/undisturbed areas' and a temporal component relating to the proportion of total time in Kenya spent on safari. Given the breadth of these criteria it is no surprise that 84% of all Canadian visitors to Kenya who were surveyed by Ballantine and Eagles (1994) were defined as ecotourists. Orams (1995) takes this scenario to its logical extreme stating that by definitions such as this, all tourism can be called 'ecotourism'.

Butler (1992), by contrast, presented a paper to the *IVth World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas* with a more rigorous and detailed checklist for ecotourists (Table 1.1). The checklist highlights the opposite pole of the definitional scale. These criteria cover most aspects of the numerous definitions found throughout the literature. While most would applaud Butler's (1992) defining criteria, in many developing world contexts these criteria may be viewed as too purist in terms of the practical realities of ecotourism development. The logical extension of this definition, again as articulated by Orams (1995), is to assume that ecotourism is impossible. Under such an approach no tourism development can possibly fulfil the lofty aspirations of the most purist definitions. Thus the search for an operational definition remains an illusive goal (Blamey, 1997).

Table 1.1 Principles and characteristics of ecotourism

1. It must be consistent with a positive environmental ethic, fostering preferred behaviour.
2. It does not denigrate the resource. There is no erosion of resource integrity.
3. It concentrates on intrinsic rather than extrinsic values.
4. It is biocentric rather than homocentric in philosophy, in that an ecotourist accepts nature largely on its terms, rather than significantly transforming the environment for personal convenience.
5. Ecotourism must benefit the resource. The environment must experience a net benefit from the activity, although there are often spin-offs of social, economic, political or scientific benefits.
6. It is first-hand experience with the natural environment.
7. There is, in ecotourism, an expectation of gratification measured in appreciation and education, not in thrill-seeking or physical achievement. These latter elements are consistent with adventure tourism, the other division of natural environment (wildland) tourism.
8. There are high cognitive (informational) and effective (emotional) dimensions to the experience, requiring a high level of preparation from both leaders and participants.

Source: After Butler (1992), in Acott *et al.* (1998).

Ecotourism provides an intriguing and hitherto unresolved definitional conundrum. Numerous attempts of varied degrees of merit have been made to define ecotourism (e.g. Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987; Ashton, 1991; Buckley, 1994; Ecotourism Association of Australia, 1996; Weaver, 2001). Yet from the plethora of articles contributing to the literature on ecotourism emerges little consensus. Indeed, Fennell (2001, p. 403) states that '*the reasons for such a proliferation of definitions is unknown*'. However, despite suggestions that scholars need to move beyond the definition stalemate, the need to clearly define the phenomenon remains a live issue. The reasons why it remains important to define ecotourism are important to consider (Table 1.2).

The absence of a clear statement of definition hinders the sustainable development of ecotourism by diluting and compromising the coordinated and collective interests and activities of public/private, government/non-government groups and organisations, and visitors. The term *ecotourism* has been applied widely (Wight, 1993), to the point that it has to some degree become

Table 1.2 The policy, planning and development context, and the need for workable definitions of ecotourism

1. *Identity*: The search for a dividing line between ecotourism and nature tourism is critical to recognising excellence in the ecotourism sector (e.g. through industry awards).
2. *Research*: The definition of ecotourism allows the accurate expression of supply and demand. This is important for defining ecotourism operations and researching/profiling visitors.
3. *Planning and development*: A conceptual basis from which planning and development can proceed is critical to the ecotourism sector.
4. *Product development*: A clear identity based on definition affords advantages in terms of focused data, reporting and information dissemination. This may assist in product development and fostering links to the demand side of tourism through marketing and promotional avenues.
5. *Awareness*: Public awareness of issues affecting the ecotourism sector may be enhanced with a more rigorous understanding of ecotourism experiences and activities.
6. *Government support*: Government support, measuring change, understanding the opportunities that ecotourism development may offer regional or peripheral economies and advocacy are facilitated through accurate definition.
7. *Sustainability*: Industry development, certification, product development and impact management. These aspects of ecotourism relate closely to industry reputation, particularly in light of the emerging cynicism associated with issues of 'egotourism', 'ecoterrorism' and 'ecosell' (Wight, 1993).
8. *Policy*: The development of appropriate policy by relevant administrative and government agencies must be guided by definition.
9. *International comparability*: A common understanding of the definition of ecotourism may enhance international comparison and communication.
10. *International reputation*: The development of national and international standards may be achieved, notwithstanding the differences that will invariably exist between ecotourism operations in different environmental, social, cultural economic and political contexts.

Source: Higham and Carr (2003b).

meaningless (Chirgwin and Hughes, 1997). This situation is undesirable and counterproductive to the development of ecotourism. It disadvantages both operators who may be unsure of the values, motivations and expectations of visitors, and tourists who may be unsure of the product offered by 'eco' operators and the qualities of experience that they seek to provide (Higham *et al.*, 2001).

It has been argued by Pearce (1994), Blamey (1997) and Bjork (2000) that developing a single definition of ecotourism is an exercise in futility. However Bjork (2000) acknowledges that defining

ecotourism is necessary to provide a conceptual basis from which planning and development can proceed. *'Only by having a strict theoretical definition (an ideal situation) is it possible to go on and adjust the dimensions in accordance with the unique characteristics of a specific tourism area'* (2000, p. 190). Bjork (2000) accurately states that ecotourism takes place in many varied contexts and, as such, the existence of exceptions to any definition of ecotourism is inevitable. It is, therefore, necessary to adopt definitions that reflect national and regional tourism contexts. Facilitating this process requires consensus on definition parameters that can be applied with different weighting in these differing contexts.

From this scenario, and in support of Wheeler's (1991) assessment of alternative tourism, some have questioned the very term 'ecotourist' based on empirical research findings (Higham and Carr, 2002). The term 'ecotourist' has effectively been defined either so narrowly or so broadly as to render it meaningless. Higham and Carr (2002) argue that while visitors to natural areas in New Zealand may be considered 'ecotourists' this effectively implies that all visitors are ecotourists simply because of the very nature of the experiences of most who visit New Zealand (Tourism New Zealand, 2006). Such a blunt approach to defining any phenomenon is counterproductive. Blamey and Braithwaite (1997) provide similar findings. They performed a social values segmentation of the potential Australian ecotourism market finding that the majority do not have the 'green' social values that one might associate with tourists who in the guise of ecotourism seek the experiences of nature. Who, then, are ecotourists, and how precisely are they to be defined?

The contradictions and constraints that are embodied in many definitions of ecotourism confirm its general inoperability. These contradictions may be overviewed with emphasis placed on the economic and environmental dimensions of ecotourism. Notwithstanding the rhetoric of sustainable tourism development, economic viability is the bottom line of sustainable tourism operations. Ecotourism operations face challenging and perplexing barriers to commercial viability. By definition they should be small scale (Butler, 1990; Thomlinson and Getz, 1996; Ryan *et al.*, 2000), resolute in limiting business growth (Butler, 1990) and, by implication, blinkered to economic theory relating to economies of scale. The recommendation that visitors are managed by maintaining an appropriate ratio of guides to visitors also brings with it economic challenges relating to pricing and commercial viability.

A range of environmental challenges also exist under current definitions of ecotourism. Not the least of these relates to the

fact that ecotourism operations should take place in unmodified (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987; Valentine, 1993), natural (Valentine, 1993; Boyd *et al.*, 1995; Orams, 1995; Blamey, 1997; Fennell, 1998; Swarbrooke and Horner, 1999) or pristine (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987) areas. With this emerges a raft of challenges that hitherto have not been adequately addressed. These challenges relate to the management of visitor activities in environments that are fragile, finite and valued primarily for conservation. This operational environment is difficult to reconcile with the further definitional requirement that ecotourism visitor operations and activities should be low in impact (Wight, 1993; Orams, 1995; Lindberg and McKercher, 1997; Acott *et al.*, 1998; Honey 1999).

Furthermore, ecotourism operations, according to definition, should take place in natural areas removed from the accoutrements of civilised life (Boyd *et al.*, 1995). If this is so then as a consequence ecotourism operations are either removed from, or required to develop, the infrastructures that Cooper *et al.* (1998) identify to be critical to tourism; those relating to transportation, accommodation, services and activities. The viability of ecotourism operations clearly hinges on two fundamental requirements: (1) A resource base that demonstrates some degree of naturalness and (2) The infrastructure that is fundamental to commercial tourism operations. Herein lies a contradiction in terms because one cannot comfortably exist in the company of the other, yet both are required to facilitate viable ecotourism experiences. While 'degrees of naturalness' is not the same as a total absence of anthropogenic change, it still exists in relation to tourism and service infrastructure only in relative degress.

The complexities of the interface between the social sciences of tourism and the natural sciences of environmental management are highlighted by Duffus and Dearden (1990). Their conceptual framework demonstrates both the dynamics of ecotourism as a social phenomenon and the dynamics of ecotourism environments as ecological phenomena. In terms of the former, they employ an expert–novice (specialist–generalist) continuum to highlight that tourist types evolve over time. Thus, in the absence of very deliberate visitor management interventions, it is inevitable that purist or expert visitors will be sequentially displaced by novices as any given ecotourism site develops over time. Simultaneously the same sequence will bring new forces of change to bear upon ecotourism environments.

Duffus and Dearden (1990) apply the limits of acceptable change (LAC) visitor management approach in their conceptual framework to highlight the environmental dynamics brought about by ecotourism. But how best should these dynamics be managed? Many of the arguably most significant environmental

impacts associated with ecotourism are brought about by the exploratory visits of Duffus and Dearden's (1990) 'experts'. These tourists may unwittingly be vectors for the translocation of insect pests, biological micro-organisms and disease pathogens. Island ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to biological introductions (deliberate or otherwise) due to the high endemism associated with island ecologies. The introduction of disease pathogens from peri-Antarctic islands to Antarctic penguin populations was, for example, an issue of lengthy discussion at the 2002 International Association of Antarctic Tourism Operators (IAATO) meeting in Cambridge (United Kingdom). So too, of course, does this apply to the more numerous 'novices' who typically follow in the footsteps of the initial 'expert' visitors. However, such troublesome impacts often become secondary to the more immediate and pressing impact issues associated with site development, transport impacts and the more 'blatant' impacts that commonly occur when tourists are brought in increasing numbers into contact with wild animal populations (Gordon *et al.*, 1992; Constantine, 1999; Bejder, 2005).

The venues for ecotourism development, including fragile ecologies, wildlife populations and coral reefs are as a rule fragile and high in conservation value. These venues are subject to the interests of those with tourism development ambitions, as well as local and central governments seeking to promote employment creation, not to mention the insatiable appetites of tourists seeking the experiences of nature. Tourist demand is difficult to forecast, and often runs far ahead of the development of effective legislation and management responsiveness. Thus management is inevitably reactive and retrospective. Sheer weight of demand, and the pace with which demand may develop, contributes to policy paralysis as management agencies are often unable to react effectively to increasing tourist demand, or the findings of empirical research.

Many of these issues were brought to a head in 2002 which was celebrated by the United Nations as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) (and the International Year of Mountains). During that year the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) were mandated by the United Nations (Resolution 53/200) to organise a range of events, the most notable of which was the World Ecotourism Summit (WES) (Quebec, Canada) (Hillel, 2002). In his address at the launch of IYE 2002 at the UN Headquarters, WTO, Secretary-General Francesco Frangialli stated that 'ecotourism is far from being a fringe activity. It should not be regarded as a passing fad or a gimmick, or even as a secondary market niche, but rather as one of the trump cards of this industry of the

future. And for a simple reason: it is crucial to the problem of developing a balanced, sustainable and responsible tourism sector' (Frangialli, 2002). Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette stated the 'urgent need to alert public opinion to the many effects of tourism on our natural and cultural heritage, and to promote responsible tourism'. Her statement, however, also largely centred on the potential rewards of ecotourism in terms of addressing issues of ecological conservation, social inequality and empowerment.

These comments are essentially endorsed by Hounsell (2002) who highlights the resurgence in traditional ways of life and the emergence of economic opportunities for indigenous communities that have come to grips with the social problems they have had to face. Hounsell, Chair of Aboriginal Tourism (Canada), noted in 2002 the existence of 1,500 aboriginal businesses in Canada, most of them both small and nature-based. Hounsell (2002) claims that 'Ecotourism is a natural fit for Aboriginals. Of course, it also has the potential to commercialise, to disturb sacred sites, to disrupt close-knit communities, but those are things we have to control. The elders and others have to determine which part of their culture they should reveal to tourists and which they won't. Visitors have to understand that there are cultural limits they have to respect. With aboriginal population increasing, tourism may be a means of meeting the challenge of providing employment for the population' (Hounsell, 2002, n.p.).

By the end of 2002 the UNEP reported that a range of successful outcomes had been achieved (UNEP and WTO, 2002a). They included:

1. *Ecotourism policy*: During the IYE 2002 over 50 countries had developed special policies and strategies focused on ecotourism at the national level. The WES was attended by more than 1,100 delegates from 133 countries (45 ministerial level officials). It stressed the participation of host communities and mandated the educational value of leisure experiences.
2. *Ecotourism and sustainable development*: If managed in a sustainable manner, ecotourism helps conserve biodiversity, alleviates poverty in rural areas, and can provide benefits to local and indigenous communities situated near, or in, officially protected areas.
3. *Ecotourism as a global economic driver*: The main challenge for the future is to apply the principles of ecotourism/sustainable tourism to all forms of tourism development.

Other key outcomes were identified by UNEP and WTO (2002a). These included a global network of specialists and practitioners,

with strengthened regional presence which was developed and made 'operational through the consultative process of the IYE 2002, managed by UNEP, the WTO, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and several other partners' (UNEP and WTO, 2002, n.p.). From the WES in Quebec the main outcome was the *Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism* (UNEP and WTO, 2002b) which represented the culmination of multistakeholder dialogue involving over 5,000 experts globally, and a set of UN-level recommendations for the development of ecotourism activities in the context of sustainable development (UNEP and WTO, 2002). A positive view, albeit from a very different standpoint, was expressed by Patricia Barnett (2002) (Director of *Tourism Concern*) who noted that '*Tourism Concern* is pleased that campaigning organisations in destination countries have pressurised the IYE to recognise that even ecotourism can have serious negative impacts on local people and environments and needs careful consideration' (www.tourismconcern.org.uk, 2002).

However, despite the rhetoric, IYE 2002 also stimulated considerable debate on the contentious issues associated with ecotourism. Critics have argued that IYE invited widespread government and investor sponsored development programmes that may have been ill-conceived, ill-advised and poorly planned (Cater, 2006). On its website the Third World Network (TWN) presented a letter that 'vigorously questions claims that ecotourism rectifies the economic inequalities, social injustices and ecological problems associated with conventional tourism' (Pleumarom, 2002, n.p.). Rather, it warned, such developments have 'opened opportunities for a whole range of investors to gain access to remote rural, forest, coastal and marine areas', and 'more encroachments, illegal logging, mining and plundering of biological resources ...' (Pleumarom, 2005, n.p.). Similarly TWN (2002, n.p.) reported in a letter to the United Nations that in Thailand an 'upsurge of ecotourism demand had resulted in a construction frenzy in rural and natural areas to provide accommodation and infrastructure for visitors'.

Widespread concerns centred on the possibility that IYE 2002 may have had a largely unintended outcome of prompting wholesale ecotourism development initiatives in the absence of sufficient planning and policy development. These issues were raised by a number of NGOs which in 2002 voiced concerns about the IYE. *Tourism Concern*, for example, highlighted concern surrounding a sudden growth in demand for ecotourism experiences, which was not deemed to be in the best interests of local and indigenous communities. *Tourism Concern* pointed out that '... the problems of unsustainable tourism development cannot be solved by promoting "ecotourism", which is a small,

niche market and also, by its nature, necessitates developing tourism in fragile, sensitive areas. This could be fraught with difficulties if demand for ecotourism increases significantly' (Barnett, 2002, n.p.).

Hsu (2002) then reports a classic case in point. In a direct response to the United Nation's 2002 IYE declaration this initiative was mirrored nationally when 2002 was declared the year of ecotourism in Taiwan. Ambitious development goals, and a government investment of NT\$30 million, were put in place in order to focus attention on large scale ecotourism development. Hsu (2002) notes that the principle aim was to 'build up Taiwan as an ecotourism island in the hope that the world's ecotourists will flock here to see the island's rich and diversified ecological resources'.

In order to achieve these outcomes, various plans were put in place. These generally focused on such things as 'building up ecotourism environments, including the establishment of ecotourism service facilities, selection of ecotourism spots, ecotourism guidance, and to elaborate an evaluation or accreditation of ecotour programmes' (Hsu, 2002), as well as the implementation of a comprehensive and regular series of ecotourism promotions, particularly targeting the *China Post* with features on Taiwan's whales and dolphins, among other things (Hsu, 2002). This, one can surely assume, was not the intention of the United Nations declaration.

In response to these criticisms, TIES declared IYE 2002, and particularly the WES held in Québec, Canada, in May 2002, a success. At the end of 2002 it was noted that IYE had presented '... an opportunity to critically assess the status of ecotourism, while urging as open and participatory a process as possible, including the voices of the poor, indigenous, and local communities' (Wight, 2002, n.p.). However, it is apparent that critical issues in ecotourism remain largely unresolved.

Two current examples illustrate this view. First, while much stock has been placed on self-regulation of ecotourism, with the efforts of the IAATO being upheld as an exemplar of self-regulation, a groundswell of doubt and concern surrounding self-regulation has developed in recent years. These concerns are borne out by Font's research on accreditation and certification (Font and Buckley, 2001; Font and Tribe, 2001). His work confirms that certification is best suited to countries where the infrastructures and financial resources required to support tourism are well established (Font, 2005). Such cases, in places where ecotourism development is advocated, and where ecotourism development was widely endorsed in 2002, are generally the exception rather than the rule.

Second, the research of marine biologists demonstrates that impacts of biological significance associated with tourist interactions with marine mammals are generally ignored or dispelled by tour operators and government agencies due to the conviction that short- and medium-term impacts are either undetected or of undue concern (Bejder *et al.*, 1999; Lusseau and Higham, 2004; Bejder, 2005; Bejder *et al.*, 2006). Ananthaswamy (2004) notes that tourist interactions with wildlife populations may have adverse impacts that are difficult to identify. Immediate effects include changes in heart rate, physiology, stress hormone levels and social behaviour, and the long-term consequences of these impacts are likely to be biologically significant. The same findings are derived from the work of Ellenberg *et al.* (2006) in their study of Humboldt penguins. These findings have resulted in a call from biologists for the collection of 'pre-tourism data' to provide benchmarks of animal behaviour. Furthermore wildlife-based tourism needs to be developed under the precautionary principle (Fennell and Ebert, 2004) at least until rigorous scientific insights into the impacts of tourist on wildlife populations have been established. In order to achieve such insights it is necessary to collect data from both tourism and control sites to allow comparative analyses to be performed. Only then will sufficiently rigorous insights into visitor impacts be achieved to guide effective management practice (Higham and Bejder, personal communication).

Clearly, regardless of whether it was intended or not, the United National declaration of 2002 as IYE stimulated large-scale ecotourism development initiatives that were generally not undertaken in association with any principles of precaution. These issues clearly bear out widespread concerns that IYE 2002 would cause more damage than good. They would indicate that the United National declaration of 2002 as the IYE was premature. The chorus of dissenting voices that were raised in response to IYE 2002 leaves little doubt about it (Cater, 2006). It is a statement of the obvious, one may argue, that much scholarly work remains to be done, and many issues remain outstanding in terms of an adequate understanding of ecotourism phenomena.

This book sets out with two principal aims. The first is to raise a range of critical issues associated with ecotourism, and draw the attention of the reader to the importance of considering these issues, among others. If, in doing so, it stimulates further research into critical issues associated with ecotourism, then this aim will have been fulfilled. The second is to provide the reader with insights into these critical issues, and the challenges that they pose. This book is organised into two parts. The first introduces and addresses generic issues in ecotourism

that apply universally. These include inescapable issues that are associated with ecotourism such as, for example, global environmental change (Gössling, Chapter 4), energy use and global climate change (Becken and Schellhorn, Chapter 5), biosecurity (Hall, Chapter 6), ethics (Nowaczek, Moran-Cahusac and Fennell, Chapter 8), poverty alleviation (Epler Wood, Chapter 9) and gender issues (Scheyvens, Chapter 10).

The second part of this book examines more specific issues that relate to the policy, planning and management settings for ecotourism in different regional and national contexts. Thus the chapters presented in the second part of this book address such issues as understanding the spatial ecology of marine mammals as a critical step towards managing tourist interactions with cetaceans (Higham and Lusseau, Chapter 13), the complexities of wildlife habitation (Shelton and Higham, Chapter 14), biodiversity conservation in Asia (Cochrane, Chapter 15), the indistinct boundaries between ecotourism and cultural tourism in China (Sofield, Chapter 18) and the critical issues faced by ecotourism business operators in New Zealand (Carr, Chapter 20).

The chapters that follow address a raft of issues that are both provocative and perplexing. They challenge the reader to critically consider the merits of ecotourism as it exists in different social, cultural, political, economic and environmental contexts. It is hoped that having considered the chapters that comprise this book the reader will be well placed to draw their own informed conclusions on ecotourism development as it exists in different national and regional contexts, and the critical issues that accompanies it, many of which remain unsatisfactorily resolved.

This chapter highlights two contrasting and largely conflicting schools of thought. One sees ecotourism as a relatively benign avenue of economic development; one that justifies the protection or restoration of natural environments, while also affording opportunities for economic development, employment creation and the empowerment or indigenous peoples and communities (Weaver, 2001). The other sees ecotourism as a means of perpetuating dominant Western interests in economic development (Hall, 1994; Wheeler, 1994; Cater, 2006) and a form of tourism that brings serious impacts, some subtle and others not so subtle, to bear where they are least needed. Those who conform with this school of thought also question the theory of trickle-down economics and the potential for ecotourism to empower local communities (Wheeler, 1991). At present these scenarios remain difficult to reconcile. Ultimately it will be left to the reader to decide which school of thought should prevail.

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