

Eco-Tourism as a Means to Improve Tourist Carrying Capacity

The wilderness of nature and challenges offered by the high mountains bring tourists to Nepal. If the volume of tourists to natural area continues to grow rapidly, tourism itself will face serious problems in maintaining the very attractions that bring the tourist in the first place. The problem was identified more than 20 years ago by the Man and the Biosphere programme. The International Union of Alpinist Associations (UIAA), at its 44th general assembly, on 16 October 1982, also adopted the declaration on mountain activities, known as the "Kathmandu Declaration."

Articles of the Kathmandu Declaration

1. There is urgent need for effective protection of the mountain environment and landscape.
2. The flora, fauna, and natural resources of all kinds need immediate attention, care, and concern.
3. Actions designed to reduce the negative impact of man's activities on the mountains should be encouraged.
4. The cultural heritage and the dignity of the local population are inviolable.
5. All activities designed to restore and rehabilitate the mountain world' need to be encouraged.
6. Contacts between mountaineers of different regions and countries should be increasingly encouraged in the spirit of friendship, mutual respect, and peace.
7. Information and education for improving the relationship between man and his environment should be available for wider sections of society.
8. The use of appropriate technology for energy needs and proper disposal of waste in the mountain areas are matters of immediate concern.
9. The need for more international support – larger governmental as well as non-governmental – to the developing mountain countries, for instance, in matters of ecological conservation.
10. The need for widening access to mountain areas in order to promote their appreciation and study should be unfettered by political considerations.

The spirit of all these articles goes to form the concept of eco-tourism. The concept of eco-tourism provides an interface between ecological concerns and economic benefits. The Adventure Travel Society defines eco-tourism as *"environmentally responsible travel to experience the natural area and culture of a region while promoting conservation and economically contributing to local communities"* (Kachondham 1994). Ever since the establishment of ACAP by the KMTNC in 1986, the spirit of eco-tourism as a strategy for protecting nature and promoting economic development has been adopted for establishing new protected areas such as the Makalu-Barun National Park and Conservation Area. The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) has provided a code for environmentally responsible tourism. The seventeen points of the code describe nothing but the concept and principles of eco-tourism.

It has been generally argued that *"Economics is the engine that powers the vehicle of Eco-tourism"*. Eco-tourism, at the same time, is the generator of employment and income for rural and remote mountainous areas. Nepal has recently adopted a principle of ploughing back the park revenues to the local communities in the park area. However, the fees and royalties from mountaineering expeditions have not yet been committed for community development. James Pearson, Chairman of the Adventure Travel Society, captures the shortest definition for eco-tourism which says, *"if it pays, it stays"* (ATS 1994).

Mountain Tourism in Nepal is, by and large, nature tourism - tourists are motivated by the desire to view the splendours of nature and to experience nature itself in an unmodified state. Nature tourism should always be friendly to nature and the system within which it functions. Thus the concept of eco-tourism has emerged as a form of tourism in which environmental impact is minimal.

Nepal has already set aside over 11 per cent of her territory for 14 protected areas (Figure 11). This does not, however, include some of the most spectacular mountain regions such as those around Manaslu (seventh highest peak 8,163m), Dhaulagiri (8,167m), Ganesh Himal (7,429m), and Kanchanjangha (third highest peak 8,586m). The Api-saipal complex of mountains also have a great touristic value which is still unexplored. The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation and also the Ministry of Forestry and Soil Conservation are looking for appropriate approaches to promote tourism as a tool for rural development and also as a resource for nature conservation. The IUCN reconnaissance survey of Manaslu, during the spring of 1993, revealed the fact that local communities ardently await increased tourism in the area. How much tourism and for whom are therefore questions of immediate concern before proceeding with a plan of action.

PATA Code for Environmentally Responsible Tourism

The PATA Code urges Association and Chapter members and their industry partners to -

- **ADOPT** the necessary practices to conserve the environment, including the use of renewable resources in a sustainable manner and the conservation of non-renewable resources;
- **CONTRIBUTE** to the conservation of any habitat of flora and fauna, and of any site whether natural or cultural, which may be affected by tourism;
- **ENCOURAGE** relevant authorities to identify areas worthy of conservation and to determine the level of development, if any, which would ensure those areas are conserved;
- **ENSURE** that environmental assessment becomes an integral step in the consideration of any site for a tourism project;
- **COMPLY** with all international conventions in relation to the environment;
- **COMPLY** with all national, state, and local laws in relation to the environment;
- **ENCOURAGE** those involved in tourism to comply with local, regional, and national planning policies and to participate in the planning process;
- **PROVIDE** the opportunity for the wider community to take part in discussions and consultations on tourism planning issues insofar as they affect the tourism industry and the community;
- **ACKNOWLEDGE** responsibility for the environmental impacts of all tourism-related projects and activities and undertake all necessary responsible, remedial, and corrective actions;
- **ENCOURAGE** regular environmental audits of practices throughout the tourism industry and encourage necessary changes to those practices;
- **FOSTER** environmentally responsible practices, including waste management, recycling, and energy use;
- **FOSTER**, in both management and staff of all tourism-related projects and activities, an awareness of environmental and conservation principles;
- **SUPPORT** the inclusion of professional conservation principles in tourism education, training, and planning;
- **ENCOURAGE** an understanding by all those involved in tourism of each community's customs, cultural values, beliefs and traditions, and how they relate to the environment;
- **ENHANCE** the appreciation and understanding by tourists of the environment through the provision of accurate information and appropriate interpretation; and
- **ESTABLISH** detailed environmental policies and/or guidelines for the various sectors of the tourism industry.