

## ECOTOURISM AND EDUCATION

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The traditional subsector of the tourism industry, based on organized and individual tours has become limited and much smaller when compared to the holiday business. A holiday is a short period in one's life which is looked forward to for almost a whole year. One saves in order to be able to spend during the holidays. One plans where to go, where to stay, what to do when one gets there. Indeed one plans many small details.

A Dutch family visits our hotel in Bodrum every year, during the first two weeks of May, and reserves a certain villa almost half a year in advance. This is a clear example of how one plans in advance and looks forward to the holidays. It is, therefore, the most important duty of the receiving side to satisfy the customers (holiday-makers) fully, even beyond their own expectations.

The 'receiving side' is a broad term which includes: the country, the region, the hotel, the resort, the human element in this list, and finally, the ecological framework. Let us imagine a holiday-maker travelling to a 5-star hotel in a region which neglects the ecology. The hotel may be in a perfect setting with mature gardens, beautiful beaches and comfortable rooms. Outside the garden walls of the hotel, there may be heaps of garbage or the next-door neighbors may be letting their untreated effluent directly into the sea.

On the other hand, the holiday-maker might want to see the environment, and visit historical sights. The roads may be dusty or muddy, traffic may be disastrously dangerous. When he arrives at the historical ruins and the weather is very, very hot, he would most probably wish to have a cold refreshment. He would prefer a nice, cold, internationally known soft drink instead of a dubious and non-hygienic looking lukewarm local drink.

Upon arrival and departure from the country, he will prefer a clean, comfortably air-conditioned, noiseless airport where the employees are clean-shaven, well-dressed, smiling and helpful. The transfer bus, or minibus between his hotel and the airport too is part of the receiving-side. An owner-driver who is in a hurry to optimize the time for the next trip, not very careful about the dust on the seats or small pieces of trash on the carpet in his vehicle, slightly sleepy due to working 20 hours a day during the season, would not be ideally suited to make the holiday-maker feel welcome in the country or to provide memories of the country back home!

The holiday-makers of the 21st century will all have attended environmental training classes. A lot of them already receive this type of education as early as in primary school or even earlier. These people arrive at their holiday resort expecting optimum ecological surroundings, including, most important of all, the human element, in all stages of their holiday.

No country is irreplaceable as a holiday destination. If a holiday-maker is dissatisfied with the ecological conditions of his holiday, he will most probably never return to that country or region or resort again. This ecological consciousness is growing among North and West Europeans, North Americans, and the Japanese.

To summarize, ecotourism is a concept conveying the following message: holiday-making is a serious event and the hospitality industry is an even more serious business. The most important single aspect of this business is the wholeness of this process. The resort owner, the staff, the airport personnel, the transportation people, and even the next-door neighbors must all take the responsibility of presenting, maintaining, and preserving the environment.

In order to achieve this harmony, proper training must be given and the proper controls must also be installed. Let us remember that the holiday-maker is a very special customer: if he is dissatisfied with the vacation, he can neither return it nor sell it back; he can, and will, only express his low opinion of those who dissatisfied him, and will most probably strike that destination off his list of future references.

The only way to achieve successful ecotourism is through education and action. Any weak link or inappropriate component will adversely affect the ecology and result in a customer's dissatisfaction. Bad on both counts.

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