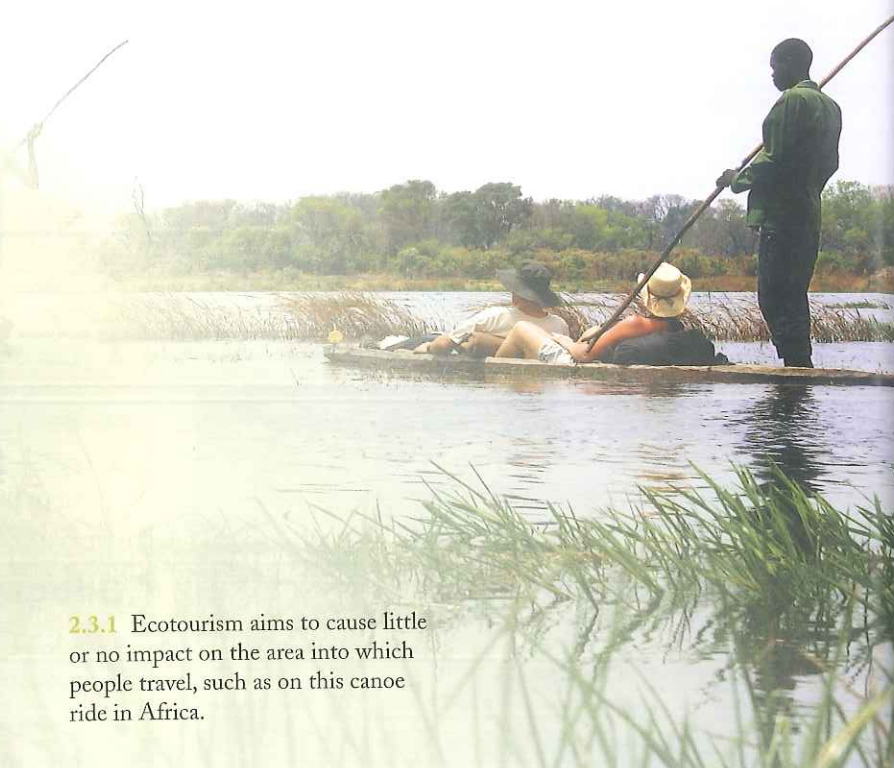


2.3

Ecotourism

Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry in Australia. It is big business around the world. Although ecotourism is often more of a marketing term than a reality for some tour operators, in some regions, such as Africa, ecotourism is proving very successful. Genuine ecotourism benefits both the environment and communities, involving the local people to ensure its success.

2.3.1 Ecotourism aims to cause little or no impact on the area into which people travel, such as on this canoe ride in Africa.



What is ecotourism?

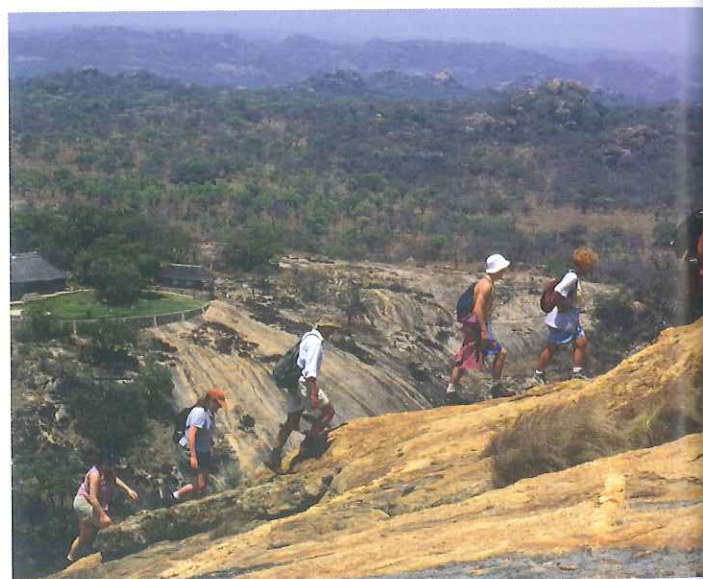
The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as 'responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people'. Ecotourism Australia refers to it as 'ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation'.

Most definitions of ecotourism include the following two elements:

- an active contribution to natural and cultural heritage conservation
- a contribution to the well-being of local and indigenous communities through planning, development and operation.

Ecotourism can be seen as 'responsible travel'—that is, travellers assist in protecting the environment and providing benefits for local cultures and communities.

TIES is a non-profit organisation, founded in 1990, that is dedicated to promoting ecotourism. It provides guidelines and standards for ecotourism as well as undertaking research, training and publishing in the



2.3.2 Good ecotourism tours are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. Many small exclusive hiking tours have minimal impact on the areas through which they travel.

area of ecotourism. According to TIES, the principles of ecotourism are:

- to minimise impact
- to build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- to provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- to provide financial benefits and empowerment for locals
- to increase sensitivity to a host country's political, environmental and social climate.

Ecotourism goes deeper than just caring about the environment; it involves education, conservation and protection, and aims for minimal or no impact on the environment.

What is an ecotourism experience?

There are many places to enjoy an ecotourism experience, including:

- Great Barrier Reef, Australia
- Alaska, Sadie Cove Wilderness Lodge, USA
- Galapagos Islands, Ecuador
- Okavango Delta, Africa.

There are many programs that assist travellers to choose good ecotourism options. In Australia there is an Eco Certification Program, which directs people to authentic tours, attractions, cruises or accommodation that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. Green travel guides and holiday carbon calculators are also useful for travellers wanting the full ecotourist experience.

Ecotourism—Australia

The Cooper Creek Wilderness group has been certified by Ecotourism Australia. It is a privately owned World Heritage Nature Refuge situated in the Daintree Rainforest in Cape Tribulation in Far North Queensland. They take ecologically sustainable small-group walks and tours through the forest. Tours can be taken day or night and some of the money that is paid for the experience contributes to the management and conservation of the Daintree Rainforest.



2.3.3 Pristine areas of forest such as this are protected through ecotourism projects such as the Cooper Creek Wilderness group. Profits from tours often contribute to the ongoing management and conservation of areas.

How to travel like an ecotourist

TIES provides ten energy-saving tips for the ecotourist traveller.

- 1 Fly wisely (minimise air travel; try to stay in the one location longer, rather than lots of small trips).
- 2 Travel light.
- 3 Book responsibly.
- 4 Before you leave—unplug household appliances.
- 5 While you are there—turn off all lights and appliances.
- 6 Use public transport or alternative modes of transport.
- 7 Eat local.
- 8 Save water.
- 9 Charge your trip sustainably—use rechargeable batteries for cameras, etc.
- 10 Offset the unavoidable footprint—contribute to a carbon-offsetting program.