

# Revenues From Ecotourism Activities in the World\*

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## ABSTRACT

**A**s a result of the urbanization brought on by the ongoing industrialization in the world the interest in ecotourism is increasing, parallel with environmental pollution, destruction of natural areas, land use and land cover change. Ecotourism involves travelling to natural areas, protected areas or national parks and benefiting local communities by conserving the environment. This tourism activity, which is the result of people's longing for living in nature and natural environment, is realized both inside and outside the country. Since the areas where ecotourism activities are carried out are areas where rural population live, it is seen as a new employment area and revenue source for locals. Therefore ecotourism is an important instrument for rural development; if managed well, it also makes serious contributions to the country's economy. Turkey has a great potential and fabulous natural and protected areas, but tourism revenues are mostly generated from coastal areas. Turkey's ecotourism areas needs more publicity, and an integrated ecotourism plan in national tourism plans. Turkey has the 6th place in the number of visitors while 12th place in tourism income, in the world. In this study, ecotourism activities were evaluated in different countries and their effects on the revenue of countries were examined. In this way, ecotourism activities will be evaluated with different perspectives.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism activities, world, revenues, Turkey, sustainability.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of ecotourism was first used by Keton Miller in 1978 and many definitions have been made (Akin, 2016). The IUCN (International Union of Conservation and Nature) defined ecotourism as “environmentally responsible travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature, including cultural features”. The most widely accepted definition of ecotourism by TIES (The International Ecotourism Society) states: “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education for guests and the staff”. Ecotourism is an ecologically, morally and ethically preferred form of tourism which optimizes cultural and ecological benefits and provides the tourist with an inspiring experience on one hand and the ecotourism provider with more economic benefit on the other (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018). Ecotourism is a kind of tourism that involves delicate and untouched areas, this is why it has low impact compared to regular tourism industry (Chand et al., 2015). All definitions of ecotourism are pointing out three

important objectives: 1. Travelling to natural areas, 2. Protecting the environment, 3. Improvement of and provision of benefits to local/rural communities (EBSCO, 2009). It is an inevitable fact that ecotourism (nature tourism, rural tourism) is developed and maintained in order to achieve sustainable development in the poor regions and to stop migration from rural areas to cities. The prioritization by forest villagers of taking advantage of the benefits from the opportunities in their regions will contribute to the protection of the village population and regional development.

## II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The researchers conducted a review of more than 100 research papers and statistical data all around the world in order to gather proper information about the ecotourism revenues. Countries which have potential and significant data have been featured in this review. At the end all information were summarized, and recommendations regarding such were made.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Who are Ecotourists?

Ecotourists' ages range from 35-54 years old. Eighty-two percent are college graduates, even though the rate differs by the activity usually 50% are female and 50%

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male, majority of them preferred to travel as a couple and ecotourists were found to be more willing to spend more than the regular tourists (Kasalak, 2015). According to FAO, ecotourists greatly differ from many angles, including the following: distance travelled; length of stay; desired level of physical effort and comfort; importance of nature in trip motivation; level of learning desired; amount of spending; desired activities; and personal demographics.

The review of relevant literature shows three main arguments behind the advancement of ecotourism, these are the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impact of ecotourism. These three impacts are interlaced as ecotourism support conservation via socio-economic development of local/rural communities (Das and Chatterjee, 2015) (Figure 1).

Ecotourism is one of the most important and developing sub-sector in tourism industry. That is why, 2002 was declared as the “International Year of Ecotourism” by the United Nations. The declaration of the ecotourism year contributed to the development of sustainable ecotourism (EBSCO, 2009). Developing countries are independent regarding their ecotourism revenues. However, due to the global economic conditions, political situations and natural disasters, those revenues are not stable. It is the largest and fastest growing industry

worldwide, and accounts for 10% of the world’s GDP, 7% of the global tourism market, and 1 in 10 jobs (UNWTO, 2017). Developing ecotourism activities offers large amount of job opportunities for local/rural population (Das, 2015). Thus, migration caused by unemployment from rural to urban areas could be prevented. (Çalışkan, 2018).

**Sustainable Ecotourism and Certification**

Ecotourism as an industry probably has the biggest potential in the world in terms of production factor. The number of tourists in regular tourism industry grows 1/3 of the tourists in ecotourism (UNWTO, 2018). Starmer-Smith (2004) estimated that, the percentage of ecotourism in the global tourism industry will be 5% by 2024. Because ecotourists are demanding greener and more environmentally conscious activities, ecotourism enhances the national economy and its effects. According to researchers, 60% of the ecotourists visiting Nepal were willing to pay 5-10% more when informed that the money would be spent on conservation (Cerina, 2012).

There are 100 voluntary certification programs (EBSCO, 2009) established in every aspect of the tourism industry, in order to contribute management, planning and coordination for these activities. The Mohonk Agreement, which was accepted by 20 countries in 2000, involves the social, cultural, ecological and economic rules for certification programs. The Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC) and Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) were also created by a number of NGOs such as the Rainforest Alliance, UNEP, UNWTO, Green Globe, TIES and CREST. These organizations developed and applied criteria about sustainable ecotourism. The main criteria are as follows (Soin et al., 2014):

- Sustainable management of ecotourism,
- Maximize social and economic benefits to the local/rural community,
- Maximize benefits to cultural heritage,
- Maximize benefits to the environment and protecting resources, reducing pollution, conserving biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes.

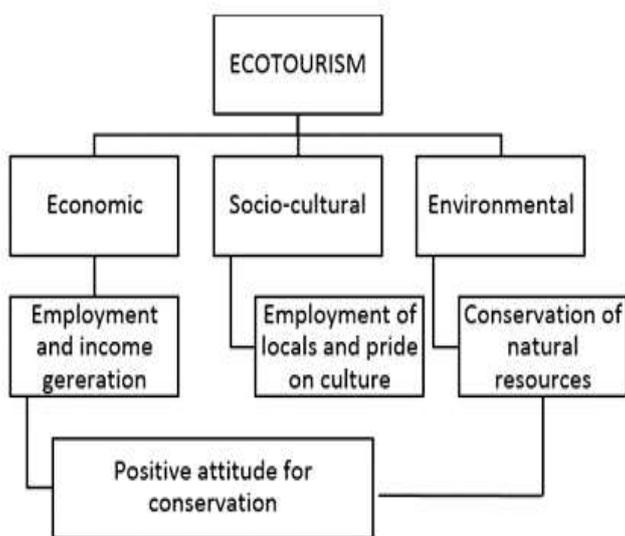


Figure 1. Main arguments in ecotourism (Das, 2015)

## Ecotourism Destinations and Revenues

Protected areas, national parks, wildlife reserves, etc. are beneficial for protecting biodiversity and combating climate change. However, it is usually difficult to translate these benefits into monetary values. People who visit these areas get benefit, and in turn those people spend money e.g. entrance fees, tours, and accommodation. Calculating the economic value is the key to maintaining existing areas for ecotourism and establishing new ones. In a study (Balmford et al., 2015), it was estimated that 8 billion visits have been made per year by ecotourists to protected areas. Out of this, 2.5 billion visits were made to areas in United States, and over 1 billion visits were made to China's ecotourism areas. The highest number of visits occurred in North America while the lowest was in Africa. Calculation of how much of the worth of these 8 billion visits estimated that direct spending comes to \$600 billion per year (Balmford et al., 2015).

Ecotourism has become an important industry in many countries such as Nepal, Kenya, Costa Rica, Mexico, New Zealand, Australia, Brazil, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, China and etc. The most fundamental distinction between ecotourists and regular tourists is that ecotourists have "come for nature". The majority of those participating in ecotourism activities are tourists from developed countries, with a high level of income with free time. In a study conducted in the Brazilian Amazon in 2000, 68% of the visitors were European (Erdoğan as cited in Kasalak (2015); 14% were American, 9% were Brazilian and 5% were Asian and African. Moreover, according to Kasalak (2015) in reference to Demir and Çevirgen, (2006); in a study conducted in Australia, it was determined that 20% of German tourists, 23% of Swiss tourists and 18% of those from Scandinavian countries came for nature-related activities.

Developed and developing countries are both giving very much importance to ecotourism because earning via foreign exchange boosts their economies. For example, total tourism revenues in

percentage within the GDP of some countries are as follows: Palau 72.6%, Macau 66.7%, Seychelles 38.7%, Bahamas 32.1%, Barbados 29.3%, Jamaica 18.6%, Kenya 5.2%, Spain 4.7%, France 2%, and USA 1%. As can be observed in some small countries (i.e. high-income economies) GDP is mostly dependent on tourism revenues (Silvano 2015).

## United States

The United States has of some of the most destinations in the world which are often visited by both local and international tourists. The number of visitors and number of visits are increasing because 70% of Americans think the environment is more important than economic growth (Strauss, 2018). Yellowstone National Park which is one of the most visited park in the US, was visited by 4,200,000 people in 2015 and it was expected to be visited at least 5,000,000 people in 2016. Another preferred destination for ecotourists is Florida. Diving in the Key West and visiting the Everglades National Park in 2008 brought \$125 million in revenue. Other than these revenues at least 500,000 jobs related to ecotourism were supported by visiting national parks in the US (<http://www.floridajobs.org>, Kasalak 2015).

## Europe

Europe's ecotourism potential is growing in recent years very rapidly. The southeast region of Europe is especially preferred by ecotourists because of their unusual, eco-friendly, and authentic small villages. Tourists who visit those areas are more interested in how the inhabitants live and survive in their communities. The Greek Islands, villages found in Macedonia and Serbia, Kosovo, as well as in Moldova (which is the border of Carpathian mountains) are the highly visited destinations by ecotourists. In Serbia ecotourism generated 100 million Euros in 2016, which constituted 16% of the total tourism revenues. In Macedonia, there is a small town where tourists can wear historic clothing, which allows them to feel and imagine what it was to live like in the old times. After the first

use of the said re-enactment project in the old town, the real estate prices increased and income from these tourist activities rose. Moreover Romania, with its beautiful eco-friendly hotels, has also been drawing more ecotourists to this region. There are 3,000 hotels which are members of the Association of Ecologic and Cultural Rural Tourism (<https://worldfootprints.com>). In France there are some hotels, villages, and camping areas which cater to ecotourism. For its part, Italy discovered ecotourism after 1980s. Most of the ecotourists come to Italy with their families and visit holiday villages. However, France and Italy was still found to earn more revenues through regular (mass) tourism than the ecotourism.

### **Costa Rica**

In addition to being one of the leading countries in ecotourism, Costa Rica is one of the rare countries which has sustainably implemented practices that are consistent to the definition of ecotourism. The country first established four national parks in 1970, comprising 1 million ha, which was 21% of its national territory. As a developing country, Costa Rica has taken advantage of and benefited from the promotion of ecotourism. From 1995-2010 international tourist arrivals increased in this region of the world. During the peak travel season, nearly 75% of the tourists indicated that they went to Costa Rica primarily because of its natural beauty and one-third of these visitors were ecotourists. In 2000 alone, Costa Rica generated around \$800 million in revenues (Kasalak 2015, <http://www.umich.edu>). Central America and the Caribbean region countries except Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Guatemala have just recently realized how ecotourism can improve their livelihood and increase the GDP of their respective countries (Gunter, 2018).

### **Africa**

The continent is one of the best destinations for those who are interested to do nature based activities. The first couple thousand visitors came to Kenya and

Tanzania in 1950s. This number increased to 400,000 in Tanzania and 900,000 in Kenya in 2000. With these increasing numbers of ecotourists, countries' revenues increased rapidly. In Kenya 35% of the total foreign exchange came from ecotourism. People in Kenya know very well that their revenues are increased because of their natural resources and wildlife opportunities. (Atieno, and Njoroge, 2018).

### **Australia**

The importance of ecotourism was long apparent in Australia. The country has prepared its first ecotourism plan in 1994. Their growth rate in terms of the number of tourists each year is 12% while the revenue increment is 6%. The most visited place in Australia is the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park which entertains 1.5 million ecotourists each year. The revenue from ecotourism activities reached \$1.1 billion in 2016.

### **Malaysia**

The country has 54 protected areas with a total of 1,483 million hectares. Its beautiful beaches, nice diving spots, fantastic biodiversity, and picturesque landscapes, draw tourists all around the world. In 2016, the country was visited by 27 million tourists and generated around \$20 billion in income. Malaysian tourism has had an average growth of 9.26% in last ten years. Despite these figures, much of the country's ecotourism potential remains largely untapped. When compared to other ASEAN nations Malaysia was number two in terms of tourist arrivals, after Thailand. The federal government of Malaysia declared that it will create 110 eco-parks as a major tourist attractions around the country. For all of these ecotourism hotspots to have lasting value, they need to be protected from the harms of mass tourism. The popularity of some areas is a threat to them and recently visitors had to be barred from entry for months so as to allow local flora and fauna to recover. Ecotourism, if managed well can be a great source of revenue, if not, it can turn into nation's natural heritage into overstressed tourist attractions (<https://cleanmalaysia.com>).

**Turkey**

Turkey also has a great potential for ecotourism. It is an obvious fact that having the 3S (sea, sun, sand) or sea tourism occupies an important place in tourism sector (Akı 2007, Soyak 2013). It is a very important the fact that Turkey’s three sides are surrounded by sea. As ecotourism has been a growing trend in the world, Turkey has a great potential to discover. In fact, a lot of work needs to be done regarding the possible ecotourism areas in Turkey (Morgül 2006; Yeşiltaş and Öztürk, 2008; Şahin and Yılmaz, 2009; Özgen, 2010; Çelik Uğuz, 2011; Met, 2012; Sezer and Bekdemir, 2017; İlhan et al., 2017; Öztürk and Kalaycı, 2018). However, at the moment, calculating economic magnitudes and effects of ecotourism in Turkey seems difficult due to the lack of data. In order to calculate these effects, inventory and field work need to be done. In discovering the potential ecotourism areas, it is crucial that a key should be created and this key should be economically scaled. The tourism income in Turkey is shown in **Figure 2** (derived from the anonymous data 2018).

The trend in Turkey’s revenues from the tourism sector shows positive linear relationship between the years of 1997-2014. After 2014, the revenues started to go down until 2017, and after this date the numbers began to increase again. The ratio of tourism sector in Turkey’s gross national product between the years 1963-2017 is given in **Figure 3** (TURSAB, 2018). The share of tourism sector in the GNP numbers were stable from 1963 up to the second half of 1980s. However, after the second half of the 80s, the share of the tourism sector in GNP is wavy and in positive trend compared to previous years. The socio-economic and socio-cultural reasons behind these results could be the subject of another study.

The average of the monthly revenue between the years of 1997-2017 is given in **Figure 4** (Anonymous, 2018). The figure also shows the relationship between the number of sunny days and the tourism activities in Turkey. It can also be observed through the trend shown that the revenues are high during the summer months, between May and October, and reaching the highest level in August.

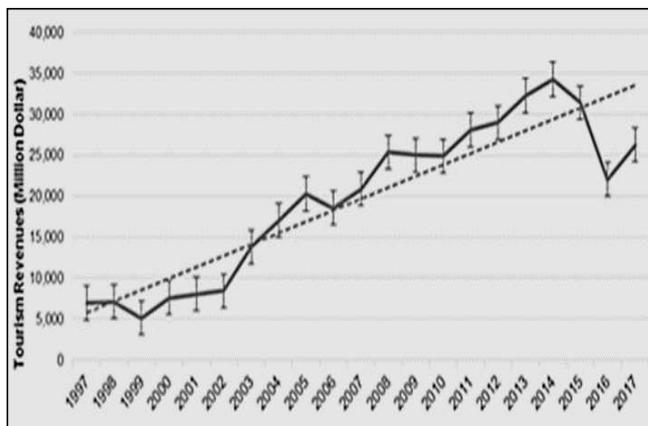


Figure 2. Tourism revenues between 1997-2017 in Turkey

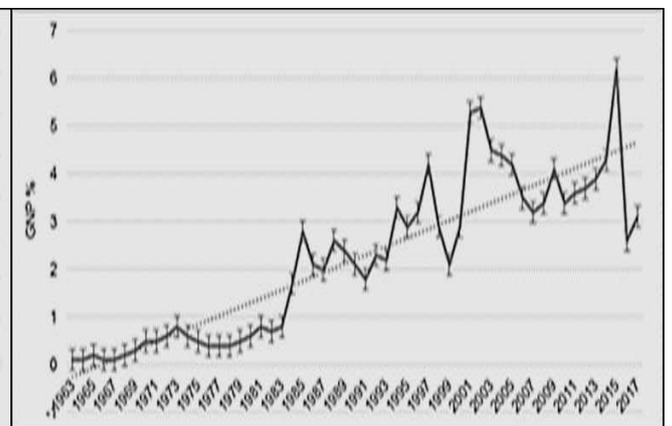


Figure 3. Share of tourism revenues in GNP in Turkey (1963-2017)

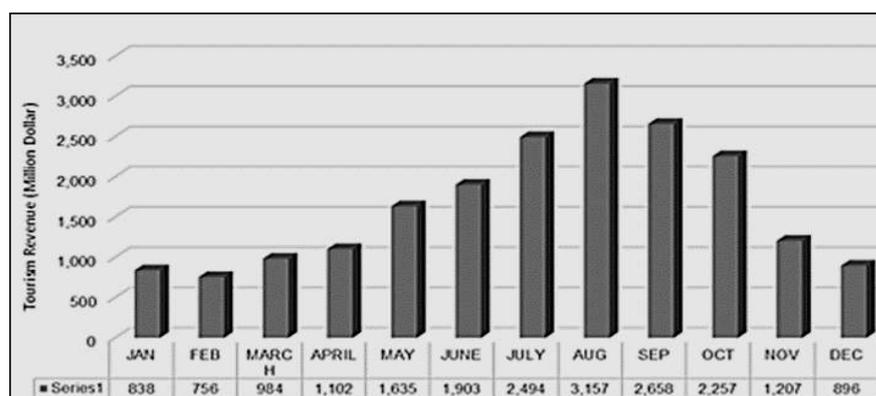


Figure 4. Average tourism revenues by months in Turkey (1997-2017)

## IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The success of any ecotourism destination lies in the satisfaction of the ecotourists after the visit. This can be determined by the increasing number of tourists visiting and their positive feedback, as well as the increase in the number of duration of visit, as well as the tourists' desire for repeated visits.

In order for local/rural communities to take advantage from the ecotourism activities, middle men/subcontractors should be minimized in this process. These activities must be managed and planned well, with the cooperation of government institutions and stakeholders. Responsible and sustainable ecotourism activities should (EBSCO, 2009):

- have carrying capacity that has been calculated correctly,
- have minimum hazardous effect on the environment,
- have direct financial benefit for conservation,
- promote local community investment,
- increase in visitor length of stay,
- be done using sustainable resource for energy (solar panels),
- local economic diversification (to not be dependent on ecotourism only),
- promote cooperation with government institutions and stakeholders, and
- promote overall environmental education.

According to the tourism strategic plan of Turkey (2023), it is scheduled to give priority in the context of ecotourism and diversification of tourism activities. Other than this it was intended to create seven thematic tourism development corridors; West Black Sea Coastal Corridor and Highland Corridor are very much important for sustainable development of ecotourism among the others. "Infrastructure unions" are planned to be established for potential ecotourism areas (Anonymous, 2007). Completing the comprehensive studies by scientists, public and private sector representatives, sustainable planning of ecotourism areas will be finalized.

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