

CHAPTER 10

FOREST ECOTOURISM AND NATURE CONSERVATION

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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10.1 INTRODUCTION

A **tourist** can be defined as a *voluntary, temporary traveller, travelling in the expectation of pleasure for the novelty and change experienced on a relatively large and non-recurrent round-trip* (Lea, 1988). **Tourism** can be defined as *the practice of travelling for pleasure, together with the business of providing services for such travellers*. International tourism is mainly a phenomenon of the late twentieth century, and shows no signs of diminishing yet. In fact, tourism is growing at a rate of about 10% per year, meaning that the number of tourist trips is roughly doubling every seven or eight years.

Tourism exists in several forms. **Mass tourism** is the sort of tourism that goes for quantity rather than quality. In Africa it is characterised by the package tours offered in Kenya, whereby tourists spend a week on safari and then a week at a beach resort. These tours offer standardised services and prices that are affordable by very many tourists, so that overall it can be quite a profitable business. However, as well as being relatively low-value, it also tends to be high-impact, involving the development of large hotels, fleets of minibuses and so on.

These days, mass tourism is going out of fashion, as tourists become more discerning. **Special interest tourism** is therefore on the increase, at a rate of 10% to 15% per year. This form of tourism aims to entice discerning tourists by catering for their specific demands, whether it be watching

wildlife, playing golf, sailing, visiting museums and art collections or whatever. By doing so, the tourism business can charge relatively high prices for the services offered, so that as much money can be made from far fewer tourists. Theoretically, this form of tourism is high-value, low-impact, but it will only work if a business can offer a service that discerning tourists will pay for.

Ecotourism is a recently-coined word for a form of special interest tourism that also aims to be environmentally sustainable, that is, one of its aims (or by-products) is to meet the needs of the people and environment of the areas being visited without compromising the ability of future generations of those same areas to meet their own needs. Ecotourists seek pleasure from experiencing the natural environment at close quarters, without changing it significantly. Many are prepared to pay handsomely for the experience.

Ecotourism has really come about because of five phenomena:

- Dissatisfaction of many tourists with the standards of mass tourism.
- Dissatisfaction with materialism and other aspects of modern life in the rich countries.
- The greater awareness amongst tourists of their potential impact on receiving environments and societies.
- A greater desire by tourists to see for themselves some of the wildlife and natural

environments which they have seen on television or in magazines.

- Realisation by host countries that ecotourism has much to offer them, especially by countries for which mass tourism is not an option.

Ecotourists are not so bothered about sun, sea and sand; they are more interested in seeing and experiencing the natural world around them. Figure 10.1 illustrates the results of a survey of tourists on safari in Kenya, in which they were asked to attribute the pleasure they gained from their experience to five main categories. Seeing, photographing and learning about the wildlife was the most important, while rest, relaxation and shopping were much less so.

Note, too, that these tourists got pleasure out of simply observing and learning. This may come as a surprise, since a people's culture is almost by definition the normal way of living for those people concerned. Locals do not pay to see locals.

But if one comes from a different culture, it can be refreshing to observe and learn about how people live under another culture; tourists are willing to pay for that experience.

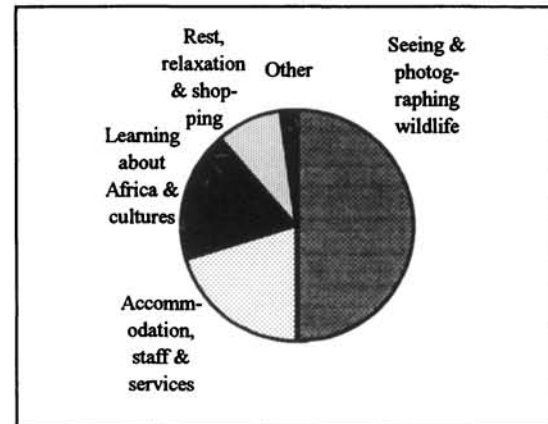


Figure 10.1. Results of a survey of tourists on safari in Kenya, in which tourists were asked to attribute their pleasure while on holiday to the five categories shown. After Brown and Henry (1989).

10.2 WHAT DOES UGANDA HAVE TO OFFER?

Uganda cannot offer the traditional trappings of mass tourism: it has no ocean beaches, and a relatively poorly-developed infrastructure making communication and travel rather difficult and at times uncomfortable. This is one reason why the number of tourists coming to Uganda has remained low compared to other countries. For example, in 1985, Uganda only received 14,000 international visitors, compared to nearly fifty times this number in Kenya. Although the number is rising, it is unlikely ever to reach the Kenyan levels.

Despite this, tourism does have the potential to be an important income-earner for Uganda, and other countries in Africa. In the 1960s, it was the third-largest earner of foreign exchange, and there is no reason why this should not be the case in the future. What Uganda can offer is access to a fascinating range of ecosystems, particularly forests, unrivalled by its neighbours. If we remember that ecotourists are looking for unspoilt

beautiful scenery and tranquillity, and a richness of wildlife that they cannot see back home, then Uganda is a natural choice. Many will have seen television programmes about chimpanzees and monkeys, or about the fate of the tropical forests, or about the fabulous snowy mountains on the equator, or about hippos on the Nile or local fishermen on Lake Victoria, and will want to see these things for themselves. Many will like the idea of sleeping in a mud hut, and mingling with bare-footed but smiling children while perhaps buying locally made baskets or carvings. They may want to feel the warmth of the tropical sun, but many will also want to experience a tropical downpour. These are all things they cannot do in their own countries, and can readily do in Uganda. However, they will not want to abandon luxury completely, so being able to get clean water and to buy sodas and local meals is also important, as is personal health and security. That rules out some African countries, but not Uganda.

10.3 PROS AND CONS OF PROMOTING FOREST ECOTOURISM

There is no point in promoting ecotourism if it encourages environmental destruction, or worsens the socio-economic situation. Box 10.1 looks at the possible benefits of ecotourism at three levels: local, national and international. Against these, we need to weigh the potential negative impacts of

ecotourism. Box 10.2 looks at some of these. In summary, ecotourism is not suitable for every situation, but certainly has a role to play in a country like Uganda.

Box 10.1
Some possible benefits of ecotourism

Local benefits

- Provides money for the local community, encouraging locals to conserve the forest in their own financial interest.
- Provides job and training opportunities for local people, leading to higher standards of living which are dependant on the conservation of the forest.
- Encourages local participation in forest management, while discouraging illegal or unsustainable forest activities that are incompatible with ecotourism, such as pit sawing and hunting.

National benefits

- Provides money for government, which increases the amount potentially available for bodies such as the Forest Department, and justifies creating and maintaining conservation areas. For example, ecotourism development in the Nyungwe Forest Reserve in Rwanda was, by the early 1990s, generating \$15,000 annually for government coffers, which was more than sufficient for paying staff and upkeep of the reserve (Offutt, 1992). Mountain and forest walking in Kota Kinabalu National Park, Sabah (Malaysia), generates sufficient funds to cover the entire Sabah National Parks budget, while tourism revenue in Kenya is soon expected to cover the total cost of managing the country's parks and reserves (Lindberg and Hawkins, 1993). In 1975, the projected annual value of Murchison Falls National Park (south) was £1900/km², most of it from tourism, whereas the gross return from timber in Budongo was only £163/km² (Laws et al., 1975).
- Boosts the national economy, since tourists visiting the forests will spend as much or more money in other parts of the country. For example, gorilla-viewing in Rwanda earned the country about \$1,000,000 annually from direct receipts, but probably ten times this when the full expenditure of those same tourists was taken into account (WCMC, 1992). Eleven per cent of the total value of exports from sub-Saharan Africa comes from tourism (Swanson, 1991). Tourism is now the world's largest employer, employing one in every 15 of the world's employees (WWF/IUCN, 1992).

International benefits

- Visitors will leave with a greater awareness of forests, conservation and the problems faced by local people, giving these subjects a higher profile in their countries of origin and helping to promote greater international awareness and, possibly, increased financial support from donor communities.

10.4 PLANNING FOR FOREST ECOTOURISM AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Saving nature by selling it is a risky business: if not well-planned then tourists can love nature to death. This is why forest ecotourism must be part of an overall framework for tourism development.

Uganda has recently produced a **Tourism Master Plan** (Abura-Ogwang, 1994). This emphasises that Uganda intends to promote special-interest tourism, and avoid some of the problems faced by countries that have relied on mass tourism. The plan makes particular mention of Uganda's forests as being one of the country's key attractions, especially as this is something that its East African neighbours cannot rival. In particular, the plan:

- encourages the development of ecotourism as a means of supporting conservation as well as communities adjacent to protected areas;

- advocates for close co-operation between the Forest Department and the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife in planning and marketing the tourist attractions under the Forest Department's jurisdiction;
- recommends that the Forest Department is represented in the inter-ministry co-ordination committee concerned with tourism development in Uganda.

The Forest Department's own contribution (Sheppard, 1995) was still in draft form at the time of writing. The objectives of the Plan are as given in Box 10.3.

Box 10.2

Some of the possible adverse impacts of ecotourism

Impacts on the physical environment

- High expectations of tourists may mean that resources such as firewood and water are used unsustainably.
- Disposal of litter and waste may become a problem.
- Trampling and erosion may become a problem. This is already evident in the peat-bogs of the Rwenzoris.

Impacts on wildlife

- Animals may be disturbed by tourists, and become rarer as a result or more prone to predation or hunting.
- The behaviour of animals such as gorillas and chimps may become altered through over habituation. This has happened with gorillas in Zaire. It may increase the risk of disease transfer from humans to primates.
- Tourists may create a demand for animal or plant products from the forest, for food or souvenirs, which could easily become unsustainable.

Impacts on local communities

- There can be conflicts of culture between tourists and locals, which can lead to resentment on both sides.
- Tourism can increase the gap between rich and poor in the local community.
- The local community can become exploited by the demands of tourism, resulting in a change of lifestyle for the worse.
- The sudden influx of cash can lead to alcoholism and other social problems in the local community.
- If local people spend their new-found wealth on timber (for house-building) or on expanding their farms into the forest, then this can be a net loss for conservation.

Box 10.3

Objectives of ecotourism development in Uganda's Forest Reserves (Sheppard, 1995)

Main objectives

- To introduce recreational development as one aspect of sustainable resource use within gazetted Forest Reserves.
- To increase public awareness, both nationally and internationally, of the outstanding variety and beauty within Uganda's forests; to foster a general public understanding of the important relationship between environmental conservation and tourism, and the benefits to be derived therefrom.
- To ensure that recreational development is carried out in a sustainable and orderly fashion, through careful planning, monitoring and control, thus helping to safeguard the environmental quality and biodiversity of the forest resource.
- To involve the local community in the planning and management of tourism development, ensuring that their needs and ideas are incorporated.
- To generate benefits for the Forest Department and local communities.

Secondary objectives

- To promote an understanding of the long-term importance of the forest resource by introducing and implementing conservation education and extension to communities adjacent to the forest reserves.
- To provide rural employment to communities bordering forest reserves, as a basis for encouraging forest conservation at community level.
- To maximise economic returns from recreational developments by providing quality facilities and services.
- To create opportunities and a favourable climate for private sector investment.
- To devise an appropriate institutional structure for overall planning and policy co-ordination and for the allocation of implementation responsibilities.

PLANNING FOR FOREST ECOTOURISM IN INDIVIDUAL FORESTS

10.5.1 General planning guidelines

A list of Forest Reserves in Uganda where ecotourism could be promoted as a main objective is currently being drawn up. In each of these, specific tourism/recreation zones will be established, based partly on the biological inventory results (see Chapter 14) and partly on the tourism potential of different parts of the forest. Even in the forests with most tourism potential, it is unlikely that more than a small percentage of the forest will be zoned specifically for tourism.

The Forest Department's tourism policy (Sheppard, 1995) specifies that development for any particular forest reserve must be in line with a forest-specific **Tourism Development Plan**, which should detail:

- the type and level of tourism which is appropriate;
- the current level of tourism and services;
- all required infrastructure and services;
- what provisions for access are needed;
- which organisations are expected to be involved and what role they will play;
- what, if any, investment or local community involvement opportunities exist;
- design and construction plans for facilities;
- training and staffing requirements;
- any other local consideration.

All of these points require careful planning. It would be very easy to ruin the very resource that tourists would want to see, through uncontrolled development of tourism infrastructure. Box 10.4 outlines some of the guiding principles that can help to make ecotourism developments pleasant for their visitors and put the developments on a firm administrative footing. Developments such as these are already under way in Budongo, Kalinzu/Maramagambo and Mabira forests, as well as in several forested National Parks (Semliki, Elgon, Bwindi and Mgahinga).

10.5.2 A case study of forest ecotourism development: Budongo Forest

In Budongo Forest, tourism development started in 1992 (Herd and Langoya, 1994). The underlying aim of tourism development was to find a way for the forest to earn money for local communities and the government, while ensuring its conservation. Two areas were seen as being suitable for tourism

development: Busingiro and Kaniyo-Pabidi (Figure 10.2).

Kaniyo-Pabidi was chosen because it represents one of the last remaining unlogged parts of the forest, and tourism was seen as a means of enabling the Forest Department to earn money from it without having to log it. In addition, it was thought to support the highest densities of chimpanzees in Budongo, presenting the possibility of developing special-interest chimpanzee-viewing. It also lies alongside the main road to Paraa in Murchison Falls National Park.

Busingiro was chosen partly because it too lies alongside a main road to or from Lake and Murchison Falls National Park. The forest has been logged, but is still rich in primates and birds and offers other attractions such as views over the forest and a small lake within the forest. An added advantage is that there are nearby local communities who stand to benefit from tourism development.

At each site, a **camp-site** has been constructed and various **forest trails** developed. The camp-sites are simple, consisting of a cleared area on the edge of the forest, with high-quality pit-latrines, cooking areas and thatched communal shelters. A **visitor centre** is planned for Busingiro.

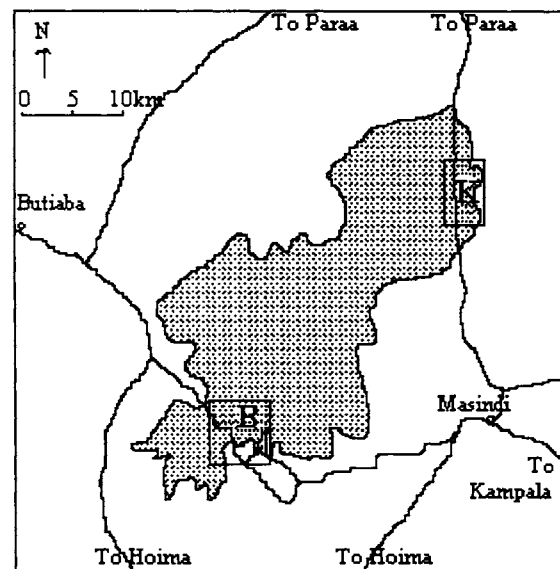


Figure 10.2. Map of Budongo Forest Reserve, Uganda (shaded area), and environs, showing location of the two tourism/recreation development zones. B = Busingiro; K = Kaniyo-Pabidi.

Box 10.4

Some guiding principles for the development of the physical and administrative infrastructure that may be necessary with forest ecotourism

Fees

- Specify fees clearly
- Make no exceptions
- Vary rates for locals, nationals and foreigners
- Give a concessionary rates for educational groups
- Set individual prices for forest entry, guided walks and camping
- Keep good records of income and expenditure
- Distribute profits between Forest Department and local community

Camp sites

- Use low visual impact design, with features adapted from local buildings
- Use local materials, contractors and labour for construction
- Use appropriate technology in the use of energy, water and sanitation
- Locate all permanent structures outside the Forest Reserve
- Maintain quiet and peaceful conditions
- Maintain a good access road
- Maintain security in parking and camping areas
- Provide a mixture of shade and sun
- Locate the site in a scenic location
- Ensure that there is clean and plentiful water
- Allow for privacy
- Keep the camp site clean
- Keep pests at bay (e.g. rats (keep rubbish out of reach), tsetse fly (possibly use traps), mosquitoes (no standing water for breeding))

Access

- Maintain clear signposts directing tourists to camp-sites and other features of interest
- Allow access into the forest only when accompanied by a guide
- Allow camping only in approved camp-sites

Trail systems

- Avoid water-courses and steep gradients to minimise erosion and silting
- Plan trails to be wide enough for two people to walk safely side-by-side, but no wider
- Avoid cutting timber trees
- Make sure trails are free of stumps, rocks etc.
- Avoid fragile areas
- Use board-walks over boggy ground
- Consider developing regularly laid out grid systems for tracking chimpanzees
- Develop gently meandering loop systems for general forest walks
- Make sure trails are clearly marked

Sanitation

- A simple V.I.P. pit latrine is suitable
- Make pit at least 7 m deep
- Locate pit at least 50 m from any water source
- Ensure latrine is cleaned daily
- Prohibit defecating in the forest
- Simple screened bucket showers are adequate, over a free-draining aggregate floor

Fuel supply

- Encourage the use of kerosene stoves or fuel-efficient stoves
- Encourage communal cooking
- Establish a source of fuelwood outside the Forest Reserve, such as a small plantation or on land belonging to local people, so that fuelwood can be sold to tourists

Refuse disposal

- Encourage tourists to take their rubbish away
- Prohibit dropping of litter in forest
- Bury biodegradable items
- Burn burnable items

In the case of Kaniyo-Pabidi, a **grid system of paths** has been established, enabling guided tourists to follow the chimpanzees through the forest without straying far from the path. At Busingiro, a series of **looped trails** have been cut, enabling guided tourists to choose walks of various lengths, without having to double back on themselves to complete their walk.

One of the most important aspects of the developments has been recruiting and training **guides** and other staff, all of whom have to be bright, pleasant, presentable and able to speak reasonable English. All have been recruited from the local communities. The guides have undergone several months of training, in order to ensure that they can interpret the forest for tourists.

For this they must know the names of trees and other plants, birds, mammals and other wildlife, and be able to tell interesting stories about them and about the forest generally, including how local people use the forest and how the forest is managed. The guides are being set up to operate as a co-operative, so that they share the profits from tourism and work together to maintain high standards.

Chimpanzee habituation is another time-consuming process, involving tracking the chimps daily and attempting to stay with them until they no longer see humans as a threat. This has taken over two years so far, and the process is not yet complete. Once it is complete, then small groups of tourists will be able to track the chimpanzees and observe them at close range, in return for their dollars, a potentially lucrative operation.

The project is now entering a second phase during which it is intended to involve the local community more in tourism-related activities (such as selling honey and handicrafts), and in a conservation education programme. Two local committees have been established, comprising people elected by and from the adjacent local

communities. These committees are overseeing the development of project activities in their respective areas, and are developing a sense of "ownership" of the projects which is seen as very important for the long-term success of the work. The guides have been trained in participatory rural appraisal techniques, and, together with the project co-ordinators, have carried out baseline surveys in the surrounding communities to find out what development problems exist, what peoples' expectations are of the project, and how the project might be able to contribute to local development.

These developments cost money, and as yet the project is not self-sustaining, relying on funding from the EC Natural Forests Management and Conservation Project, from GTZ and from USAID, together with the input of a Forest Officer and a British volunteer. Ultimately, it is intended that revenue will exceed spending, at which time the profits will be shared between the guide co-operative, the Forest Department and the local community. Within a few years, annual revenue is expected to rise to at least US\$ 28,000,000 and possibly as much as US\$ 243,400,000, making tourism one of the major contributors to the local economy.

10.6 SUMMARY

- Tourism is growing rapidly worldwide.
- Ecotourism is growing particularly rapidly, as tourists increasingly demand a higher quality experience.
- Uganda has much to offer the ecotourist, especially its forests.
- Ecotourism is a means towards an end: promoting conservation through economic and local community development.
- Ecotourism development should progress in line with the national tourism policy and the policy of the Forest Department.
- At the forest level, development should be according to a tourism development plan.
- It is easy to make mistakes with ecotourism, so proceed slowly and carefully, and never lose sight of the objectives.
- If in doubt, consult widely.

10.7 FURTHER READING

Lea, J. 1988. *Tourism and development in the Third World*. Routledge, London. 88 pp.
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WWF/IUCN. 1992. *Beyond the green horizon: a discussion paper on principles for sustainable tourism*. WWF/IUCN, Gland.