



Ecotourism and Environmental Sustainability

Principles and Practice

Edited by **Jennifer Hill and Tim Gale**

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Edited by
JENNIFER HILL AND TIM GALE
University of the West of England, UK



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*To our mothers, Janet Hill and Mercia Gale,
for their unfailing love, guidance and friendship.*

ECOTOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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Preface

This edited collection has its origins in the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG) Annual International Conference 2006, held at the Society's headquarters in Kensington Gore, London. At this conference the Biogeography Research Group and the Geography of Leisure and Tourism Research Group of the RGS-IBG co-sponsored a session entitled 'Ecotourism and Environmental Sustainability'. We convened this session, with the intention of interrogating the complex interactions between ecotourism and a range of 'natural' environments, from polar to tropical and terrestrial to aquatic. Notionally, ecotourism helps to conserve these environments, many of which could be construed as 'fragile', in addition to helping improve the welfare of local people (thus embodying the principles of inter- and intra-generational equity that lie at the heart of sustainable development); it can also engender more positive attitudes towards the environment and desirable behaviour in participants, both at the destination and following their return home. However, ecotourism has also attracted criticism, not least with regards to the environmental cost of air travel to popular destinations such as Costa Rica and Kenya, the 'true' motivations of ecotourists (which appear to have as much to do with sustaining the ego as the environment), and the potential for unwittingly disturbing ecosystems through co-presence.

With this in mind, we invited papers from either side of the natural-/social-scientific divide that offered theoretical or practical insights into the complex interactions between ecotourism and the natural environment, from the local to the global scale. This book incorporates papers presented at the aforementioned RGS-IBG conference, together with contributions from selected academics and practitioners. The volume examines critically the ambivalence that lies behind the concept of ecotourism as synonymous with environmentally sustainable tourism; likewise, it resists a dominant trend to showcase best (or most sustainable) practice.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all contributors for their timely return of draft and final manuscripts, and for their sustained engagement with a project of some length. We would also like to thank Paul Revell from the Cartographic Unit at the University of the West of England, Bristol for production of many of the figures that appear in the book. Our final thanks are extended to our colleagues, students and loved ones who had to bear with us as we buried ourselves under proofreading, organization of content and synthesis of ideas, all of which distracted us from myriad other duties. Their forbearance and understanding has ultimately allowed this book to come to print.

Jennifer Hill and Tim Gale
2009

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PART 1

The Context of Ecotourism and Environmental Sustainability