

Eco Lodges and their Effects on Local Communities and the Environment in Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT

The world is in a critical period where knowledge of our environmental impact must be used to create sustainable innovations such as eco lodges. Eco lodges are a form of accommodation that are designed to have little to no effect on the environment it is located in while also having a positive socioeconomic impact. This chapter investigates the current success and future potential of these places in Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, and India. When properly managed, there has been massive success for eco lodges for owners and visitors. Some highlights of these findings include many lodges recovering from startup costs in the first year, 94% of visitors to lodges in the Maguri Wetlands wanting to visit again, and eco tourists staying in lodges longer than the average tourists' vacation. It was found that these places provide a variety of activities for guests that are all ecofriendly. Through research this chapter draws the conclusion that this will be a profitable and sustainable innovation in the tourism industry.

INTRODUCTION

Eco tourism is a rapidly growing subsection of the tourism industry. It can be defined as a sustainable form of travel that aims to conserve the environment and improve the well-being of local communities and people. Recently, there has been rapid growth in this sector of the tourism industry, specifically among environmentally conscious travelers. This comes from the overall global trend of being eco-friendly and the rise in awareness regarding climate change and maintaining the health of the biosphere. Every day, new innovations are being made to combat this issue. When thinking of how to solve this scientific problem, most minds immediately expect some sort of technology to be the solution the world is waiting for. Innovations such as the electric car, solar power, or plant based packaging are all significant steps in that direction. However, the effort to protect the environment needs to encompass all industries.

Eco lodges provide a unique opportunity for the eco-tourism sector, focusing on blending conservation and local communities with sustainable travel. Travel writer (Balmforth, 2022) says, “An Eco lodge is most simply described as an initiative that focuses on minimizing the negative effect lodging has on the environment, while positively contributing to local communities and / or conservation efforts. Eco lodges focus on using renewable energy sources to provide power to their properties as well as using energy efficient lighting and water preservation” and “are often located in remote places including jungles, beaches, mountains, and forested areas. Since they are often located in remote areas, they tend to depend heavily on the surrounding environments, making use of our natural world in a positive way” (Balmforth, 2022). Activities provided by these attractions often attempt to showcase the biodiversity of the region. Guests may participate in amenities such as nature walks, bird watching, kayaking or other river tours and much more. As important as protecting nature is, these lodges simultaneously provide economic relief and control to local communities allowing many people to remain on their native land without being pushed out by the tourism industry and still getting to share their region with the world.

Although eco lodges seem to be a straightforward subsection of the tourism industry, they often face many challenges. These can range from balancing tourism expectations to environmental conservation and the local communities. Tourists hope to be welcomed in and immersed in local life when visiting these unique locations. Since these places depend heavily on nature, they are often found in areas with low populations who are not prepared to welcome many guests. In addition, the local infrastructure must be considered as many visitors will likely venture outside of the eco lodge activities and dining areas. Managing these factors can prove very difficult for eco lodges and can often lead to complicated issues that significantly impact the overall success of the tourism venture. Smart and compassionate ownership is required to sustain growth and economic prowess over time. Despite the ecological and social benefits associated with eco-tourism, the financial implications and sustainability of such projects often receive less attention. This paper will also examine how eco-lodges manage their financial resources to ensure long-term operational success, aligning environmental goals with economic viability.

Eco tourism and eco lodging are vital in promoting a more sustainable form of tourism that respects the environment and local cultures. To further progress the stability and impact of eco-tourism, investors and stakeholders must innovate in sustainable practices and form deep and meaningful connections with the local communities. These strategies would assist in ensuring not only the preservation of the natural resources and environments around these lodges but would also align with global sustainability goals. This paper aims to answer the research question: what is the past success and future potential of eco lodges in terms of their environmental impact, socioeconomic benefits, visitor satisfaction, and long-term sustainability?

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