

Critical Aspects of Sustainable Development in Tourism: Advanced Ecotourism Education

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Abstract

Ecotourism is obviously with color of ecological education and popularization of ecological science. However, as a result of lack in environmental consciousness and ecological knowledge among tourism stakeholders, quite a lot of unsustainable development issues appear in ecotourism. Based on this background, the author puts forward advanced ecotourism education and goes deep into its necessity and critical aspects.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Advanced ecotourism education, Sustainable development

1. Proposal of advanced ecotourism education

1.1 Status quo of ecotourism education

After the concept of ecotourism was put forward at the international environmental protection conference in Mexico in 1986, it was immediately responded by all countries in the world, and received extensive research and practice. There is one viewpoint which holds that, ecotourism is to share, recognize and protect natural and cultural heritage from destruction under direction of ecology views and theories, which is a specific tour activity in a particular form with obvious color of ecological education and popularization of ecological science. This definition reflects the fact that ecotourism has certain educational connotation. That is, ecotourism has the objective to protect ecological environment and educate ecological tourists and other tourism stakeholders. With emergence of ecological environmental issues in development of ecotourism, human beings begin to concentrate on ecological issues in sightseeing districts. At present, ecotourism in China is still limited to the level of mass tourism at an initial stage. A common scenic zone not only doesn't have any consciousness of environmental education, but also hasn't had any conditions to conduct scientific research on environmental education and its human resources. Even if this scenic zone opens a natural preservation zone for ecotourism, few of them are making tentative exploration into ecotourism education. Together with lack of environmental awareness of the citizens and deficiency in ecological knowledge, ecotourism education in China seriously lags behind the vigorous development of ecotourism.

1.2 Connotation of advanced ecotourism education

So far, there have been relatively few studies on ecotourism education in the academic circle, and standpoints and perspectives of these studies differ greatly from each other. Tong Mei et al proposed the necessity of attaching importance to ecological protection education from the perspective of ecological protection education; Abdirahman-Halik pointed out the necessity of ecotourism education by his observation in destruction of tourism resources; Zhao Huaqiong recommended strengthening ecotourism education by taking into consideration the laggard condition of ecotourism education, etc. Yet, neither of them have mentioned the concept and specific content of ecotourism education. In order to enhance the ecological environmental protection awareness and quality of the mass public, focus and emphasize ecotourism education and guarantee sustainable development requirement of ecotourism, the author put forward advanced ecotourism education and enriched its connotation through comparison of traditional tourism or ecotourism in terms of educational subject, educational method, educational content and result (See as Table 1). That is, advanced ecotourism education refers to promotion and popularization of a socialized and popular ecotourism knowledge from different perspectives with multiple forms in order to cultivate the concept of sustainable development among tourism stakeholders, intensify their basic knowledge and awareness of ecotourism and improve their capacity and skills of ecological environmental protection.

2. Necessity of advanced ecotourism education

2.1 Advanced ecotourism education being the premise of ecotourism development

Ecotourism is more than pure ecological and natural tourism, but more a tourism activity to reinforce responsibilities for protection on natural resources and ecological environment by means of tourism. Ecotourism education may enable tourism developers to be well aware of environmental protection, abide by the natural rules of biological diversification to the hilt and reduce and even refuse any short term economic behavior. Ecological tourists ought to have knowledge and self-consciousness of environmental protection and cherish natural and cultural values; local residents and government ought to have sufficient environmental awareness and knowledge and seek for common development of the three aspects of economy, ecology and society. In such a way, a harmonious and unified ecological link between human beings and the nature can be embodied, so that

sustainable development of tourism resources and environment.

2.2 Advanced ecotourism education being the purpose and task of ecotourism

Ecotourism is an intangible big school for ecotourism education, being nationwide and whole process, and may reflect participation by the mass public. It is the primary content and objective in the whole process of ecotourism to advocate ecological education, to enable protection of natural landscape and human landscape, protection of wild animals and plants, awareness of the great nature and love of the nature to become a common desire of tourists, to make ecological virtues and vices, ecological justice and ecological obligation become conscious behavior and code of ethics of tourists, to grasp fundamental knowledge and skills to protect ecology, and to achieve the purpose of imitating the nature.

2.3 Advanced ecotourism education being the objective requirement of sustainable development of ecotourism

Sustainable development of ecotourism touches upon multiple aspects, such as environment, society and economy, etc. On the part of a tourist, ecotourism means nothing but an experience and a way of consumption; on the part of a developer and operator, ecotourism is a way of exploitation and a form of product; on the part of tourist attraction managerial personnel, ecotourism is a way of management. Development of ecotourism ought to be based on the following premise, that is, to respect nature, follow ecological rules, advocate harmony and unification between human beings and the nature, seek for coordinated development of economic, social, ecological and environmental aspects on the basis of scientific development, and pursue maximization of economic benefit on the basis of ecological, environmental and social benefits.

3. Critical aspect for implementation of advanced ecotourism education

3.1 Core of advanced ecotourism education: the idea of sustainable development

Ecotourism ought to be harmoniously developed together with the natural environment, which should not only satisfy requirement of ecotourism development, but should also bring a positive effect to production environment. We need to establish a brand-new and scientific ecological tourism concept among all citizens in the whole society and bear in mind the sustainable development awareness and concept of “respecting ecotourism resources and environment for growth and development of the future generation”. We should also advocate ecological value, ecological moral ethics and ecological aesthetical concept by holding such activities as popularization of scientific education and training about ecotourism all over the whole society, strengthen propaganda of the value and significance of ecotourism resources and gradually form an ecological environmental atmosphere of civilization tourism, scientific tourism and healthy tourism.

3.2 The subject: suppliers of ecotourism

First of all, successful ecotourism rests upon the high quality of suppliers of ecotourism (including ecotourism planners, developers, operators and managers). Usually, ecotourism development zone refers to the sensitive area of ecological environment. Thus, we have to strengthen standardized management of tourism planning, carry out the system stipulated by tourism planners and guarantee the quality of tourism planning. It is necessary to invite ecological experts and tourism experts to hold regular lectures and open training classes, etc, guarantee practically the good consciousness and high quality of ecological environmental protection of ecotourism developers, operators and managers and reinforce education on their responsibility and enterprise-push-and-go. As an important instructor of popularization of science in ecotourism activities, a tour guide ought to obtain an Ecotourism Tourist Guide Qualification Certificate, grasp knowledge about ecology, forestry and environment protection and knowledge about the natural, geographical aspects of the ecotourism destination per se, take propaganda of environmental protection of tourism as his own duty, bring into full play his role as a consultant and spreader of education about ecotourism knowledge, and play a significant part in standardizing, guiding and educating tourists.

3.3 Focal point: whole process education on ecological tourists

Ecological tourists are the market converters for value of ecotourism resources and are also protectors and destructors of ecotourism resources, so we have to conduct education on them in the aspect of correct ecological value discovery and ecological appreciation. First of all, we should bring everything under control before the event and after the event. For instance, we can inform tourists in advance of such aspects of environment, price of the ticket and tourism activities, etc.; we may strengthen dredging of tourists, such as resolving the problems of congestion of a large scale of tourists and traffic jam. The government may set up some recreational spots with the property of education nearby tourism districts, and design or shoot some interesting content with local characteristics and favor, etc. Secondly, human-based management should be adopted to control behavior of tourists. We can advocate humanized slogans to infect or influence behavior of tourists and present cordial, delightful and fresh slogans to tourists. In one word, we can lead the civilized behavior of tourists by means of cultural activities. Finally, the management mode of participation by tourists can be carried out. For instance, we can provide a benign circumstance, design some activity projects with integration of knowledge, entertainment and interestingness, stimulate tourists' interests and hobbies in ecological knowledge and conduct unconsciously influenced environmental protection education.

3.4 Extension: emotional education of local residents

Castas from American Ecotourism Society elaborated the importance of local residents in participation in and acceptance of ecological tourism education in his “Ecotourism and Its Status in Sustainable Development”. Ecological tourism districts are mostly located in economically underdeveloped areas, where cultural awareness of local residents is low, consciousness of participation is weak and competence of participation is poor. Considering such a situation, the government can take resource environment of the tourist destination as the theme of education, regarding emotional content as being central and theoretical education as being subsidiary, and design some relatively vivid and lively content and activities for the purpose of enabling them to obtain corresponding knowledge on ecological tourism through experience. Furthermore, the government can enhance tourism awareness and participation consciousness of local residents by scientific popularization education of ecological tourism, help them establish correct cultural concept and concept of resource environment, and stimulate their desire of participation in tourism and enthusiasm in local traditional culture. Also, the government may improve competence and level of participation in tourism among local residents by continuous training of tourism management and service skills.

3.5 Guarantee: legislation of ecotourism

Usually, an ecological tourism district is also an ecological fragile region and species sensitive region. As has been proved in practice, almost all countries or regions that are successful in ecological tourism have stipulated strict laws and regulations, or have special institutions to supervise implementation of these laws and regulations. For instance, in 1916, USA passed the act for setting up the National Park Service, which enabled management of Yellowstone National Park to be brought into the legalization track. Therefore, by combination of the practical situation in China, we should establish and make sound relevant policies, rules and regulations that may facilitate sustainable development of ecological tourism and reinforce practically supervision and management on the department of tourism and scenic regions. The government should speed up establishing and releasing a relatively complete ecotourism act and details about its implementation, including quality class standard of ecological tourism areas, general rules for planning of ecological tourism areas and regulations of management of ecological tourism resources, etc, with the purpose to enable ecotourism to realize the state of “having rules to follow and having laws and abide by”.

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Table 1. Comparison between advanced ecotourism education and traditional tourism education & elementary ecotourism education

Feature	Traditional tourism	Ecotourism	Advanced ecotourism education
Purpose	Economic benefit	Economic benefit and environmental benefit	Economic benefit, environmental benefit and social benefit
Subject of education	Tourism developers, operators & managers and tourism service personnel	Tourism developers, operators & managers and tourists	Tourism developers, operators and managers, tourists, residents in tourism districts and tourism service personnel
Educational method	Formal education and training	Particular emphasis on formal education and training and assistance of propaganda means	Equal significance of formal education, training and propaganda
Educational content	Improvement of management competence and service skills of tourism practitioners	Training of ecological environmental awareness of tourism practitioners	Training of sustainable development concept of relevant tourism groups, and improvement of their ecological, environmental protection awareness and competence
Results	Short term and unstable development	Relatively stable development	Long term and stable sustainable development