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**Ecotourism and Environmental Education : Opportunities and  
Constraints for Sustainability.**  
**Case study in Phuket Island, Thailand.**

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**Abstract**

Ecotourism, which typically involves nature-based tourism, plays an increasing role in today's environmental management. As environmental conservation has, in many cases, suffered from a limited budget, funding ecotourism is perceived as a way to provide additional resources to finance environmental conservation efforts. In some cases, revenue generated from ecotourism can be substantial and can be used to provide alternative employment/income to local residents. This alternative employment also helps to reduce the pressure on encroachment and environmental destruction by the local people. Ecotourism is, thus, seen here as a vehicle for sustainable development.

As ecotourism involves human interaction with nature, it inevitably asserts a pressure on the environment. Overcrowding, waste and littering, pollution or commercialization resulting from ecotourism can also accelerate environment destruction. For this reason, there is a need to carefully promote ecotourism so that it will not become an additional threat to the environment. For ecotourism to benefit society but not damage natural heritage, it has to recognize the carrying capacity of the environment and not expand beyond that threshold. Controlling ecotourism within the limit of the carrying capacity of the environment can be accomplished via sound management techniques (park management) or the use of economic instruments such as user charges (or entrance fees), various kinds of taxes, and imposing a limit on the number of visitors or tradable permits. These economic instruments aim to control ecotour activities so that the marginal benefit (revenue) equals the marginal social and private

cost (environmental damage plus opportunity cost of all inputs) and, hence, maximize the net social welfare to society.

In a recent literature review found that only relaxation exceeded learning in importance as a motivator for many leisure activities. They found that from analysis of a number of studies, considerable gains occurred in factual knowledge, recognition memory, and behavior of skills during leisure participation. However, evidence of attitude change was less compelling. The opportunity to learn, whether that learning be cognitive, affective or motor skills development has been an implicit value of travel and tourism. They further agree that what they call the big issues of learning, such as environmental sensitivity and stewardship, pride and commitment to a nation's heritage, have not been addressed in the context of leisure.

Tourists' opportunities to learn during their travels are many, though it could be argued that the quality of these learning opportunities varies considerably. Tourists to natural areas (national parks and similar reserves) have long been offered a range of environmental and cultural interpretive opportunities, ranging from interpretive signs, brochures, booklets and other printed material, and personal experiences with rangers and other interpretive guides. Defined interpretation as an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objectives, by firsthand experience and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information

Interpretation can be thought of, then, as a form of non-formal environmental education carried out in a largely recreational setting, in which the visiting population is provided with opportunities to become more aware of particular concepts and phenomena by firsthand experience. Environmental education differs from interpretation in that it is a more formal approach to learning, has a more rigorous structure, and presents information more in the form of information to be learned.

Ecotourism and Environmental Education in Thailand recommended the following key goals of environmental education:

- To foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
- To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
- To create new patterns of behaviour of individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment.