

Community Based Ecotourism: Best Practice Stories and Resources



The terms community-based tourism (CBT) and community-based ecotourism are commonly used to describe the type of tourism that, recognizing the significant social, environmental and economic impacts tourism can have, primarily focuses on tourism's benefits to the local communities.

According to WWF International¹, community-based ecotourism takes the social dimension of ecotourism a stage further, by developing “a form of ecotourism where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community.” Community-based ecotourism, therefore, fosters sustainable use of land and natural resources. Moreover, it embraces both collective responsibility and individual initiatives within the community. While the definition and usage of the terms CBT and community-based ecotourism may vary from one country or region to another, what matters most are not the names, but the principles of social and environmental responsibility behind the action.

The following are some examples of initiatives in the Asia Pacific region that focus on local communities.

¹ WWF International, Guidelines for Community-based Ecotourism Development, 2001

REST – Best of CBT in Thailand

The Responsible Ecological Social Tours (REST) Project works to assist local Thai communities in developing their own small-scale sustainable tourism projects which aim to develop the skills and confidence of local community members, create an opportunity for host communities and their guests to share their knowledge and experiences, and develop their commitment to protect the natural environment.

According to REST, one of the most important aspects of CBT is that “communities choose how they wish to present themselves to the world.” REST’s CBT projects support grassroots conservation activities and promote environmental awareness. Best examples include:

- In Koh Yao Noi, CBT income has directly supported a local conservation club’s coastal patrols to prevent illegal fishing.
- In Koh Yaow Noi, CBT has helped improved the local environment through mangrove rehabilitation plots and seagrass protection.
- In Mae Hong Son, local farmers have begun re-introducing wild orchid species into areas of the forest which had previously been deforested.

See www.rest.or.th/cbttours/default.asp for more information about REST’s CBT initiatives.

Award-winning Himalayan Homestay Program in Ladakh, India

Himalayan Homestays, an innovative community-based ecotourism program by the Snow Leopard Conservancy, was a winner of the Global Vision Awards 2005 (www.travelandleisure.com/globalvision) in recognition for its “exceptionally farsighted program” that links tourism with conservation through culturally and environmentally friendly homestays. The homestays serve as a means to support local mountain communities and protect the endangered snow leopard, a species endemic to the region. The program has also transformed the common perception of the snow leopard, from that of a dangerous predator that attacks livestock to an animal whose presence draws travelers and provides important economic opportunities to villagers throughout the region.

With locals now increasingly involved in efforts to protect the snow leopard, Himalayan Homestays is a model of a self-sustaining and profitable conservation program. The program aims to ensure that hosts are able to develop unique mountain experience through Homestay, and obtain a fair return for their services and investment, and to contribute to conserving local cultural and natural heritage.

See www.snowleopardconservancy.org/eco-tourism.htm for more information about the traditional village homestay program.

Experience Tourism Differently with Go Differently

Go Differently is a UK-based ethical tour operation specializing in small group and tailor-made trips, as well as volunteering/voluntourism itineraries primarily in Southeast Asia (Thailand, Cambodia, India, Laos, Bhutan, and Indonesia). Go Differently offers unique community-based tourism experience that combine CBT and volunteer programs, including homestays in tsunami-affected villages on Thailand’s North Andaman coast, which aim to educate the participants about traditional ways of life and contribute to the conservation of the natural environment; and a tailor-

made voluntourism tour in Southern Thailand supported by the local Kiriwong Community-based Tourism Club.

“Community-based tourism does not simply seek to maximise profits for investors. Rather, it is more concerned with the impact of tourism on the community and the environment. CBT emerges from a community development strategy, using tourism as a tool to strengthen community organisation through community-wide participation.” (From Go Differently website: What is Community-Based Tourism?)

See www.godifferently.com/community_based_tourism.asp for more information on Go Differently’s CBT programs.

Sustainable Pro-Poor Tourism with SNV

SNV, a Netherlands based international development organization, provides advisory services to governments and local organizations in developing countries. SNV currently works in 31 countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe. SNV Asia operates in two sub regions: the Mekong (Vietnam and Laos) and the Hindu Kush Himalayas (Nepal and Bhutan).²

In 2001, SNV Vietnam launched the very first community based tourism initiative in Vietnam. This Sustainable Tourism pilot project in Sapa aims to establish mechanisms for more equitable sharing of the benefits of tourism, to support the active participation of the community in decision-making and implementation, and to increase the capacity of local stakeholders in reducing the negative cultural and environmental impacts of tourism. The pilot project was successfully implemented, with enthusiastic support from the local stakeholders, serving as an important lesson for the national and provincial authorities on the benefits of responsible tourism and its potential for poverty alleviation.

For more information about SNV Vietnam and its tourism initiatives, go to: www.snv.org.vn

Asian Encounters - Helping IT Help Rural Communities

Specializing in empowering poor communities in Asia with information and communication technologies, **Asian Encounters** helps promote responsible community-based tourism that is sensitive to the needs of the local community, its culture and its environment.

Asian Encounters’ recent projects include constructing a user-friendly content management system to help CBT operators build websites, holding a seminar on e-marketing of CBT in Nepal; and contribution of a paper “E-Community-Based Tourism for Asia’s Indigenous People,” to be published by Idea Group (www.idea-group.com) in the book *Indigenous People and Information Technology*.³

For more information about Asian Encounters, and to sign up for its electronic newsletter, go to: www.asianencounters.org.

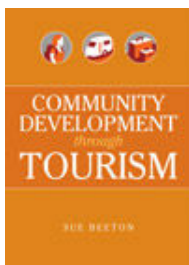
² SNV/IUCN Sustainable Tourism Project, “Community Based Tourism Development in Sapa/Vietnam”

³ <http://project.it.uts.edu.au/indigenous-it>

Resources on Community-Based Ecotourism

Community Based Tourism for Conservation and Development: A Resource Kit

The *Resource Kit* serves as a guide for planners and field based operators to design and manage community-based tourism projects. For more information on the Mountain Institute see: www.mountain.org

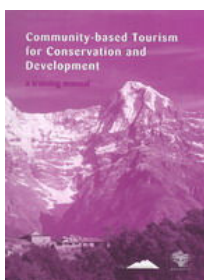


Community Development Through Tourism

Community Development Through Tourism examines the development of local communities through the healthy integration of community planning, business planning and tourism planning. It explores the most pertinent tourism and business theories, moving from strategic planning to community empowerment and practice.

www.publish.csiro.au/nid/21/pid/5336.htm

Community-based Tourism for Conservation and Development: A Trainer's Manual



Jointly developed by The Mountain Institute (TMI) (www.mountain.org) and Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC) (www.recoftc.org), this manual for trainers incorporates TMI's field-based experiences in Community-based Tourism (CBT) development in South Asia along with RECOFTC's interactive learning experiences. TIES Board member Nandita Jain is one of the main writers who contributed research and articles for the manual.

The main purpose of this manual is to provide training or facilitation guidelines for individuals, organizations or institutions that have an interest in building knowledge, skills, and experience of field workers either by using CBT Development or the Appreciative Participatory Planning and Action (APPA) approach. The training activities contained in this manual are designed to help participants develop the understanding and basic skills necessary in order to apply the concepts of CBT development effectively and efficiently. Experiential learning techniques have been applied to encourage contributions from all learners and participants in order to gather experience, reflect on their learning, and generalize their own understanding and concepts for further application in different contexts.

Linking Communities, Tourism and Conservation – A Tourism Assessment Process

This new publication produced by Conservation International (www.conservation.org) and The George Washington University (www.gwu.edu) provides field practitioners with tools to perform rapid assessments and analysis of potential ecotourism destinations. The manual offers practitioners with a practical guide for planning ecotourism sites that safeguard a destination's cultural heritage, enhance its natural environment, and improve the welfare of the local population. The manual provides a detailed planning framework and easy-to-use processes.

Containing criteria and principles on how to properly build sustainable and ecotourism developments, the hands-on manual also is a tool for those engaged in applying tourism as a strategy for biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction.