

# Responsible Tourism and Ecotourism: Principles, Approaches, Best Examples, and Some Key Points

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**Submission:** November 14, 2023; **Published:** November 29, 2023

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## Abstract

Let me start this opinion article with a statement: Ecotourism (ET) cannot be but responsible. Therefore, I strongly believe responsible tourism (RT) is not another form of tourism; it is an approach to a rationale *visa vis* tourism as socio-economic activity adopted and implemented by all tourism stakeholders, i.e., government and local administrations, tourists, residents, and business sector. The following points outline the key elements underlining the two concepts to develop some highlights and key takeaways.

## Definitions, Essential Components and Principles

A comparison between RT and ET is always useful. Let us start with the definition and meaning of two concepts. RT is "tourism that creates better places for people to live in and to visit [1]. RT is what we do to make tourism more sustainable; it is about how we use tourism to create sustainable development to benefit destinations. Hence, RT requires that all involved stakeholders take responsibility for their actions. On the other hand, ET is "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" [2]. It is a form of sustainable tourism (ST) that focuses on the natural environment and community development. It is intended to provide tourists with an insight into the effect of human beings on the environment and cultivate a greater appreciation of their natural habitats. The main underlying idea for RT is to take responsibility and actions and undertake initiatives to make tourism more sustainable [3]. For the ET, the key idea is to visit natural sites ecologically and socially responsible to gain a deeper understanding of the local culture and be responsible for conserving nature, wildlife, and cultures. The principles of RT include the following: to minimize negative impacts; to make positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage; to generate greater economic benefits and enhance the well-being of host communities; to improve working conditions and access to the industry; to involve

local people in decisions that affect their lives; and to provide more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people [4]. The principles of ET include the following: to reduce the adverse effects on the environment and culture; to educate the tourists on the requirements of conservation; to maintain and preserve the ecosystem; to monitor acceptable changes in tourism development; to seek to improve financial benefits for the countries, and communities; to depend on environment-friendly infrastructures; to preserve local flora and fauna, and yet to support the natural and cultural ecosystem.

It is worth pointing out that both tourisms have a common key driver: The realization of turning the world into a better place is the underlying motivating factor in all sustainable approaches and actions, as well as RT and ET. This position that inspires the tourists and the hosts to create a favorable realm of interaction is the key driver to RT and ET. Therefore, both concepts have the same essential components, and both of them rest on some fundamental functional units, such as Awareness-building programs; Reliable information creating a favorable impact on the guest and positive interaction with locals; Boosting/enhancing responsible human and tourist behavior; Improve the environmental, socio and cultural atmosphere/ambiance; Enhance the standard of living of local communities, and Create attractive experiences [5].

### Sustainable Tourism, Responsible Tourism, and Ecotourism: What are the differences?

It is believed there are some subtle differences between ST, RT, and ET, although the terms often seem to be synonymous because of few overlapping features; that is why confusion prevails. Sustainability is the ambition. The main goal of the sustainability paradigm in tourism is to minimize the negative impact of tourism on the environment and local communities. It ensures that all resources are used optimally. In turn, ST helps preserve the natural world and local traditions, culture, and heritage. Besides, the sustainability approach provides social and economic benefits to the local communities. The sustainable activities ensure the long-term future of tourism. The WTO (World Tourism Organization) advocates optimal and judicious use of natural resources in tourism, respecting the socio-cultural fabric of the destination and ensuring viable long-term tourism operations benefiting the destination as a whole [6]. RT is about what we do as service providers (businesses), local communities, and consumers (tourists) to realize the aspiration of sustainability. RT is not the same as ST. Responsibility requires that we say what we are doing to improve tourism and be transparent about what we achieve. RT is about using tourism to make better places to live in and better places to visit. In RT, tourists and hosts are responsible for ensuring the above two aspects are maintained. RT and ST have the same goal, that of sustainable development [7]. Therefore, the pillars of RT are the same as those of sustainable tourism - environmental integrity, social justice, and maximizing local economic benefits. ET is a form of tourism intended to support conservation efforts and observe wildlife. Even though it focuses on the environmental factors of destinations, it also implies respecting the locals dwelling around them. The tourists' attitude matters in RT and ET. While they visit a place, they strive to create a positive impact and come back enriched from a new cultural exposure. Therefore, RT supports ST and ET. The major difference between RT, ST, and ET is that in RT, individuals, organizations/entities, businesses, and all stakeholders are asked to take responsibility for their actions and the impacts of their actions. The emphasis on responsibility puts the task firmly in the hands of everyone involved in tourism government, product owners and operators, transport operators, community services, NGOs and local associations, tourists, local communities, and industry associations. All must be concerned and responsible [8].

### Best Approaches to RT and ET and some Examples of Best Practices

The success of RT and ET depends on a concerted and coordinated effort by the government, private sector, tourists, and the host community. Best practices for both come from all stakeholders. These approaches include Creating awareness of responsible practices and implementing related programs; Avoid detrimental activities and mitigating environmental pollution;

Promoting local and circular economy industries; Water conservation and management; Conservation local flora and fauna, Minimize tourism's negative impact; Boost adequate human behavior (pro-environmental or environmental-friendly); Respect locals and their culture; Involve in local culture; and Collaboration and cooperation on the value chain: Working with others - local people, residents, tourists, suppliers, and other businesses - to make tourism "better, more responsible" and "environmental friendly" at the destination level. Some examples of best practices in the field of RT include the Gardens by the Bay -Pride of the Lion City (in Singapore); Grootbos Private Nature and Lodge, Cape Fynbos Kingdom, Dyer Island Cruises at Gansbaai, and Mdumbi Backpackers Hostel (in South Africa); North Sailing Silent Whale-Watching Tours Húsavík (in Iceland); Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park (in Uganda); and BEES Elephant Sanctuary in the Maechaem district (Thailand). In ET, the best practices include Costa Rica, a tropical destination boasting rainforests, cloud forests, countless beaches, volcanoes, and mountains. Corcovado National Park is almost the epitome of ecotourism. The mountain shows in China a connection of cultural heritage with the ecotourism industry through mountain performances. Creation of outdoor theatrical shows in mountain landscapes showcasing the local cultures, such as the Tianmen Fox Fairy Show and Tianmen Mountain National Park, or Tianmenshan, located in Zhangjiajie City, Hunan Province. Iceland is a natural environment that encourages visitors to explore, hike, and ride on horseback. Another example is the Galapagos Islands, which were the first place added to the UNESCO World Heritage Site. In Kenya, the public organization ' Ecotourism Kenya' promotes sustainable tourism that conserves Kenya's natural environment and improves the livelihoods of local communities [9].

### Keypoints and Takeaways

Based on the above-outlined elements, the main points to consider by all tourism stakeholders and actors are as follows. Sustainability is an aspiration. It will only be realized if and when we take responsibility for making tourism sustainable. Recognizing that sustainability is a journey and that we will need to do more when we can, we commit to doing what we can to improve tourism. Responsibility drives sustainability. RT is a broad movement encompassing destinations, large mainstream businesses, niche operations, and tourists. New labels are generated for traveling - regenerative, ethical, and ecotourism. All these labels are better forms of tourism, whether or not they are turned on who has taken the responsibility to make them better, what they have done, and with what impact. RT is about changing the way we travel and consume culture. Amazing travel experiences and sustainability have never been mutually exclusive. RT means and involves RESPECT for the hosting areas, environment, people, and culture. It is imperative to develop practical guidelines and to encourage all stakeholders to take responsibility for achieving better tourism and creating better places for people.

Projects and initiatives could and should be undertaken from bottom to up; it is optional to have big, large-scale projects. Small and medium-sized ventures and initiatives can make a difference and set an example for others, leading to a whole offering of high level and quality. They can be replicated across the industry and around the world. It is worth highlighting that RT is not another form of 'niche tourism.' It is not a product or range of products. RT is about tourism's legacy and consequences for the environment and local people. RT does not only take place in protected natural environments. Any tourism business, whether located in a thriving metropolis, a desert, a rural village, an island, or a medieval town - can be RT operations. RT is not only the responsibility of big organizations/firms; the smallest of owner-managed tourism businesses are already practicing RT [10]. Various tourism businesses have already taken up the challenge of RT. Each is different and has found different solutions to the challenges in the local context. All forms of tourism can be more or less responsible. Ecotourism operations may be more or less responsible if they are not taking responsibility for improving aspects of tourism and their impacts.

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