

Sustainable tourism and ecotourism: Searching for a niche in the Hong Kong tourism industry

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Abstract: This paper examines the need for sustainable tourism and ecotourism in the already vibrant tourism industry of Hong Kong. Initially, appropriate literature is reviewed in attempting to link ecotourism, sustainable tourism and overall tourism development with the concept of sustainable development.

The paper is based on the premise that ecotourism is the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry and has often been linked to sustainable development. However, the concept can only be well implemented if there is adequate understanding of underlying factors and the adoption of an acceptable framework for planning, implementation and management.

From the discussions of issues raised regarding nature-based tourism, sustainable tourism and ecotourism, a framework is suggested which if well implemented, can make ecotourism a complimentary theme to the already successful tourism industry by putting into it elements of sustainable tourism and sustainable development. It is hoped that the framework suggested can be considered for use in many contexts of various destinations.

Keywords: Ecotourism; Framework; Hong Kong; Nature-based recreation; Sustainable tourism

Introduction

A number of scholars (Taylor and Stanley 1992; Swarbrooke 1999; Goeldner *et al.* 2000) and indeed the World Tourism Organization (WTO), most recently in 2003 have underlined the importance of tourism industry worldwide. The extent to which tourism influences the economic, social, environmental and sundry aspects of most destinations has been an issue of concern especially in the last decade (Ross and Wall 1999; Horochowski and Moisey 2001).

While the importance of tourism and concern for its effects has been identified globally, in Asia it has emerged as the foremost socioeconomic sector. The WTO (1999) reported that China received about 24 million tourists in 1998, making it the 6th largest destination in the world, while Hong Kong received 9.6 million making it the 2nd most important destination in the region at that time. In 1999, the WTO declared Hong Kong as the 9th tourism earner in the world. Recently, tourists spent over US\$10 billion dollars, and thus Hong Kong

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emerged as the highest tourism receipts and arrivals in East Asia (Tourism Commission 2003). Hong Kong, being part of China, is therefore a global major tourism player. Although tourism is important for both developed and developing economies, its development and practice needs to be monitored for perceived and unperceived negative effects.

As an urban destination, Hong Kong has proved attractive and by the year 2002, has received over 13 million visitors. Specifically, Hong Kong received 13.73 million visitor arrivals in 2001 representing a 5.1% growth compared with the previous years. The economic benefits brought by the visitors is very important as it is reported that per capita spending by the visitors amounted to about \$4, 532 in 2001 (Tourism Commission 2003). This trend shows some sort of growth even in the aftermath of September 11. The growth is as a result of various attractions and the omnipresent campaigns sponsored by the government and executed by the Hong Kong Tourist Board at its vanguard.

Indeed, the numerous attractions that characterized the successful tourism industry of Hong Kong include shopping, dining and a well-developed infrastructure for international conventions. In addition, Jim (2000) succinctly indicated that other attractions include the status of Hong Kong as a regional hub, an amalgamation of East and West culture, low crime rate and political stability. Others include events like the Chinese New Year, Rugby sevens, conventions, etc.

Although these have remained valid and are continuously being promoted, a growing number of travelers are becoming conscious of their environment and getting physically and intellectually active. Globally, tourists seek knowledge, information and tend to engage in recreation and adventure, and attempt to learn about culture and natural environment of the destinations that they visit. As a result of this growth, which is a global trend, nature, culture and adventure tourism are growing rapidly. Indeed, people visit destinations because of culture and environment. Although Hong Kong earned its position primarily as an urban destination alluding to the so-called mass tourism phenomena, can it not tap into the market of these environmentally conscious travelers? Because of the global trends in alternative tourism and partly as a result of a clarion call from local environmental concern groups, policy is being geared toward diversification of attractions to include natural and cultural heritage destinations as well as the promotion of the country parks as ecotourism sites.

Tourism, when well developed, encompasses economic issues, social concerns, environmental, and ethical considerations. Acceptance of tourism by the people in a destination and the quality of the environment needs to be maintained because it is the people and the environment that attract tourists to the

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destination in the first place. For this to continue to be the case, there is the need to incorporate into tourism the concept of sustainable development. It is indeed worthwhile to discuss and identify how and in what form can sustainable development principles be incorporated into tourism framework (Wall 1997).

Earlier, Wall (1997) had observed that although it is clear that tourism has been identified as one of the leading industries, it was not mentioned in the book "*Our Common Future*", a book that is mostly referred to as the cradle of the sustainable development debate. Despite this oversight, the concept of sustainable development in tourism has attracted the interest of scholars (Swarbrooke 1990; Inskip 1991; Welford and Ytterhus 1998). Inskip (1991), was one of the earliest researchers to have articulated and indicated that "the sustainable development approach can be applied to any scale of tourism development from large resorts to limited size special interest tourism, and that sustainability depends on how well the planning is formulated relative to the specific characteristics of an areas environment, economy, and society and on the effectiveness of plan implementation and continuous management of tourism". The importance of this phenomenon led advocates and researchers to adopt the term "sustainable tourism". At the pinnacle of discussion at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) conference in 2002, in South Africa tourism featured prominently. Sustainable tourism and ecotourism were acknowledged as development tools that could be used as yardsticks for measuring the success of sustainable development.

Like sustainable development, the definition of sustainable tourism is still open to various definitions and has taken various dimensions. In 1993, Butler (p. 29) suggested a more comprehensive definition of sustainable tourism; that is tourism "which is developed and maintained in an area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period, and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being of other activities and processes". Sustainable tourism evolved specifically as a result of concern for the environment. Indeed more tourists are becoming environmentally and socially sensitive as indicated earlier. Visitors seek well designed or rugged, less polluted or pristine destinations, by passing areas that have environmental and social problems. One derivative of sustainable tourism is ecotourism.

Ecotourism has since early 1990's found commonplace with sustainable development and sustainable management of natural resources. Where sustainable tourism and ecotourism are initiated, an important trend in most destinations is to develop tourism in part to promote conservation of the natural environment, biodiversity, natural and cultural heritage and scenic places.

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Ecotourism and cultural tourism are being developed in many places as a means of justifying and achieving conservation objectives.

In view of the foregoing, there is the need to evaluate status of the resource base that will compliment the buoyant tourism industry of Hong Kong. Although ecotourism seem to have been accepted worldwide, there is a need for articulating a locally acceptable definition that will help create a framework for its implementation. The aim of this paper is therefore to investigate the viability and adaptability of locally achievable sustainable tourism development in Hong Kong, develop and incorporate ecotourism and nature-based tourism particularly as Hong Kong boasts a well managed protected area system that can be used as resources for this type of tourism, and attempt to justify a market niche in the buoyant tourism industry of Hong Kong.

The emergence of ecotourism and local resource support like sustainable development and sustainable tourism, ecotourism started as a result of concern for the environment. The birth of ecotourism can be traced back to the successful campaigns undertaken by conservationists and scientists for the protection of humpback whales in 1966 (Hundloe 2002). This campaign was partly influenced by Hetzer's (1965) thesis who had earlier called for a rethinking of culture, education, and tourism and promoted an "ecological tourism" concept. When ecotourism appeared in the tourism, development and academic scenes, the concept was ambiguous without a clearly defined meaning (Welford and Ytterhus 1998). While some saw ecotourism as akin to visiting wilderness environment and or extreme environments, others related it to activities of tourists that are environmentally friendly.

Given the ambiguity associated with the historical origin of ecotourism, it has been used to denote tourism activities that do not bring along environmental degradation. Although the key features include ecologically sustainable, culturally sensitive, and economically viable principles (Wall 1997), there is no universally adaptable definition. Nonetheless, what is clear is that ecotourism is poised to forge the link between tourism, nature tourism and environment.

In an effort to clearly define ecotourism and make it operational, Valentine (1993) enumerated the variety of descriptive terms such as nature travel, adventure travel, and cultural travel, which are largely activity based. Responsible, alternative and ethical tourism, underscore the need to consider impacts and consequences of ecotourism making it appear value-laden. Whatever theme ecotourism carries, it stands to promote nature conservation, environmental education, aesthetic appreciation and partly recreation. Could these experiences also be acquired in undesignated destinations? Furthermore, can the themes identified be implemented and practiced in protected areas? Indeed, ecotourism is the fastest growing component of the global tourism

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industry. Ecotourism, a kind of a nature-based tourism centers on the appreciation and further understanding of nature and wilderness.

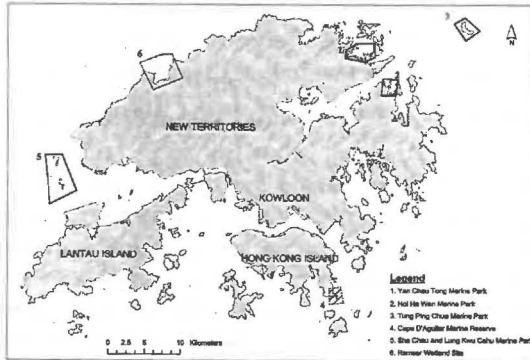
Ecotourism has received much attention in the past decade and till date, there is still considerable debate over what the term really means in various communities (Valentine 1993; Sirakaya *et al.* 1999). Although there is a general lack of knowledge about ecotourism in the travel industry, among the tourists as well as within the society in general, the situation is gradually changing. Consequently, a number of definitions have been proposed with each focusing on one or two aspects. Some of the earlier scholars that have defined ecotourism include Ceballos-Lascurain (1987); Farrel and Runyan (1991); Valentine (1993); Sirakaya *et al.* (1999), and organizations like The International Ecotourism Society (1991), Australian Department of Tourism (1994) among others.

In summary, ecotourism, a new kind of niche tourism, is seen as ecologically and socially responsible, and as fostering environmental appreciation and awareness (Buckley 1998; Fennel 2002). It is based on the enjoyment of nature with minimal environmental impact. In fact, ecotourism has been widely recognized as a form of nature tourism that is expected to contribute to both conservation and development, and in some places, provide a source of income for the local community (Carter 1993; Ross and Wall 2001). In most places around the world particularly in the developing countries, it has helped to uplift the living standards of the host community by generating income. Consequently, the income generated can also be used for conservation purposes. While this could be the case, in Hong Kong direct economic dividends might be negligible.

Nature tourism and or ecotourism, makes use of the potential of the countryside and wilderness areas. It is based on undisturbed natural resources such as topography, vegetation, wildlife, water features and scenery. These resources are abundant in Hong Kong (Figure 1). Natural resources in the countryside include country parks, wild areas and nature reserves. Other relevant resources include marine parks, Chinese white dolphin watching in the wild, Mai Po marshes and the deep bay Ramsar site (Figure 2), etc.

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Figure 2. The protected area system: Marine Parks, Marine Reserve & Ramsar Site.



From what is shown in Figures 1 and 2, the countryside of Hong Kong and the coastal areas are replete with natural resources and in recent years efforts have been made to make these resources useful for recreationists, conservationists and educationists and researchers. These resources are also accessible to those who are purely tourists, looking for unique experiences. Planning and management of these resources facilitates visits to unique areas like arboreta, participation in barbecue and picnics, hiking, camping and sundry outdoor activities. Table I further provides a resource indicative outline of the total area and facilities for nature-based recreation. Additionally, the marine parks and reserve areas provide resources for scientific studies. Although people visit these areas for snorkeling, canoeing and other activities related to the marine environment, these resources constitute scenic coastal areas, marine ecosystem and aesthetic seascapes that provides amenities for appreciation of nature.

Table 1 Resource indicators for Hong Kong's Nature-based Recreation¹

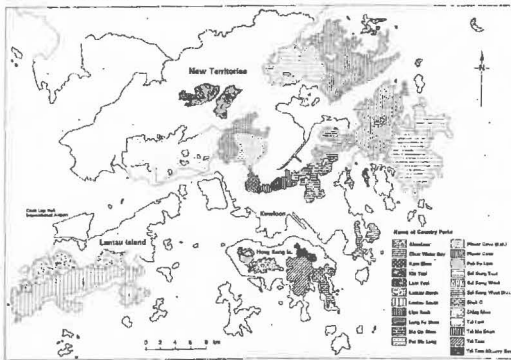
Land Area	1098 km ²
Country Parks	410 km ²
Marine parks and reserves	2.4 km ²
Park Facilities	
Number of parks	23
Picnic/barbecue sites	403
Camp sites	39
Visitor centers	7

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Whereas many definitions of ecotourism have emphasized nature appreciation, learning and education, cultural appreciation, economy, conservation, sustainable management of natural resources, quality of life etc., resources in Hong Kong will best serve the purposes of nature-based recreation, education and other non-consumptive activities.

While accepting the fact that ecotourism development and management is a significant natural resource management issue, with adequate planning and management, these resources could be used sustainably. The responsible use of these resources therefore, will entrench the concept of sustainability and promote the notion of quality of life.

Figure 1 The protected area system: Distribution of the 23 Country Parks



From the numerous descriptions of ecotourism, it is clear that the theme of this kind of tourism can find commonplace with the current trend in Hong Kong. Whether or not Hong Kong has the potential to accommodate this type of niche tourism is subject to further investigation and case-by-case analysis.

While in other places, the development of ecotourism has resulted from exogenous market pressures (Boyd and Butler 1996), in Hong Kong the pressure for its development rises from within. Rather than alluding this call to economic reasons, it is the environmental concern that has dominated the urge for ecotourism.

Almost three quarters of the territory of Hong Kong is rugged and hilly, rising up to 957 meters a. s. l. From the 1970s, Hong Kong has designated almost 41% of its land territory as country parks. In addition, marine parks have also been designated putting a large part of the territory under a protected area system as seen in figures 1 and 2. Annually, these country parks are patronized by over 10 million visitors (Table 2) majority of who engage in recreation activities within designated high intensity use areas. Within the framework of

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the country park systems, such high intensive use areas are honeypots and are characterized as intensive, dispersed, extensive and wilderness areas. Recreation activities range from barbecue, family picnic, camping, family walks, hiking, bird watching, etc. As the urban dwellers engage in the use of the country parks, the core themes of conservation and recreation work against each other. But with the advent of ecotourism, an acceptable framework can make them work in tandem.

Table 2. Trend of visitors to Country Parks and special areas (1999-2002)

Country Parks and Special Areas	Visitor numbers '000		
	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002
Aberdeen	962	988	1 011
Tai Tam	402	530	534
Quarry Bay	799	717	691
Pokfulam	172	185	197
Lung Fu Shan	263	272	280
Lantau (North and South)	1 593	1 596	1 533
Tai Lam	302	260	278
Plover Cove	1 737	1 837	1 909
Pat Sin Leng	383	389	347
Lam Tsuen	26	27	27
Shing Mun	277	384	397
Tai Mo Shan	231	213	228
Kam Shan	180	230	225
Lion Rock	97	201	183
Clear Water Bay	293	311	349
Ma On Shan	731	753	605
Sai Kung (East and West)	1 746	1 789	1 816
Tai Po Kau*	73	78	80
Tsiu Hang*	389	353	416

*Special areas

Source: Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department Annual Report 2001 and 2002

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While ecotourism in Hong Kong may not be able to generate significant amount of economic benefits, it will however, work in promoting environmental awareness, nature appreciation, and can imbibe into visitors the concept of environmental conservation. In fact, ecotourism in Hong Kong is not about economic dividends but implicitly about sustainability and the continuous maintenance of a good resource base for appreciation and experiential education.

Already, a good part of the institutional set up, to assist in this direction already exist. These include the country and marine parks authority, the visitor centers, trails for nature study and hiking, various means of information dissemination, and the plethora of facilities and signposts installed intermittently in the protected areas that attract visitors (Jim 2000).

Ecotourism values and sustainability

Visiting destinations with the sole purpose of viewing and interacting with different natural species (one of the components of ecotourism) has been a major component of human life. The scenery, particularly splendours natural environment have represented attractive spots. Baumann (1993) reported that many tourists were particularly delighted in Greece's extraordinary wealth of beautiful, interesting wild and cultivated plants. In addition to the need to appreciate and interact, the various uses of species testifies to the fact that the need to interact with other species is deeply rooted in the human psyche. Ecotourism development and management will simply help in promoting, enhancing and maintaining these psychological and aesthetic values.

To promote aesthetic values and continue to open up remote and pristine areas for visitors is gaining popularity. Orians (1990) indicated that people spend a large amount of money to mimic nature in their homes and surroundings. They also tend to travel to see and appreciate wild nature, while some derive therapy and therapeutic benefits from interacting with natural ecosystems. As indicated earlier, many countries derive considerable foreign income from ecotourism, which depends on the existence of a rich array of plant and animal species in their natural habitat (examples: Costa Rica, Kenya, Ecuador, Thailand, China, etc.).

In most countries, such ecological sites and countryside environments are protected and designated specifically for exclusive purposes. But historically, the allocation of land to parks and protected areas has not often been easy. In many developing countries human populations are expanding rapidly and some of the best parks occupy potentially valuable grazing and agricultural land. But in knowledge-based economies like Hong Kong, non-agricultural land uses

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poses the greatest threat to protected area systems. As population increases, land at the periphery of human settlements, are prone to rapid development. Where some of the land is covered by natural ecosystem with abundance of rare species, it becomes an attraction and can often be a 'honey pot' for nature lovers. Such landscapes of plethoric rarity then become valuable.

Aesthetic values also depend on the knowledge that there is something to see and that it is rare. Thus allocation of natural resources for aesthetic purposes tends to receive much attention from affluent societies where aesthetic uses of environments compete effectively with other uses that tend to have fixed limits. As a result of this, designating specific parcels of land can become entangled in an elongated decision-making process. But understanding and adapting a framework for ecotourism as one being argued here can help solve administrative and functional bottlenecks.

Ecotourism, variously referred to as nature-based, green, responsible, etc. is often practiced in wilderness both in protected and unprotected natural areas. While national parks have played a

significant role as tourist attractions in many countries (Butler and Boyd 2000), country parks as they are called in Hong Kong, are designated to cater for conservation, education and recreation (Table 3). Although historically the activities of the country parks are centred around conservation, recreation and education with each focusing on different functions, the onus is on the authorities to inculcate and enforce some code of conduct that will allow the resources to be used in a sustainable manner. With the advent of ecotourism, the country parks are becoming even more vulnerable as visitors to these parks are increasing in number. (as indicated in Table 2). To cater for this increase and demand, an acceptable framework needs to be adapted.

Table 3 Objectives of Country Park that will work in tandem with ecotourism

Country Parks objectives	Functions	Enforcements
Conservation	Protection of natural resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The landscapes ▪ The ecological resources ▪ Sites of geological interest ▪ The water catchments ▪ Cultural and archaeological interests ▪ Park's tranquility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SSSI's created within the parks* ▪ Improved controls on land use ▪ Compartmentalization of the country parks
Recreation	Provide optimum range of outdoor recreation compatible with conservation objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minimize conflict of activities ▪ Provide for changes in demand ▪ Encourage other agencies to provide environmentally compatible activities ▪ Prohibit such activities that are not compatible with conservation objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Zoning system ▪ Provision of facilities ▪ Directing users ▪ Various types of visitor management
Education	Educate the public of the need to learn and conserve their countryside <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase the public's enjoyment by giving them a deeper understanding of the countryside environment ▪ Provide information on the location of facilities ▪ Provide opportunities for field studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Environmental campaigns through various media ▪ Organizing activities ▪ Promote experiential learning

* SSSI: Sites of Special Scientific Interest

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Traditionally, the relationship between tourism and protected areas is not always satisfactory (Nelson and Serafin 1997; Wang and Miko 1997). While tourism opens up and tends to market the environment as its product, protected areas or country parks promotes conservation and preservation as one of the objectives. But with education and love for nature, these themes can be compromised.

For people to be able to understand and promote conservation in midst of other potential uses like nature-based recreation and ecotourism, there is the need to forge a sustainable form of symbiosis between the park system and tourism in a variety of contexts. The successful promotion and implementation of ecotourism stands a chance to forge this link. Already there is a rising environmental expectation among tourists and recreationists that demands a framework that will support and promote ecologically responsible behavior, a theme that ecotourism preaches. When this is achieved, the environment can be protected for and from the tourists, achieving a symbiotic association in the long term (Budowski, 1976).

The country park system in Hong Kong is unique. In most other places, the parks and protected areas are located at considerable distances from major population centers. In Hong Kong, the parks are juxtaposed often at the periphery of the urban area. While protected areas in other parts of the world require a great deal of travel time to access, country parks in Hong Kong can be reached in less than one hour travel time. Because of the dense population of Hong Kong, more and more people are finding solace in visiting the country parks for various activities with peak visits occurring on weekends (Jim and Wong 1996; Wong 1988). With growing environmental awareness,

nature appreciation, conservation, etc. are becoming popular. Gradually, ecotourism as opposed to outright recreation could become the major form of attraction to these parks.

In addition to cultural and natural heritage, open pristine environment and numerous natural diversity, ecotourism and sustainable tourism will depend on principles and frameworks that will fundamentally promote the appreciation of species diversity, rarity and richness. As ecotourism and

sustainable tourism depends in some complex manner on the abundance of species richness, Hong Kong stand a better position to promote this niche tourism. It has been reported that Hong Kong has roughly about 400 species of insects, 450 species of birds, 239 floral families composing of over 2700 species; natural resources that are needed for nature based recreation to be successfully implemented. (Hong Kong Herbarium 1993; Dudgeon and Corlett 1994) All these have to be articulated and packaged for ecotourists to continue to enjoy them. Consequently, exposing ecotourism to these resources and

allowing visitor numbers to increase will make it a most formidable destination. As a result, developing these resources as ecotourism products will be dependent on the maintenance of a good degree of diversity.

Courting a workable framework

Many studies have reported that ecotourism provides an enjoyable experience in nature. Indeed, the fundamental functions of ecotourism are and not limited to protection of natural areas, production of revenue, education and promoting local participation (Ross and Wall 1999; Orams 1995; Myburgh and Saayman 2002). Although each of these functions is fundamental in ecotourism and can be used to justify success or failure, a framework that can concentrate on selected objectives of local ecotourism development, in this case non-consumptive uses of natural resources is certainly most required.

Although ecotourism has metamorphosed into a globally accepted tool for development (Carter 1993; Welford and Ytterhus 1998; Ross and Wall 2001), it is not a homogeneous phenomenon if we take a global perspective. However, in implementing and practicing ecotourism, a common core idea can be elicited that includes a handful of central dimensions (Bjork 2000), checklists and principles for implementation. While this phenomenon is relatively newly practiced in Hong Kong, a framework that will guide its implementation and facilitate its applicability to the local situation is in dire need. From the discussions thus far, a framework is thus postulated that will help promote ecotourism and develop a more sustainable form of tourism industry. It is however, pertinent to note that the framework suggested is by no means of general application and may need to be considered in the many contexts of various ecotourism destinations.

The framework for successful ecotourism development in Hong Kong is based on the premise that: 1) there is a growing environmental awareness and a proliferation of environmentally active NGOs; 2) the existence of a societal call for this type of activity as evidenced by the growing number of visitors to the country parks and country side; 3) there is already an existing infrastructure – protected area system; 4) there is the backing of a supportive government; 5) there is abundant – cultural and natural resources diversity, and 6) there is a boisterous tourism industry in which ecotourism can be accommodated.

The framework can include but not limited to the following:

1. Need to capitalize on the rise in interest on ecotourism by effective publicity
 - Undertake vigorous publicity of the protected areas and alternative destinations for nature-based recreation. When viable destinations are identified and designated, effective publicity should be done by the

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proponents of such destinations. Successful publicity of pre-determined eco-site destinations will rise the profile of Hong Kong to tourists as indeed a place where attractions are diversified. And if naturalness and greenness can be considered a factor of sustainability and quality of life, such eco-sites will provide windows to the abundant pristine countryside of Hong Kong that represents about 70% of the land territory;

2. Accessibility and compartmentalization

Already access to such destinations is good to moderate. As indicated earlier, access to most of the Hong Kong countryside is less than one hour's travel time. In some cases it can take up to two hours. Compared to most countries, this is an added advantage. In addition, the topographical conditions of the natural landscape provides patches of ecologically viable areas that can be compartmentalized for specific attractions. Compartmentalization in country park management is already undertaken by the country parks authority of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department of the Hong Kong Government for management purposes;

3. The education and interpretation component

This is already well articulated but can further be enhanced to compliment the rising interest in nature appreciation. Education, being one of the components of nature-based recreation is already one of the objectives of the country park system. Intermittent interpretation centres can be created in predetermined destinations to facilitate understanding even if some visitors are without tour guides.

4. Experiential component

Further enhancement will put in place an experiential habit of learning that will further attract people to the designated ecotourism areas. This can enhance understanding and make a destination more attractive.

5. Promote nature walk and qualiwalks

Where walks are easy and classified for all and sundry, there is need to promote qualiwalk and the usefulness of such pursuits to quality of life. Nature walks, family walks and qualiwalks as well as trails of different hardship can be clearly identified and promoted as such.

6. Safety

The reputation of Hong Kong as a safe heaven should be highlighted and extended to the countryside environment together with its natural beauty.

Generally, the importance of the framework proposed is to ensure adequate planning and programming that will direct and lead visitors to interpretive destinations, promote non-consumptive tourist activities that will be beneficial to the tourist and the community. Although frameworks, checklists and principles are important, they are bound to be different from place to place. The common factor is for a framework to bring to light the strengths of a destination and attempt to accommodate the weaknesses and avoid the threats to destinations and or to visitors. The framework that is suggested here may not necessarily be the best upon implementation, but in implementing ecotourism thus far, efforts have been replete with rhetoric and inaction in which case a workable framework is needed for implementation.

Conclusion

Following a number of examples and reviews, this study has attempted to provide a framework that when followed, can be complimentary to the already successful tourism industry by inculcating into it elements of sustainable development and sustainable tourism (Welford *et al.* 1999). Seen through another lens or perhaps in other situations, tourism has sustained and revitalized the culture of a region. When sustainable tourism and ecotourism is successfully implemented, it also brings about ecological integrity, sustainability and sustained positive experience.

For these to be achieved, principles and frameworks have to be followed. In this study, a framework has been suggested. In developing this framework, experience is drawn from extensive literature that includes debates on ecotourism definition, acceptability and practice. The WTO estimates that nature-based tourism generates seven percent of international tourism expenditure. A study undertaken for the World Resources Institute found that this type of tourism is increasing at an annual rate of between 10% and 30% (Reingold 1993). If we consider visiting nature as akin to this type of tourism, then in Hong Kong it is developing, as visitor numbers to the designated country and marine parks have indicated. And if this type of tourism brings about positive change to a community, will it not bring the same values to Hong Kong?

As an alternative to mass tourism, ecotourism espouses the goal of symbiosis through the integration of natural resources, environmental education, and sustainable management (Australian Department of Tourism 1994) of natural resources. Ecotourism when well developed and implemented involve the forging of new relationships between people and environment, between peoples with different life-styles, and between a wide variety of forces for both change

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and stability. This particularly is directed towards the conservation of appropriate resources.

The term nature-based tourism is generally applied to tourism activities depending on the use of natural resources which remain in a relatively undeveloped state, including scenery, topography, waterways, vegetation, wildlife, and cultural heritage (Ceballos-Lascurain 1987). Finally, ecotourism cannot replace the successful organized mass tourism that is the selling point of Hong Kong. But with careful planning, it could be a complimentary welcome addition as there is clearly a need for the diversification of attractions in a destination in order for the tourism industry to be sustainable.

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