

Quick Fix or Costly Process



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Over the last two decades, ecotourism has been generally sold as a panacea that will allow local communities within natural areas, to change their ways from their “unsustainable” resource extraction base, to “sustainable” livelihoods.

While it is evident that a huge opportunity presents itself from the willingness of affluent urban dwellers to visit natural areas, developing tourism with the scale and scope required to achieve conservation results is no easy task, due to complex internal and external factors that influence the activity.

Let's start by defining the type of activity required:

Tourism can generate important negative impacts:

- **Environmental degradation**
 - Perceptible
 - Imperceptible
- **Cultural distortions**
 - Cultural *shock*
 - Competition for space
- **Social distortions**
 - Unequal access to benefits
 - Loss of internal control
- **Economic distortions**
 - Cost of living increase
 - Dependency on a highly volatile market.



ECOTOURISM

Tourism activity that takes place in natural spaces and produces:

- Low or null negative environmental impact**
- High local socioeconomic impact**
- High quality experience for the tourist**

thus its development produces incentives to all involved actors to preserve natural and cultural values present in such natural spaces.



Preservation of natural and cultural values

WILLINGNESS TO PRESERVE

MATERIAL BASE OF THE ACTIVITY

High local socioeconomic impact

Low or null negative environmental impact

Ecotourism Virtuous Cycle

\$ \$ \$

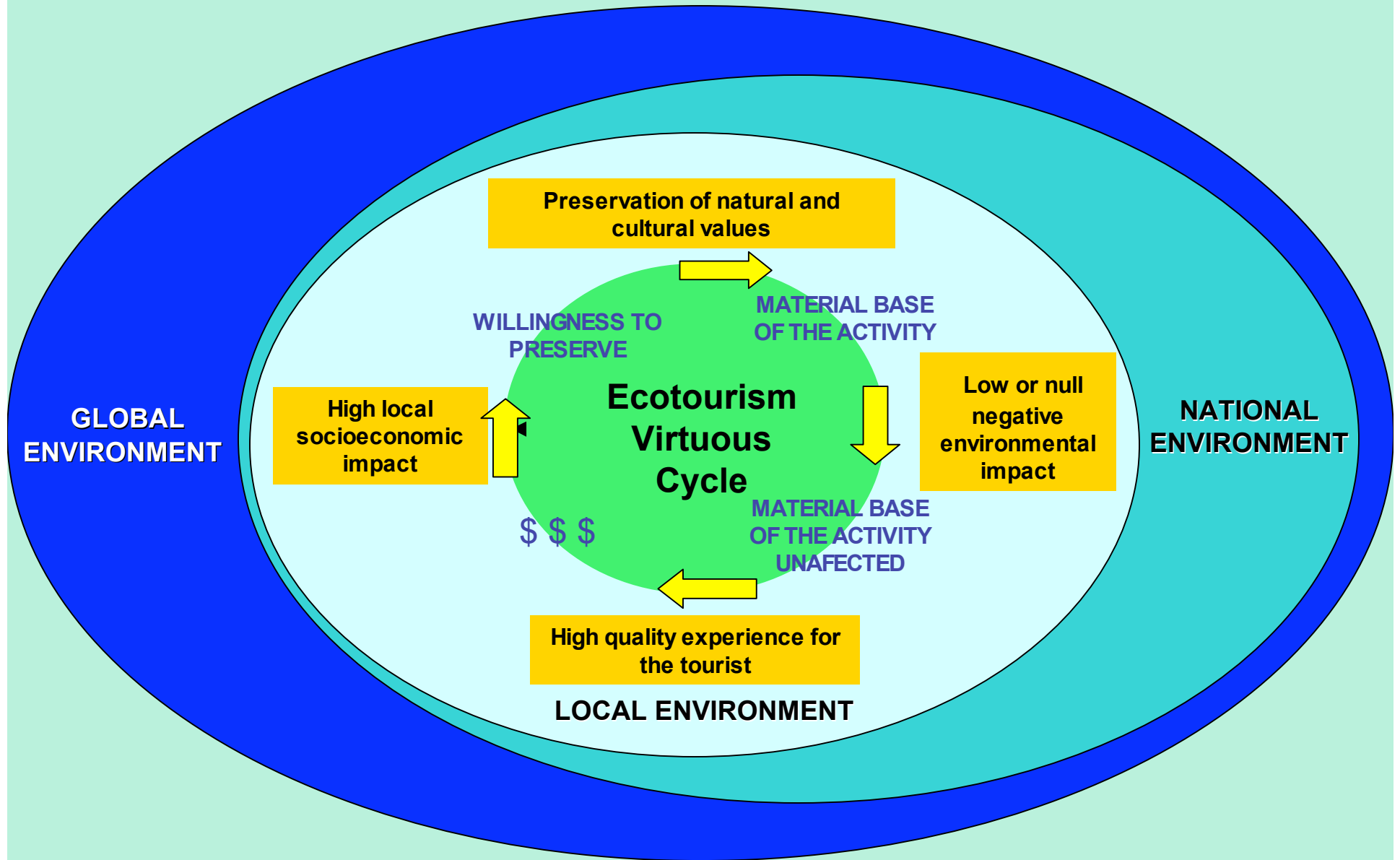
MATERIAL BASE OF THE ACTIVITY UNAFECTED

High quality experience for the tourist

**All this sounds
really cool but
can tourism
really represent
an easy fix to
the challenges
that
conservation
and local
sustainable
development
represent?**



The development of any tourism enterprise is conditioned by externalities derived from differentiated environmental scales



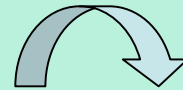
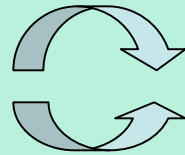
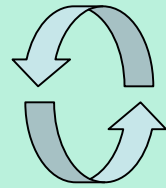
THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

Developing sustainable community enterprises within a “dog eat dog” framework.



Tourism takes place through a chain of highly competitive global commercial agents:

- Airlines
- Hotels
- Cruise ships
- Outbound tourism wholesalers
- Inbound tourism wholesalers
- Local travel agencies and tour sales persons
- Tour operators (ground operators)



\$



\$



***“Think globally and act locally”* but beware of the WTO.**



The World Trade Organization has been working toward increasing its involvement in the trade of services through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which currently involves tourism services with a limited scope. Over the last decade a proposal to create an specific annex for tourism has been evolving.

The wording on many of the concepts that are being presented to the WTO support sustainable development.

But analyzing three of the most important guiding principles of the GATS expansion negotiations, one has to wonder if the basic values of ecotourism can coexist within the context of:

- National treatment**
- Expanding access to markets**
- Domestic regulations**

Or will the baby be killed by globalization before it gets a chance to grow.



National Treatment:

This principle requires equal treatment to foreign service providers than the one given to nationals. As such it weakens efforts to insure that local people benefit from ecotourism.

Given the inherent inequalities in financing, access to markets and resource management between a small enterprise and transnational corporations, there is certainly no way that local entrepreneurs are going to be able to compete on a level field.



Expanding access to markets:

Expanding access to markets implies many positive things, but expanding access to natural areas based on demand can result social and environmental degradation.

Are restrictions on the number of boats that can visit an MPA an access based market impediment that should be eliminated?

Are the restrictions imposed Article 48 of the General Environment Law that state that “productive activities within biosphere reserves can only be undertaken by local communities or with their participation” another access based impediment to eliminate under GATS?



Domestic regulations:

GATS requires the establishment of general regulations that discipline how government develop and implement domestic regulations. It becomes difficult to imagine, how can a top down global commercial regulation process would be able to deal with local conditions and sensibilities needed to implement domestic regulations needed for responsible tourism.

Uniform GATS regulations establishing an uniform limit to governments from Alaska to Zacatecas would ignore biological and cultural diversity and the right of every community to regulate and protect its own development model.

THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

“*Small is beautiful*” but unfortunately politically it just won’t sell:

The Mexican FY 2005 Federal Budget includes:

Mx. \$ 1,147,453,750 for the overall Tourism sector

Mx. \$ 3,000,000 for Rural Tourism and Ecotourism

Mx. \$ 100,000 for Sport Fisheries

Non mass tourism representing 0.27% of the overall budget.

Still it is great to have it as a line item in the budget and to have a small administrative structure in charge of looking at ecotourism.

Secretaría de Turismo (SECTUR)

Subsecretaría de Operación Turística

Dirección General de Desarrollo de Productos Turísticos

Dirección de Desarrollo de Turismo Alternativo

In charge of: Ecotourism

Rural Tourism

Adventure Tourism

SECTUR ECOTOURISM INVESTMENT IN PROTECTED AREAS MPAs in blue.	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	Total
	\$4.9 M	\$5.1 M	\$2.94 M	\$ 3.1 M Programmed	\$ 15 M
Sian Ka'an BR					
Yum Balam FFPA					
Ría Lagartos BR					
Sierra Gorda BR					
Lagunas de Chacahua NP					
Pantanos de Centla BR					
Los Tuxtlas BR					
Calakmul BR					
Vizcaino BR					
Tehuacan-Cuicatlan BR					
Huatulco NP					

Mexico is still a long way towards establishing ecotourism as an important component of its tourism State policy.



Nevertheless the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve has become the poster child of the Mexican Department of Tourism efforts to develop ecotourism in Mexico, having financed the development of tourism infrastructure since 2002.

THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT

**Picking up the crumbs from mass tourism:
the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve case**

**Out of 18,665,000 foreign tourists that visited México
in 2003, 25.5 % visited Quintana Roo.**

2003 Quintana Roo (SECTUR)	
Tourist arrivals (persons)	6,097,712
National tourists arrivals (personas)	1,702,501
Foreign tourists arrivals (personas)	4,395,211

**By 1989 and after a very cursory analysis it became
obvious there was a potential market to start
developing Sian Ka'an as a Cancun based day tour
destination**

Development of Tourism Activities in Sian Ka'an

Phase I 1989 - 1998

Opening up a Market

Phase II 1990 - ongoing

Regulating tourism activities

Phase III 1996 - ongoing

Community based tourism

Phase IV 1998 - ongoing

**Development of public
use infrastructure**



Phase I 1989 - 1998

Opening up the Market

Amigos de Sian Ka'an Ecotourism Project

(Pew Charitable Trust, The Nature Conservancy, WWF)

Sian Ka'an featured in all specialized tourism magazines in Northern Quintana Roo.

Experimentation with 4 basic products, first 3 with successful results:

- Day boat tour from Cancun**
- Day boat tour from Tulum**
- Night crocodile adventure**
- Jungle walk tour**

Experimentation on the sale of these products through local travel agents, tour sales agents and outgoing wholesalers.

Achievements:

Positioning of Sian Ka'an as a day destiny from Cancun and the Cancun-Tulum Tourism Corridor.

Availability of non earmarked funds to pay for Amigos operations.

Phase II 1990 -

Regulating tourism activities

(Amigos de Sian Ka'an A. C., Dirección de la RB Sian Ka'an, GEF-World Bank, Instituto de Ecología A.C., R. Hernández, Tinker Foundation, TNC, UQROO)

Access control and collection of statistics (1995).

Management Plan - moratorium on new constructions (1996)

Public Use Program Guidelines – to be incorporated in second iteration of the management plan (1996)

Regulating local tourism services providers (boat licensing, guide licensing excluding non locals and limiting to the number of available licenses (1996)

Coastal Sian Ka'an Environmental Zoning Program (2002)

Entrance fees (2002).

Pending:

Land tenure regularization in Punta Allen

Phase III 1996 -

Community based tourism

(Amigos de Sian Ka'an A. C., European Community, COMPACT Sian Ka'an / PPD PNUD, Dirección de la RB Sian Ka'an, FMCN, ICRAM, RARE Center, SECTUR, TNC, UN Foundation / World Heritage Center / PNUMA)

Guide training.

English for nature guides.

Financial and administrative training.

Organization of tourism services providers.

(Cooperatives: U'ýol Ché Maya, Conjunto de Aluxes en Chunyaxché; Punta Allem, Los Gaytanes, Las Boyas y Vigía Grande en Punta Allen; and, Lancheros de Punta Herrero)

Financing tourism equipment.

Pending:

Effective coordination mechanism between tourism service providers established to enable the adoption of shared marketing and price stabilization practices.

Phase IV 1998 -

Development of public use infrastructure

(Amigos de Sian Ka'an A. C., Dirección de la RB Sian Ka'an, SECTUR, TNC)

Chun yaxché y Xlapac piers.

Chun yaxché interpretative trail.

Chun yaxché and Paso Lágrimas visitor centers.

Interpretive, informative and restrictive signs.

Pez Maya (demonstrative tourism development)

What have we learned



Five basic needs for success:

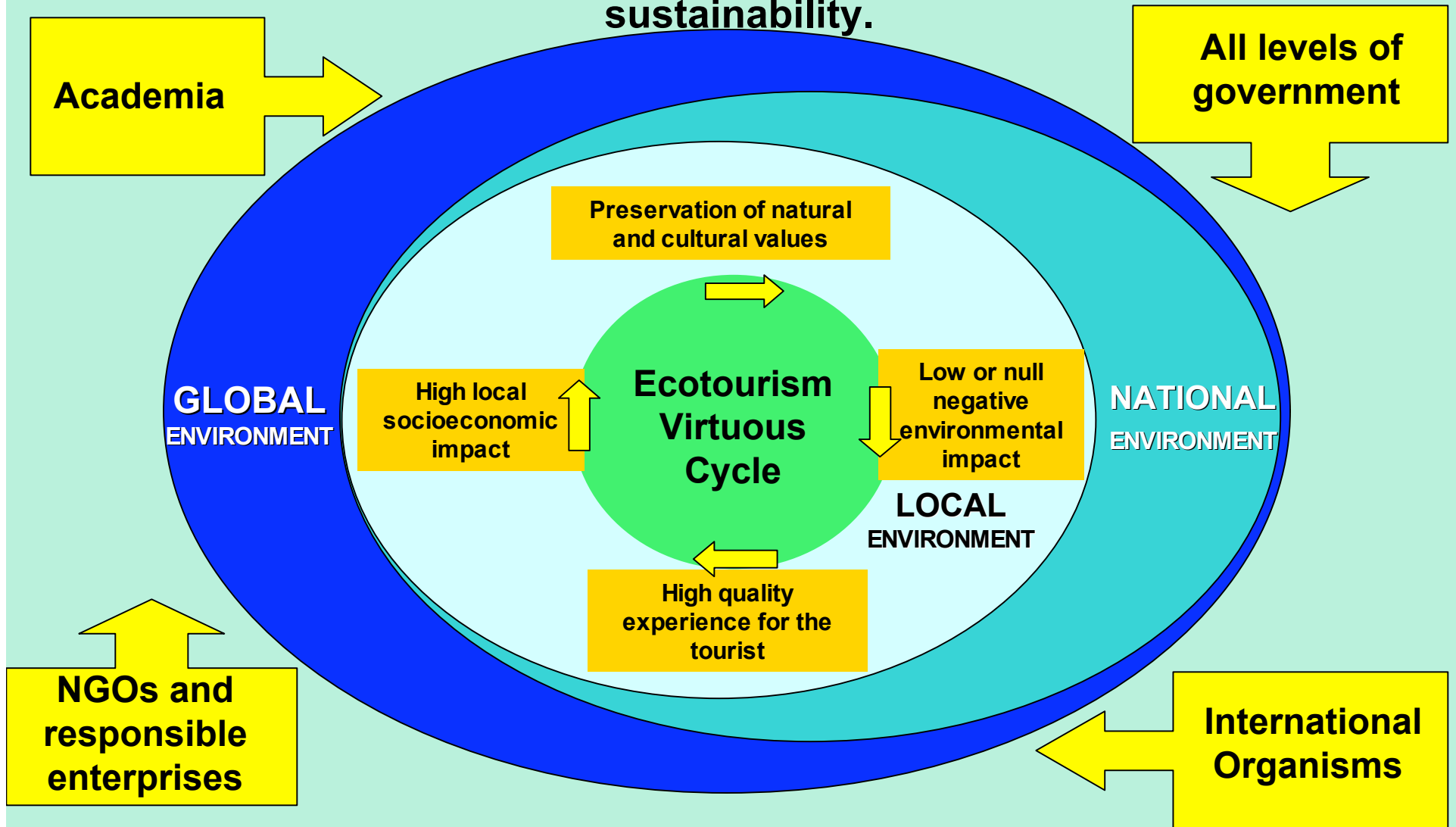
- **Obtaining external support**
- **Listening to the Market**
- **Regulating tourism activities**
- **Creating community capacity**
- **Developing infrastructure**

Obtaining external support

The complexity of the environment that influences the development of ecotourism activities do not facilitate integration of the virtuous cycle.



Development of ecotourism activities requires solid support to local communities from external agents in order to integrate the required virtuous cycle, having it gain momentum and achieve its own sustainability.



Listening to the Market

Tourism is a market based activity. Unless your product is so unique that it differentiates itself from all other products and is able to attract customers no matter where it is located, the key to successful ecotourism is location, location and location.



Listening to the Market

Location will be determinant in defining the type of tourism enterprise that can be implemented and the size it can attain.

In most cases, it is much more efficient to start up ecotourism projects by tapping upon existing tourism flows than trying to create new ones.

Test as many partnerships as you can with other actors within the tourism market, they might not work as you planned, but new avenues will open from them and you will learn a lot.

Regulating tourism activities

Working with protected area managers to regulate tourism activities before they actually develop is a sound investment, that will prevent many future conflicts.

Regulations should clearly state the number of use units (boats, guides or tourists) allowable and areas where activities can take place and these should be strictly enforced.

Interconnected legal instruments becomes a good strategy to regulate tourism activities.

Exclusive use rights for local communities can become the best formula for a successful ecotourism project.

Creating community capacity

Tapping the ecotourism potential requires that important changes take place in all those people involved in the activity, that should not be taken lightly.



Creating community capacity

Projects should be developed at the speed, pace and scope that the communities determine.

A wide range of capacities that include: language, guiding, accounting, administration, marketing, negotiating, product design etc. need to be created within communities to develop a successful project.

Creating mechanisms for joint marketing and preventing down spiraling price trends is an important factor to promote between community service providers.

Supporting incremental costs for the acquisition of appropriate equipment can represent an important factor to guarantee quality of the service and thus to the project's success.

Developing infrastructure

In most cases forget about the “*build it and they will come*” mind frame. Infrastructure in many cases should be the last thing to be considered by the program since somehow this type of buildings have the tendency of turning into “*white elephants*”. In other cases it is a very real prerequisite. Know exactly where you stand.

Always try to use existing infrastructure to develop an ecotourism project if the project is successful, then new infrastructure can become immediately profitable

**Thank you for
your time.**

