



**EX**periential **TO**urism for sustainable **R**ural development

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**WP3. Design and testing of EXTOR training material for innovative VET in rural tourism**

**A3.1. Development of EXTOR training programme**

**LU3: Ecotourism Practices**



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# Introduction to Ecotourism Practices



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## What is Ecotourism?

- *"Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education."*

(The International Ecotourism Society, 2015)

- *"Ecotourism is a sustainable, non-invasive form of nature-based tourism that focuses primarily on first-hand learning about nature and is ethically managed to ensure low impact, non-consumptive practices, and local orientation (in terms of control, benefits, and scale). It typically takes place in natural areas and should contribute to their conservation."*

(Fennell, 2001, as cited in Fennell, 2020)

- It involves visiting natural landscapes, flora and fauna, and natural ecosystems, allowing travellers to learn, study, and participate in eco-friendly activities.

(Rana, 2021)

## What is Ecotourism?

### Characteristics & Principles of Ecotourism:

- ✓ The types of nature-based tourism where the primary motivation for travellers is to observe and appreciate natural environments and traditional cultures in these areas.
- ✓ It includes educational and interpretative elements. Increase awareness of the political, environmental, and social conditions in host countries.
- ✓ Small, locally owned businesses are typically key service providers.
- ✓ It reduces harmful effects on both the natural and socio-cultural environment and contributes to the preservation of natural areas.
- ✓ It creates economic benefits for local communities.
- ✓ Ensure positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- ✓ Design, build, and run environmentally friendly facilities.
- ✓ Reduce physical, social, behavioural, and psychological harm to wildlife and plant life.
- ✓ Acknowledge the rights and spiritual beliefs of indigenous and local communities and collaborate to promote empowerment.

(The International Ecotourism Society, 2015; Global Ecotourism Network, 2016)



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## Benefits of Ecotourism

- *Economic and Environmental benefits:*
  - ✓ Generates income and provides alternative livelihoods for local communities.
  - ✓ Helps preserve resources and ensures their sustainable use.
  - ✓ Raises environmental awareness and fosters appreciation for nature and the importance of conservation.

(Rana, 2021)



## Sustainability Practices for Ecotourism Businesses

### 1. *Minimize impact:*

- ✓ Adopt low-impact travel practices (e.g., "Leave No Trace", carbon offset programs).
- ✓ Focus on sustainable waste management, water conservation, and respect for cultural regulations particularly for businesses offering cultural heritage tours.

### 2. *Promote environmental and cultural awareness and respect:*

- ✓ Educate tourists on local environments and cultures.
- ✓ Hire local guides and provide pre-trip informational sessions (e.g., educational videos for wildlife tours to encourage responsible behaviour).

### 3. *Enhancing visitor and host experiences:*

- ✓ Offer educational programs (e.g., agritourism experiences on farm life and the environment).



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## Sustainability Practices for Ecotourism Businesses

### 4. *Provide financial benefits for conservation:*

- ✓ Offer volunteer opportunities for tourists and locals (e.g., provide opportunities for financial support for conservation projects or support through hands-on participation).

### 5. *Empower local communities and provide financial benefits:*

- ✓ Partner with local businesses (e.g., restaurants, accommodations, transport services) to create economic opportunities.

### 6. *Foster awareness of social, political, and environmental issues:*

- ✓ Facilitate educational exchanges between tourists and locals (e.g., farm stays to experience rural life).

(Bustam & Stein, 2010)



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## Ecotourism Best Practices (Samia et al., 2017):

### 1. *Socioeconomic benefits:*

- Prioritize community-based tourism to ensure local populations maintain diverse income sources and reduce dependency on ecotourism.
- Foster collaborations with experts from various scientific fields throughout ecotourism initiatives.
- Build partnerships with businesses committed to environmental sustainability and social responsibility to strengthen the industry's impact.
- Promote an ecological mindset among all stakeholders, from policymakers to tourists, by integrating environmental education and strategic planning into ecotourism activities.
- Support the development of national certification systems for nature-based tourism that align with global standards while respecting regional and cultural differences.

## Ecotourism Best Practices (Samia et al., 2017):

### 2. *Conservation knowledge*

- Monitor wildlife and environmental conditions with expert input from taxonomists and environmental specialists, focusing on ecosystem functions.
- Use diverse biological indicators to assess wildlife stress levels and conduct controlled studies on wildlife physiology, behavior, reproduction, and survival.
- Apply scientific insights into animal behavior, ecology, and evolution to minimize ecological disturbances and promote sustainable practices.
- Investigate animal emotions and cognition to improve conservation strategies, especially for species frequently observed in ecotourism areas.
- Collect and analyze visitor data to understand usage patterns and guide future conservation efforts.
- Conduct social studies to how ecotourism current usage patterns and create a reference point for future conservation efforts.

## Ecotourism Best Practices (Samia et al., 2017):

### 3. *Wildlife well-being and population sustainability:*

- Implement environmental education programs led by expert guides.
- Set clear visitor access regulations based on seasonal changes, conservation priorities and the vulnerability of species and habitats to human activity.
- To minimize human-wildlife interaction physical contact and close approaches should be prohibited as well as feeding animals especially with non-native or unnatural food.
- Prioritize non-invasive research and monitoring wildlife methods in ecotourism and protected areas.
- Implement strict measures to prevent the spread of invasive species and disease transmission.
- Reduce environmental pollution, including noise and light pollution.
- Concentrate infrastructure in specific areas to protect larger, uninterrupted natural habitats.
- Design roads and trails to prevent habitat fragmentation, reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions, and guide visitors to designated areas.

### 4. *Adaptability:*

- Tailor ecotourism practices to local ecological, geographical, and social conditions.
- Regularly revise best practices based on scientific research and emerging environmental challenges.

## Best Practices For Implementing Ecotourism

- ✓ BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES
- ✓ PROMOTING CONSERVATION & SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES
- ✓ ENSURING ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES
- ✓ DEVELOPING ECO-FRIENDLY ACCOMMODATIONS & SERVICES



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## Did you know?

- ❖ **Iceland** relies primarily on renewable energy, with geothermal and hydroelectric power significantly reducing the carbon footprint, including that of tourism activities, accommodations, and transportation.

(Reali, 2023)

- ❖ In **Italy** the Regional Park of Maremma was established to preserve nature and local traditions. This park protects wetlands and provides a habitat for diverse species, including the Caretta Caretta turtles. Around 30% of the park's land is used for agro-tourism.

- ❖ In **Austria & Slovenia** the Geopark Karawanken promotes nature conservation by making its landscapes accessible through g interpretational-informative infrastructure. Visitors learn about geological, natural, and cultural heritage through storytelling and gamification.

(European Commission, 2024)

- ❖ Beyond Europe **Costa Rica** offers an impressive network of over 26 national parks, 58 wildlife refuges, 15 wetland areas, 32 protected zones, as well as 8 biological and 11 forest reserves. The country prioritizes conservation, collaborates with local communities, and uses advanced technology for monitoring and managing protected areas.

(Reali, 2023)

## Tools and resources for assessing sustainability efforts:

**1. Green Destinations Tourism for SDGs Self-Assessment**

<https://www.greendestinations.org/sdgs-tourism-self-assessment/>

**2. GreenStep Free Sustainability Score**

<https://greenstep.ca/resources/free-sustainability-score/>

**3. UNWTO STAR, Self-assessment Tool to Assist Rural Destinations**

<https://www.unwto.org/news/un-tourism-launches-digital-self-assessment-tool-for-rural-destinations>

**4. European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) for sustainable destination management**

[https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/eu-funding-and-businesses/funded-projects/sustainable/indicators\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/eu-funding-and-businesses/funded-projects/sustainable/indicators_en)

**5. UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Toolkit**

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabletourismtoolkit/>



## What is Adventure Tourism?

- A type of tourism that involves activities incorporating risk, physical exertion, and specialized skills.
- Requires participants to engage in experiences that may involve uncertain or challenging environments, requiring endurance and proficiency to navigate successfully.
- Includes both nature-based and non-nature-based activities.

(Weaver, 2001)

- **Two** main types of Adventure Tourism

Soft  
Adventure

Generally safe activities that require little to no specialized skills or experience, such as backpacking, birdwatching, camping, canoeing, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, kayaking, safaris, sailing, and surfing.

Hard  
Adventure

Activities that involve higher levels of risk and typically require technical skills or prior experience, such as off-road 4×4 driving, mountain climbing, trekking, and caving.

(Med Sustainable Tourism)

## How Can the Impact of Adventure Tourism Activities Be Reduced?

### Hiking & Trekking:

- Use marked trails to minimize environmental impact.
- Ensure tourists are informed about and follow "Leave No Trace" principles.
- Encourage visitors to collect all trash, respect wildlife and leave natural elements undisturbed

### Bird/animal Observation:

- Encourage tourists to stay on designated paths, have a quiet presence, and avoid feeding wildlife.
- Ensure tours respect natural habitats and focus on conservation and community support.
- Advise guests to maintain a safe distance to minimize stress on animals.

### Cycling:

- Encourage renting bikes from eco-conscious companies with well-maintained equipment.
- Promote using marked bike paths to reduce environmental impact and ensure safety.
- Advise guests to follow local traffic rules, respect pedestrians, and avoid disturbing wildlife.

### Kayaking & Canoeing:

- Respect wildlife by maintaining a safe distance and avoiding disturbance to habitats (e.g., shallow gravel areas where fish may lay eggs).
- Promote 'do no harm' practices, such as avoiding walking on sensitive areas like dunes and using designated docks for embarking and disembarking.
- Ensure proper waste disposal, encouraging guests to plan ahead for bathroom needs and dispose of waste responsibly.
- Suggest eco-friendly sunscreens to protect marine life and coral reefs.
- Advise guests to paddle gently.



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## Use of Eco-Friendly Equipment

- Use eco-friendly equipment made from recycled or biodegradable materials.
- When photographing animals, avoid flash and use the camera's zoom to maintain a safe distance and reduce stress on wildlife.
- Offer tourists the option to rent second-hand gear.
- Use of non-motorized boats to reduce pollution and minimize wildlife disturbances.
- Promoting the use of reusable water bottles and eco-friendly snack packaging to minimize waste.

(Green City Times)



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## Leave No Trace principles

1. Plan ahead and prepare.
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
3. Dispose of waste properly.
4. Leave what you find.
5. Minimize campfire impacts (be cautious with fire).
6. Respect wildlife.
7. Be considerate of other visitors.

(Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics)



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## What is Agritourism & Farm Tourism?

A form of tourism whose activities are focused directly with agriculture and utilises the unique offerings of rural and agriculture rich communities such as:

- ✓ Visiting farms to pick and purchase produce.
- ✓ Learning about environmentally friendly or historical agricultural practices.
- ✓ Supporting tourism efforts in rural communities.
- ✓ Participating in planting or harvesting activities.
- ✓ Visiting rural areas for tasting and purchasing locally made juices or wines.

Agritourism connects guests with sustainable farming practices, supports local agriculture and economies. Guests can actively participate in farm activities gaining valuable insights into sustainable living and enjoy fresh, locally produced food.

(Food and Agriculture Organization, Green City Time)

## What is Agri-ecotourism?

- Combines sustainable agriculture with immersive nature experiences, allowing guests to enjoy farm life while on vacation.
- Visitors can learn about eco-friendly farming practices, witness food production, and participate in farm activities.
- Supports environmental conservation and benefits local communities.

### Key differences from traditional Ecotourism:

- Integrates agriculture, providing deeper insight into sustainable food production.
- Attracts eco-conscious travelers, sets properties apart from conventional rentals, and enhances engagement through hands-on workshops and farm-to-table experiences.

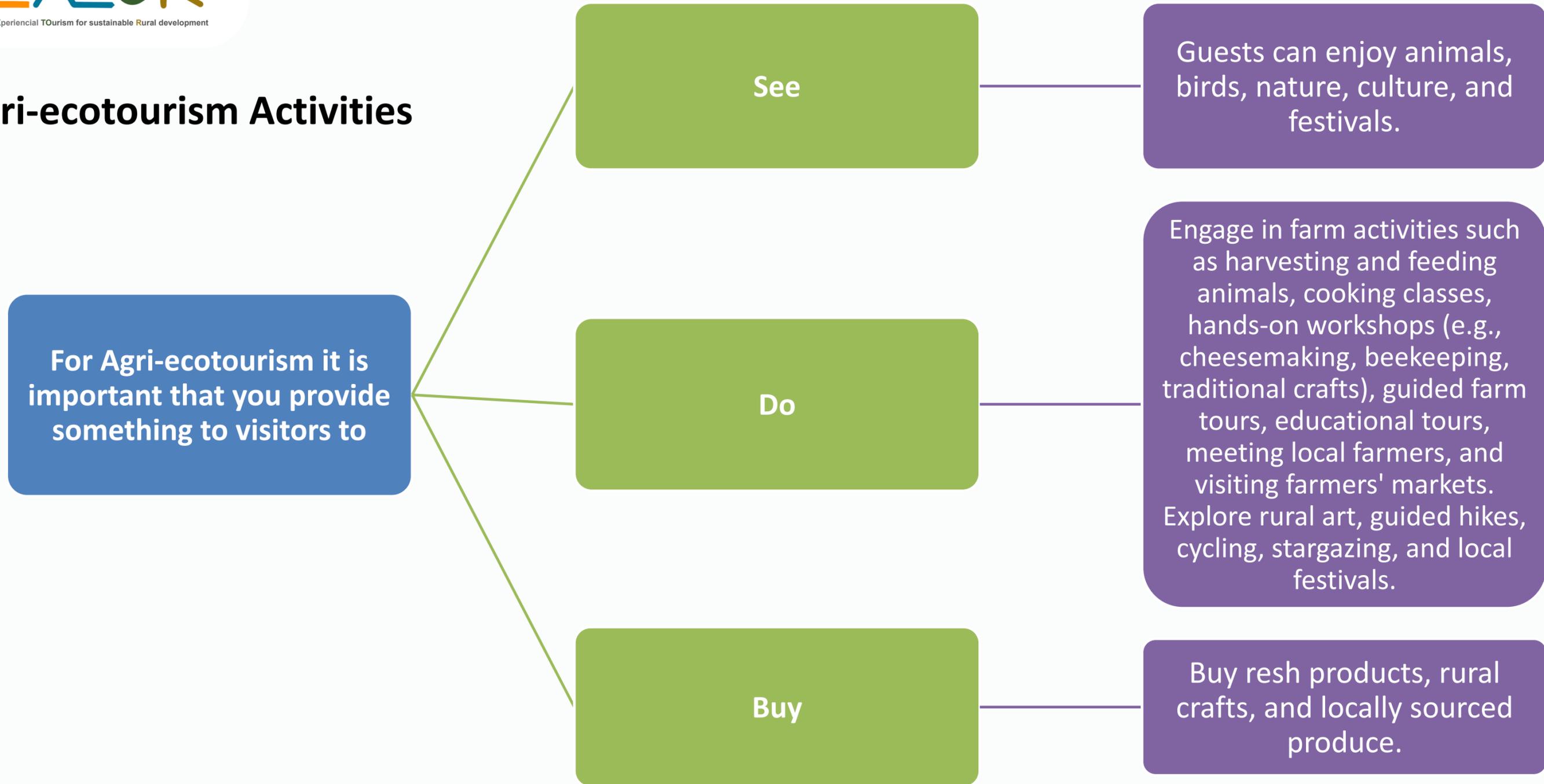
(Avantio, 2024)



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## Agri-ecotourism Activities



(Kumar et al., 2021; Avantio, 2024)

## Core Components of Agri-ecotourism

### ❖ Soil and Water Conservation

- In regions with high rainfall, effective soil and water conservation methods like terraces, trenches, and water-harvesting structures to maintain soil health and prevent erosion.
- Other methods include drip irrigation, greywater recycling for non-food crop irrigation and selection of drought-resistant crops

### ❖ Organic Farming

- Focus on organic crop and animal production, waste management, composting, and vermicomposting.
- Avoid synthetic pesticides and fertilizers to maintain soil health and biodiversity.

### ❖ Integrated Farming Systems (IFS)

- IFS promotes diverse agricultural activities (dairy, poultry, fishery, sericulture) to ensure efficient resource use and stable income for small farmers.
- IFS integrates crops and livestock while showcasing rural traditions and farm-based activities.

## Core Components of Agri-ecotourism

Other **environmentally responsible practices** in agri-ecotourism include:

- Use renewable energy solutions (solar panels, wind turbines, biogas digesters, geothermal systems).
- Reduce waste through recycling, composting organic waste to enrich the soil, using biodegradable materials, and promoting recycling to minimize overall waste.
- Foster respect for the environment by encouraging guests to follow farm guidelines and adopt waste-reducing habits to protect ecosystems and wildlife.

### ❖ **Supporting Local Communities**

- Prioritize local employment and sourcing of supplies.
- Involve community stakeholders in decision-making and implement revenue-sharing models.
- Promote cultural preservation through traditional farming demonstrations, local craft and cuisine workshops, incorporation of local architecture into facilities, and cultural events.
- Ensure fair labor practices with fair wages, safe conditions, and skill development opportunities.
- Offer educational initiatives such as guided tours on sustainable farming, environmental conservation workshops, school programs, and internship opportunities.

(Kumar et al., 2021; Dreamwork Network; Green City Times)



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## What is Cultural Tourism?

- A type of tourism where the primary motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination.
- These attractions/products reflect the material, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional features of a society, including:
  - Arts, architecture, and historical heritage
  - Culinary traditions, literature, music, and creative industries
  - Living cultures, lifestyles, value systems, beliefs, and traditions.

(UN Tourism)



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## What is Cultural Tourism?

### Cultural Tourism includes:

- Experience local customs, traditions, and daily life.
- Interact with native communities, fostering cross-cultural respect and empathy.
- Visit monuments, museums, and archaeological sites to explore the region's past.
- Attend sacred sites (temples, churches, mosques) or participate in spiritual practices.
- Explore local art through galleries, theatres, and cultural performances.
- Learn about local drink traditions and sustainable farming practices through food festivals, cooking workshops, and farm and vineyards visits to learn about the origins of local produce.

(Tourism Notes)



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# Advantages and Disadvantages of Cultural Tourism

## Advantages

- Deepens appreciation for history, architecture, art, and cuisine.
- Highlights the value of connecting with local communities.
- Encourages ethical practices and minimizes environmental impact.
- Helps preserve and promote values, traditions, heritage, arts, rituals, folklore, music, literature, and languages, fostering mutual respect and understanding.
- Supports local businesses and sustains cultural experiences.
- Strengthens cultural identity and continuity for future generations.
- Supports the performing arts and creative industries, contributing to artistic vitality and fostering global appreciation of diverse cultural expressions.

## Disadvantages

- Potential for the commodification of cultures, where local traditions may be altered to appeal to tourists, risking a loss of authenticity.
- Resource strain that can lead to overcrowding, increased competition for amenities, and a decreased quality of life for residents.
- Environmental degradation: Risk of damaging sensitive natural areas and disrupting wildlife.

(Tourism Notes)

## Eco-cultural Tourism

### Definition:

- ❖ *Eco-cultural tourism can be defined as travel to destinations where both natural landscapes and cultural heritage serve as the main attractions. This form of tourism is seen as a strategy to promote the conservation of natural habitats, showcase indigenous cultures, and offer an alternative path to economic sustainability. It serves as a tool for the economic empowerment of indigenous communities, helping preserve traditions while supporting the protection of both natural and cultural heritage.*

(Cajee, 2014)



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### **Key Strategies for Sustainable Cultural Tourism (European Commission, 2019)**

- Incorporate sustainability and social responsibility in business strategies.
- Provide training and guidelines for responsible tourism to professionals and tourists.
- Support local start-ups and cultural tourism clusters.
- Use digital tools (e.g., United Nations Environmental platform) to track visitor impact.
- Educate visitors on minimizing ecological footprints and respecting local cultures.
- Encourage longer and off-season stays with pricing strategies design.
- Promote local products and businesses to benefit the local economy.
- Collaborate with local communities to create authentic and culturally rich tourism experiences.
- Create stable jobs, including during off-peak seasons.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. This unit explored sustainable tourism practices across Ecotourism, Adventure Tourism, Agritourism, and Cultural Tourism. Tourism, when responsibly managed, can support environmental conservation, economic growth, local community well-being.
2. Introduction to ecotourism, defining its principles and benefits. It emphasizes responsible travel that conserves nature, generates financial benefits for conservation, and respects local cultures.
3. Adventure tourism is explored. Strategies to reduce negative effects, such as following "Leave No Trace" principles, respecting wildlife, and promoting low-impact activities like hiking and kayaking are included.
4. Agritourism and farm tourism focus on integrating agriculture with tourism, offering visitors authentic experiences while supporting rural economies. Key components include organic farming, soil and water conservation, and engaging activities like farm tours and hands-on workshops.
5. Cultural tourism is examined as a way to preserve and promote heritage while generating economic benefits. The challenges of cultural commodification are discussed, along with strategies for responsible tourism development.



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