

Utilisation of natural forests for ecotourism: matching the expectations and goals

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The utilization of primeval forests for the ecotourism purposes must be exercised with the utmost precaution and must not compromise primeval forests integrity in any possible way. The paper rises questions and draws conclusion whether primeval forests should be opened or serve as an attraction for ecotourism on a larger scale at all and if so – under certain conditions, what kind of approach, based on strict and well defined criteria, should be taken.

As a result of a thorough study conducted on the public awareness of the primeval forests' value prior and after the visit of The Prince of Wales to the Badin Primeval Forests in Slovakia, on the experience and evaluation forms gathered from and after the guided excursions with groups having different background and interests, as well as their overall impact in terms of nature protection and ecological awareness, a clear line should be drawn between ecotourism in a broader sense and the scientific tourism. It is necessary to distinguish between different expectations of at least two groups – the ecotourists, opinion-leaders and decision-makers on one hand and scientists, conservationists, and land managers on the other hand – as well as the goals to be achieved within these groups.

Both factors, i. e. the expectations of various groups and goals to be achieved have been analyzed and tested on numbers of occasions and in various localities in the light of the optimal utilization of primeval forests and semi-natural for scientific, educational and recreational purposes. Alternative approaches and best practices depending on the expectations and goals have been proposed based on this analysis, e. g. initiatives such as Green diplomacy, natural forests educational proxy trails etc.