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Greetings!

Ecotourism Kenya is supporting tour operators to achieve sustainability in their operations

Tourism in and around protected areas can have both positive and negative impacts. Some of the positive impacts include providing direct revenues for protected areas and local communities, while some of the negative impacts include: air pollution from transportation, pollution of soil, ground water and surface water as a result of improper waste disposal (such as plastic), and destruction of wildlife habitat destruction. Addressing the negative impacts require co-operation among all tourism industry stakeholders including tour operators. Indeed, there is rising trend in demand for responsible products and services among consumers, but the level of awareness about this very important concept is not at par with the demand of 'green products'.

What is sustainability? It refers to engaging in activities that will ensure continuity of your business. Continuity of business in this case requires that business such as tour companies be environmentally friendly, socially acceptable and economically sound. This week's article will focus on tour operators in promoting sustainable tourism, and how Ecotourism Kenya is working with them so that this is achieved as well as the benefits of being a sustainable business.

Tour operators' role in promoting responsible tourism

Tour operators play a very unique role in the industry! They are the intermediaries between tourists and tourism service suppliers such as camps and lodges. Therefore they have the ability to influence what you as a traveler or consumer chose to consume, and also the practices of the

camps and lodges as well as development patterns of our destinations. Their contribution is quite massive to say the least, so it's important that we also understand ways in which they can impact the industry positively. Some of these include:

1. Making financial contributions to conservation and development projects such as construction of schools, health centres and repair of infrastructure such as local roads among others.
2. Providing travelers with opportunities to support conservation in protected areas such as conservancies, for instance through donations.
3. Providing travelers with guidelines on how to minimise impact on the environment, for example by maintaining appropriate distances from wildlife, avoiding off-roads and minimising water and energy consumption levels.
4. Integrating sustainability principles into the selection criteria and service agreements with suppliers such as lodges.

Role of Ecotourism Kenya in promoting sustainability

Ecotourism Kenya has partnered with Travelife to support tour operators in attaining sustainability in their operations. This is through training on sustainability, management and certification.

A tour company that seeks to be recognised by Travelife goes through 3 stages: engaged, partner then to certified level. In Kenya, Twiga Tours became the first company to attain a Travelife Certified level. The pictures below depict the award of certification during the Annual General Meeting of Kenya Association of Tour Operators (KATO) held in 2018.



Our Team leader at Ecotourism Kenya, Grace Nderitu was present at the event together with the Director of European Centre for Eco and Agro Tourism (ECAT), Naut Kusters to award the certificate as depicted in the picture above.

How you will benefit from certification

1. The tour company has the potential to gain competitive advantage from use of the Travelife Certified award logo.
2. Publicity in the Travelife website, and higher company profile and credibility.
3. The company receives technical feedback from the evaluation process.
4. Improved efficiency of resources used and reduced negative impacts on the environment.
5. Potential for improved relations with the local community where the tour company conducts business.
6. Improved sustainability in the tour company's business as more resources are used responsibly.

We hope that you will make a commitment towards sustainability through certification if you have not yet made such step. We are glad that some tour operators are already on this path, and are making every effort to promote best practices as they conduct business for the benefit of nature and communities that they interact with.