Introduction
Sustainable development for communities and their ecosystems can be considered through the optic of the 3 E’s of environment, economy, and equity. It is unequivocal that human activities are causing the depletion of the world’s environmental resources at an unprecedented and unsustainable rate; this destructive process must be urgently corrected in a manner that is environmentally, economically, and equitably sustainable. In 2001, the United Nations created the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment in order to evaluate “the consequences of ecosystem change...and the scientific basis for action needed to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of those systems.” The findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment led to the conclusion that:

over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history, largely to meet rapidly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fiber and fuel[,]...result[ing] in a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth.

Many avenues are being pursued in the movement to improve environmental conditions, including “the greater use of economic instruments and market-based approaches in the management of ecosystems[.]” This approach to the environmental crisis that the world faces has a great deal of potential because it creates the possibility for multifaceted sustainability in all of the 3 E’s.

Accordingly, as globalization has led particularly to the exploitation of resources in developing countries, it is in these places that efforts to increase efficient use of resources, economic prosperity, and social justice should be directed. Tourism is one of the world’s largest economic sectors, as the World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that travel, tourism, and associated activities will contribute to 10.6% of the world’s GDP by 2012, making it an incredibly viable economically-based means of creating sustainability. However, to achieve this, there must be a relationship between tourism and the furthering of the 3 E’s.

Such a form of sustainable tourism is known as ecotourism. In contrast to traditional tourism, ecotourism intends to spur conservation and

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1 Wheeler, 8
2 “Millennium Ecosystem Assessment”
3 Ibid.
4 Chopra, Leemans, Kumar, 8
5 “Sustainable Tourism: Briefing Paper”
community development through low-impact, non-consumptive use of local resources. The United Nations dubbed 2002 as the “International Year of Ecotourism.” However, it has been up for debate as to whether ecotourism actually serves to positively advance the 3 E’s. “Whilst it can be argued that tourism creates an incentive for environmental conservation, tourism is also responsible for damage to the environment. The phenomenal growth of the sector has been accompanied by severe environmental and cultural damage.” The conflicting environmental, economic, and equitable effects that ecotourism can bring about demonstrate the difficulty of determining how “eco” ecotourism really is.

By using the 3 E’s to examine and evaluate ecotourism practices in Costa Rica, the world’s most prominent ecotourism destination, this paper will reach a broader conclusion about the sustainability of ecotourism in developing countries.

What is Ecotourism?

The ubiquitous “environmental” movement is painting the world greener every day. Accordingly, ecotourism is now touted as the most rapidly growing form of tourism. The World Tourism Organization defines ecotourism as “tourism which leads to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.” Similarly, it is intended to be a sustainable process that meets the needs of present tourist and host communities while simultaneously protecting and enhancing their future needs.

Ecotourism sounds like a guaranteed sustainable solution, but in practice, while it succeeds in some ways, it is also fraught with negative, unsustainable consequences. Although most definitions of ecotourism are generally comparable to the one set forth by the World Tourism Organization, there is no formally established rubric as yet for what constitutes “good” ecotourism. “Because there are no universally accepted definitions of ecotourism or the ecotourist to clearly distinguish this activity from other forms of tourism,” tourism sites are able to “greenwash” themselves and freely self-identify as “eco” even if their

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6 Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler, 322
7 “Sustainable Tourism: Briefing Paper”
8 Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler, 1
9 Egan
10 “Sustainable Tourism: Briefing Paper”
11 Ibid.
12 Weaver, 19
practices are not really adherent to the sustainability of the 3 E’s.\textsuperscript{13} This problem is worsened by the lack of an official rubric for distinguishing true ecotourism from “ecotourism” that does more harm than good. This makes it necessary to evaluate the sustainability of the practices that claim to provide for the present and future needs of communities and their environments.

Developing Countries and Ecotourism

Because ecotourism aims to be a vehicle for ensuring environmental, economic, and social responsibility, it is naturally one of the vanguard strategies of promoting sustainability in developing countries.

As a form of tourism with smaller scale infrastructural needs and less sophisticated consumer demands, ecotourism is ideally suited for the developing world. It does necessitate multi-billion dollar investments. Local, small businesses and entrepreneurs can successfully fulfill the demands of ecotourism, especially in the areas of lodging and food services. As a result, ecotourism has become incredibly popular within the developing world, particularly as a means of stimulating economic development.\textsuperscript{14}

Countries of the developing world are expected to experience great economic growth in coming years, and “have something of a comparative advantage when it comes to ecotourism, in terms of the vast biodiversity and extent of pristine, natural environments in those countries.”\textsuperscript{15} All of these factors make ecotourism an environmentally feasible and economically progressive option in developing countries. It is used as an instrument for these countries to compete in the global market, as well as improve quality of life through environmental preservation and economic stimulation.

Ecotourism’s Advantages

Advocates of ecotourism promote its potentially non-consumptive nature and its financial promise. Ideally, ecotourism can provide environmental, economic, and equity-directed benefits, particularly in attractive tourist areas that have sensitive or irreplaceable environments.

\textsuperscript{13} Egan 2001
\textsuperscript{14} Narayan
\textsuperscript{15} Narayan
Environmental Benefits

“In theory, the most prominent direct environmental benefit of ecotourism is its incentive value for preserving natural and seminatural environments which might otherwise be severely altered or removed altogether.”16 “As population and economic growth put increased pressure on national parks and other protected area[s,]” ecotourism “could…provide an incentive for the restoration of already-altered landscapes to a state capable of attracting ecotourists.”17

Accordingly, the pursuit of ecotourism can create a greater incentive for environmental conservation on the part of locals and tourists. Ecotourism encourages the establishment and maintenance of environmental preservation sites, as the presence of a thriving environment is the basis upon which ecotourism attracts ecotourists. Additionally, interest in the environmental movement, which has played a significant role in the popularization of ecotourism, may also lead to increased awareness of environment issues and a broader commitment to environmental well being. The tourists who engage in ecotourism gain an awareness of and commitment to stewardship of the environment from the experience.

Financial contributions to the environment are also another major benefit of ecotourism. “The mere existence of an ecotourism lodge increases the number of people visiting the area and, consequently, the gross revenues contributed to park management.”18 Ecotourists account for a significant portion of visitors to preservation sites, and accordingly ecotourism can financially support these protected areas through tourism-related revenues. “Park entry fees, which tend to be minimal in most countries, could thus probably be increased by a substantial margin without significantly affecting demand, especially if the ecotourists are provided with some assurance that most or all of the revenues are allocated to the park system.”19 Additionally, because of the experience at ecotourism sites or simply the concern for environmental issues, ecotourists may also provide donations that will further benefit the environment. “Through its users fees, donations and other sources, ecotourism therefore has an unfulfilled potential to generate much-needed funds for protected-area systems and other natural habitats.”20

Economic Benefits

16 Weaver, 23
17 Weaver, 23
18 Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler, 324
19 Weaver, 23
20 Ibid., 24
Economic benefits are usually the main driving force behind ecotourism. “For all levels of government, as well as local communities, potential economic benefits, such as income and jobs, usually constitute a more compelling incentive to pursue ecotourism than the environmental considerations.” Ecotourism creates direct revenues from its activities, and serves as spin-off for other businesses. “Unlike many sustainable harvesting initiatives, ecotourism consistently provides a financial return per hectare competitive with current land use.”

Under ideal circumstances, ecotourism can provide local economic benefits such as employment, improved infrastructure, and increased business for local stores, while also maintaining ecological resources. When local inhabitants are involved in the management and operation of ecotourism services and other complementary sectors of business, such as vendors, restaurants, and shops, ecotourism can substantially contribute to the local economy. As ecotourism is a constantly growing industry, “ecotourism may provide a particularly lucrative long-term revenue source for communities that decide to pursue this option.” It may also indirectly stimulate the economies of nearby communities. Additionally, as ecotourists come to enjoy the environmental attracts offered by ecotourism, they subsequently may also patronize local cultural and heritage attractions as well.

**Equity Benefits**

Ecotourism is usually not a high-cost, high-skill, or high-risk activity. Thus, it can be practiced and enjoyed by a broad segment of the population.

Unlike most forms of tourism, ecotourism gives an array of socioeconomic groups access to it. “Consequently, large numbers of people are able to benefit form the high aesthetic qualities of interacting with wildlife and natural habitat, as well as associated cultural issues. Increased public awareness of the environmental and cultural issues, among both tourists and hosts, may also be seen as a social as well as environmental benefit.”

Ecotourism can also increase the socioeconomic participation of locals in the mainstream economy, as many environmental destinations are in previously or currently still remote destinations. These new participants of

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21 Ibid., 25
22 Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler, 323
23 Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler, 323
24 Weaver, 25
25 Ibid., 27
the economy may also benefit from exposure to people from different backgrounds and socioeconomic groups with whom they might otherwise never had the opportunity to interact and engage with.

**Ecotourism’s Disadvantages**

Although ecotourism in remote areas can be positive, such “rapid tourism development can “create...its own unique problems.” Accordingly, the successful implementation of ecotourism may in fact be its greatest pitfall as it can lead to the degradation of the social and natural wealth of a community.

**Environmental Costs**

If adequate attention or resources are not invested in the management of the environmental capital that attracts tourists, or in the infrastructure that supports ecotourism, ecotourism may have increasingly negative impacts on the environment it seeks to protect.

It is possible that ecotourism sites will exceed local carrying capacities. This would be a direct result of “successful ecotourism initiatives [that] may draw increasing interest and a correspondingly higher number of tourists, thus, increasing negative impacts such as solid waste generation, habitant disturbance, and forest degradation resulting from trail erosion,” or “by modification associated with ecotourism, such as the construction of fixed visitor accommodation, basic infrastructure, waste-disposal facilities, etc.” Thus, though ecotourism seeks to preserve the environment, it may foster unexpected negative consequences that are detrimental to a wider area because of increased exposure to already fragile sites. Such negative consequences can occur “in the habituation of local animals to the presence of humans, the siting of such services within a critical breeding or migration habitat and the introduction and dispersal of exotic flora and fauna,” and accordingly, “ecotourism cannot be viewed as a benign, non-consumptive use of natural resources.”

High growth rates for ecotourism characteristic amongst different environmental sites does not allow sufficient response time from planners and mangers to confront certain issues created by the influx; and unfortunately, “lucrative revenues so derived may take precedence over due consideration for the capacity of sites to

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26 “Sustainable Tourism: Briefing Paper”
27 Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler, 324
28 Weaver, 24
29 Ibid.
30 Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler, 324
accommodate such increased (although in these cases it may no longer be legitimate to refer to such forms of tourism as ‘ecotourism’).”31

Economic Costs

Ecotourism, like any industry, requires fixed cost investments before it can garner any fiscal profits. These funds include “the acquisition of lands for the establishment of protected areas, restoration costs, the development of a suitable management plan and other aspects of the necessary regulatory environment, the training of local personnel, promotion and marketing and the construction of both superstructures (e.g. accommodations, interpretation centers) and infrastructure (e.g. roads, cars, parks, trails, waste disposal and energy systems).”32 Ecotourism also has ongoing expenses, such as the maintenance of facilities, upgrading skills, wages, habitat protection and enhancement. Like all other forms of tourism, ecotourism is not always a stable industry and as a result, it faces uncertainty in patron levels and the consequent uncertainty in revenue levels. These kinds of variations in the consumer market can be triggered by seasonal influxes, “political uncertainty, social unrest (regional, national or local), natural disasters, epidemics, the vagaries of fashion, the establishment of intervening opportunities, local hostility, increased crime or the unintentional deterioration of product.”33

Additionally, ecotourism may also fail to provide widespread economic benefits, as it may actually lead to minimal contributions to local development. It is possible that little or no economic revenue reaches local people; a concern that is often brought up in discussing the sustainability of ecotourism is that ecotourism creates relatively few jobs and little income for local inhabitants. “Despite the tendency of ecotourism to emphasize the consumption for local good and services, revenue leakages will inevitably occur through the necessity of importing at least some goods and services, and through the expatriation of profits generated by non-local entrepreneurs.”34

Equity Costs

A major concern is that ecotourism can contribute to the cultural transformation of communities. As ecotourism enters isolated environments, contact between disparate cultures is inevitable. “However well intended, the most intimate interactions sought by ecotourists may

31 Weaver, 25
32 Ibid., 26
33 Weaver, 26
34 Ibid.
result in intrusive or inappropriate behavior and the introduction of potentially harmful alien values.”35

Communities that are visited by tourists adapt surprisingly quickly. Once given the chance to prosper economically, society’s competitive nature can create rapid changes within such communities and cause community disintegration. As individuals seek to maximize economic gains, community members may change their social behaviors and thus decrease community cohesion. “Even where a host culture is not perceived as being traditional or pre-modern, ecotourism has been criticized as an aspect of an elitist environmentalist ideology, which is imposed on a host society who may be perceived as incompatible with the ideology or, more cynically, with the revenue generating potential of ecotourism.”36

Ecotourism can result in a disconnection between a native society and the culture and environment that they once identified with.

Such behavior could be manifest in ecotourism stakeholders and ecotourists’ objections to certain cultural practices like hunting, slash-and-burn agricultures, and other traditional activities. Outsiders participating in ecotourism may try to impose their notion of society upon local cultures, and by doing so induce radical changes to that culture. Local cultures can also be hindered simply by the establishment of ecotourism that causes population displacement though the acquisition of land for preservation and the migration of non-local labor attracted by economic activity. There are examples in the ecotourism sector “of communities becoming marginalized and forced out of traditional lands as protected areas and destinations become established.”37 This may also “stop people from having the right to access land, water and natural resources.”38

Another threat of ecotourism for a community is the “commodification” of a culture, “wherein people and their cultures become marketable commodities.”39 This can result in serious disintegration of a local community’s social and cultural structures, and consequently, the erosion of a community identity based on previously intrinsically valued cultural traditions.

Ecotourism in Costa Rica

35 Ibid., 26
36 Ibid.
37 “Sustainable Tourism: Briefing Paper”
38 Ibid.
39 Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler, 325
One such developing country that is thriving on ecotourism is Costa Rica. The natural beauty, political stability, and governmental commitment to environmental preservation have placed Costa Rica at the forefront of the ecotourism industry. Because of these factors, “over the past two decades, tourism and ecotourism in particular have become an increasingly important source of revenue for this small Central American country.” In 2000, 1.1 million, nearly one-quarter of all tourists to Central America, visited Costa Rica; 65-70% of those Costa Rican vacations were classified as “environmentally friendly.”

Costa Rica’s unique locational setting makes the country “the only region of the world which is both interoceanic and inter-continental,” creating a ‘bottleneck’ effect that explains its extraordinary biodiversity and natural landscape. The tropical climate and variations in altitude foster an array of flora and fauna. “Evidence of this biodiversity includes the presence of 20 ‘life zones’ (ranging from mangroves and costal rain forest and subalpine grassland), containing at least 850 bird species, 1260 tree species, 1200 orchid species, 237 mammal species, and 361 species of reptiles and amphibians.”

Furthermore, Costa Rica is a particularly appealing tourist destination in Central America at least partially due to its position as the most politically stable country in the region. Unlike most Central American countries, Costa Rica has been a democracy since 1953 and all political transitions since have occurred smoothly. Therefore, Costa Rica is commonly perceived as a safe tourist destination. “International tourism receipts rose from $117 million in 1984 to $136 million in 1987 and $577 million in 1993. By 1992, tourism surpassed the banana trade as the leading source of foreign exchange, both reflecting and reinforcing tourism’s status as a key element in contemporary national development strategies.”

The government of Costa Rica encourages ecotourism and environmental preservation. The country’s national parks system was established in 1970 and since then 21% of the national territory has been designated as preservation sites. (narayan 4). The National Tourism Board under the Ministry of Industry and Culture is the government agency responsible for regulating tourism in the country; their Tourism Development Strategy “emphasize[s] ‘nature and adventure tourism’ ” (Weaver 84). The government also spends a great deal of money on tourist infrastructure.

40 Ibid.
41 Acosta
42 Weaver, 81
43 Ibid.
44 Weaver, 83
Roads, electricity, telephone lines, and an international airport make travel to and around the country convenient for foreigners.

All of these reasons help to explain why ecotourism is a major industry in Costa Rica; its environmental, economic, and equity advantages and disadvantages are incarnated in the Costa Rican context.

**The 3 E’s in the Costa Rican Context**

Through the 3 E’s, this paper will now approach Costa Rica as a case study for how sustainable ecotourism can actually be for developing countries. Ecotourism in Costa Rica, like many developing countries, ranges from large-scale resorts to homestays in small villages. Recognizing research limitations, this paper is obliged to evaluate the panoply of Costa Rican ecotourism instead of focusing on certain ecotourism categories or destinations in the country. The purpose of this is not to reduce ecotourism to generalizations, but to allow for a comprehensive perspective of ecotourism in Costa Rica that will inform conclusions about the sustainability of ecotourism in developing countries around the world. The following sections will demonstrate that Costa Rica displays both the positive and negative effects of ecotourism discussed above.

**Ecotourism and Environment**

The environment is a significant resource for and beneficiary from ecotourism. Costa Rica’s natural abundance is what attracts ecotourists to the country. Ecotourism raises both funds and awareness for Costa Rica’s environment, but also gives rise to negative environmental impacts.

Because the environment is so linked to livelihood options, locals feel a greater commitment to protect it. The Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve is the most prominent reserve in the country and 95% of all park revenues go toward park maintenance and environmental research. Also, local perception of the quetzal, a bird found in the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, has been transformed due ecotourist’s interest in seeing the bird in its natural habitat. As one worker commented, “five years ago, [he] might have shot at this bird with a gun, probably just for the hell of it, ….Now [he] shoot[s] it with [his] camera.”

This may also be the consequence of the awareness of environmental issues that comes from ecotourism practices. Monteverde also boasts nearby small-scale lodging and eco-friendly adventure options such as white-water rafting.

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45 Vivanco, 80
However, ecotourism in Costa Rica has also unintentionally caused environmental degradation. For example, it has been documented that due to ecotourism, “the trails at Chirripo and Poas...have suffered damage [and the] migration of monkeys from Cabo Blanco reserve since it opened to the public are reported to be have decreased the population of the howler monkey up to 40% and the white-faced monkey up to 27%.”\textsuperscript{46} Additionally, ecotourism infrastructure has caused other indirect forms of environmental degradation. Extreme water consumption has been required for tourist facilities like golf courses. A small-scale lodge called Desarrollos Ecológicos (Ecological Development) was marketed as “environmentally sensitive for its recycling, composting, and nature walks” even though “was built within the Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge where development is restricted.”\textsuperscript{47} These sorts of issues highlight the notion that ecotourism sites may not necessarily be in the best interest of the environment they purportedly protect.

\textbf{Ecotourism and Economy}

Economic incentives are what ultimately drive ecotourism; ecotourism in Costa Rica also displays positive and negative economic consequences.

Ecotourism has unequivocally generated wealth for Costa Rican communities. “Many middle and lower-middle class Costa Ricans have managed to move into auxiliary businesses associated with ecotourism, including opening tour agencies or restaurants.... Ecotourism has [also]...provided more funds for conservation projects, national parks, and private reserves.”\textsuperscript{48}

Conversely, because there is no formal regulation system for ecotourism in Costa Rica, many self-proclaimed “greenwashed” ecotourism sites “do not really...contribute to the quality of life in their communities.”\textsuperscript{49} Instead, resorts built by foreign corporations consisting of “vacation homes, condos, shopping centers, golf courses, [and] marinas.... [are] call[ed] ‘eco developments.’”\textsuperscript{50} One ecotourism expert asserted “the only thing green about some of these places is the color of the dollars they are earning.”\textsuperscript{51}

Also, seasonality and tourism packages drastically impact ecotourism patronage and how much money actually reaches local communities.

\textsuperscript{46} Inman, 28
\textsuperscript{47} Honey, “Giving a Grade,” 44
\textsuperscript{48} Honey, “Giving a Grade,” 45
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 43
\textsuperscript{50} Honey, “Giving a Grade,” 43
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
Because of this, local income is uncertain and the profits often end up in the hands of foreign developers and corporations. One local ecotourism hotel owner points out that “the Spanish Barcelo chain...can sell a $5000 tour package through any one of their chain of 200 US-based travel agencies...[and] spend...only $2000 of this in Costa Rica. [Thus,] their local investment benefits disproportionately, and the profit is directly repatriated to Spain.”\(^{52}\) While the Four Seasons Papagayo is “being billed to the travel press as ecologically responsible” while it is hardly taken into consideration that “this all-inclusive resort will bring only modest revenue to Costa Rica, with vacationers paying for their packages overseas and not needing to venture into Costa Rica since everything (except a rain forest!) is available at the resort.”\(^{53}\)

**Ecotourism and Equity**

The ways in which ecotourism enables and hinders equity in Costa Rican society is closely linked to environmental and economic issues, as well as social ones.

Ecotourism definitely creates wealth for local communities and their environments. It also fosters an awareness of environmental and cultural issues. The preservation of Monteverde’s quetzal can be attributed to ecotourism’s influence. Ecotourism can also “provide tangible benefits to area residents” through efforts like those of the country’s “original” ecolodge, Rara Avis.\(^{54}\) Its proprietor, Amos Bien, has used ecotourism to positively impact his community “through employment and profit-sharing, purchasing supplies locally, awarding student scholarships, offering free tours for local school children and making in-kind donations to the local clinic and schools.”\(^{55}\) Entire rural communities, like that of Monte Verde, that would never otherwise have had the opportunity to enter the global economy, have done just that due to ecotourism.

Although ecotourism is meant to involve and benefit local communities, this is often not the case. Local communities are often not included in the planning process, nor are they able to compete with large-scale, foreign ecotourism operations. The Santa Clara Lodge, one such local ecotourism start-up that strives toward sustainability, was determined by the government to be too small to qualify for tax breaks from the Costa Rica Tourism Board. Even though the practices of micro-scale ecotourism sites are usually better than those of large hotels, “all the [Costa Rica Tourism Board] tax breaks go to big projects. There is no government policy

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\(^{52}\) Olsen and Pratt, 18-19  
\(^{53}\) Honey, Giving a Grade,” 44  
\(^{54}\) Ibid.  
\(^{55}\) Ibid.
favoring small businesses.”\textsuperscript{56} Another negative impact of ecotourism has been the displacement of the rural poor located around parks, but this has been curbed in recent years by employing those people in ecotourism-related sectors.\textsuperscript{57} The commodification of culture, like the quetzal in Monteverde, is a different danger of ecotourism. This is troublesome because it reduces community values to a monetary value.

**Conclusion**

Costa Rica’s ecotourism industry demonstrates the promises and pitfalls of ecotourism in developing countries. With regard to the 3 E’s of environment, economy, and equity, a case study of Costa Rica reveals that ecotourism can, and does, have both costs and benefits. Thus, it follows that ecotourism that is truly sustainable in Costa Rica and similar ecotourism destinations must be planned and implemented so as to maximize benefits and minimize costs. Achieving just one or two of the 3 E’s is not enough in the pursuit of sustainability. Fulfilling all of the 3 E’s is imperative to the success of ecotourism as an economic solution in developing countries.

The lack of a formal ecotourism certification program in Costa Rica, and elsewhere, greatly hinders ecotourism’s sustainability. Ecotourism sites that may not actually promote environmental, economic, and equity-based interests are able to profit from standing under the big greenwashed umbrella of “ecotourism.” This undermines the purpose and success of the ecotourism industry. However, in 1999, Costa Rica’s government launched the voluntary Certification For Sustainable Tourism program (CST) that “categorize[s] and certif[ies] each tourism company according to the degree to which its operations comply to a model of sustainability.”\textsuperscript{58} The program was one of the first of its kind and utilizes four main parameters to evaluate the level to which a tourism company achieves sustainability:

**List of Descriptors by Area**

**A. Physical-biological environment**

1. Policies and programs
2. Emissions and wastes
3. Gardens
4. Natural areas
5. Protection of flora and fauna

\textsuperscript{56} Honey, *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development*, 137
\textsuperscript{57} Honey, *Ecotourism and Certification*, 145
\textsuperscript{58} “What CST is All About”
B. Hotel Facilities
   6. Formulation of policies
   7. Water consumption
   8. General supplies consumption- Food and beverages- Cleaning and cosmetic supplies
   10. Employee training

C. Customers
   11. Communication and involvement
   12. Room conditioning (management)
   13. Management of guest groups
   14. Customer feedback measurement

D. Socio-economic environment
   15. Direct economic benefits for local communities
   16. Non-direct economic benefits for local communities
   17. Contribution to the promotion of local culture
   18. Contribution to public health
   19. Infrastructure and security

Based on the percentage achieved in each of the four parameters, companies are awarded CST certification levels:

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<th>Level</th>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
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<td>&gt;95</td>
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Because the four parameters and their subsections correspond in many ways to fulfillment of the 3 E’s, we believe the CST is a significant measure taken to ensure the sustainability of ecotourism. Even though it is a voluntary program, consumers will probably prefer to patronize CST-certified locations; the competitive market should impel more and more companies to strive toward CST certification. By August 2001, 100+ hotels had applied for CST certification. Since the establishment of the CST, numerous similar rubrics have been created by different ecotourism-

59 “What CST is All About”
60 Ibid.
61 Honey, Ecotourism and Certification, 149
related organizations. This has only “made it difficult for tourists to
distinguish exactly what is being certified.”

We recognize the difficulty of applying a single set of standards to
different global contexts but doing so would alleviate consumer confusion,
make ecotourism more accessible to consumers, and encourage
sustainable practices on the part of ecotourism operators. We believe that
the CST has the potential to be ultimately implemented in other developing
countries. Among the countries of Central America, governments have
generally supported the idea of implementing the CST as a regional
program. In 2002, the UN Partnerships for Sustainable Development
conducted a feasibility study for doing this, which concluded that such an
expansion would be possible.

Achieving sustainable ecotourism in Costa Rica and other developing
countries requires a commitment to achieving sustainability in each of the 3 E’s.
Through the cultivation of environmental, economic, and equity-based sustainability, all
stakeholders of ecotourism benefit. This can only be achieved as a result of careful
planning and implementation that is engineered to maximize ecotourism’s benefits and
minimize its costs. The CST is a mechanism for doing this that will hopefully be
expanded to countries experiencing similar struggles with ecotourism. The CST has the
potential to ensure that all stakeholders of ecotourism, from consumers, to proprietors, to
community members, to the environment, benefit from sustainable tourism practices,
which is exactly the goal of true ecotourism.

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62 Ibid., 152
63 Ibid., 153
64 “Certification for Sustainable Tourism”


