

INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

What is Sustainable Tourism?

Sustainable tourism, as defined by UN Tourism, is “the 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” (Cruz, 2019).

Sustainable tourism is a way of managing tourism that aims to protect the environment, respect local cultures, and benefit local communities. Its focus is on reducing negative impacts, such as pollution and resource overuse, while ensuring that tourism helps the local economy and people. This approach tries to balance the needs of tourists, the environment, and residents, ensuring that tourism can continue to thrive without causing harm.

Since the products of the tourism industry are linked with natural resources, it is important to promote sustainability practices to help preserve attractions and destinations, both natural and built, for future generations while enhancing visitor experiences today.

Relevance of Sustainable Tourism

One way to characterize sustainable tourism is that it benefits communities, the environment, and the economy more than harms them. Destinations that practice sustainable and responsible tourism seek to improve people’s living and visiting conditions. The following are the benefits of sustainable tourism:

- **It helps safeguard wildlife, the environment, and natural resources.** Sustainable tourism enables the implementation of strict tourism regulations, such as limiting the number of visitors and activities, to protect wildlife and ecosystems.
- **It preserves cultural assets and develops genuine travel experiences.** Revenues earned from tourism, such as entrance and environmental fees, help fund attractions’ maintenance and preservation of their structure and appearance. Sustainable tourism allows locals with unique cultural experiences and customs to share their knowledge with tourists, which helps preserve those practices.
- **It establishes accessible and inclusive travel options.** This means that tourist attractions and establishments will be equipped with facilities to accommodate all people, including those with disabilities, ensuring they can experience the world’s wonders. For example, natural parks have wheelchair-accessible trails to be accessible to all tourists.
- **It provides socio-economic benefits for communities who live in tourist destinations.** Tourism attractions and businesses prioritize local people as guides, staff, and cultural performers, which helps them be employed. Farm-to-table restaurants are an example of this since they provide economic support to the local agricultural communities.
- **It fosters mutually beneficial relationships between visitors and local communities.** *Agritourism* is an example of this, which allows visitors to stay on working farms and participate in agricultural activities. This creates a direct economic benefit for farmers and a unique tourist experience.

To fully understand why sustainable tourism is important, the development and proper balance of the different dimensions must be done.

Dimensions of Sustainable Tourism (Lopez et al., 2023)

For tourism to remain sustainable, it needs to be able to continue for an indefinite time without little to no repercussions. Below are the three (3) dimensions of sustainable development that must be well-balanced:

- *Environment* refers to the dimension that is concerned with the preservation of natural resources.
- *Economic* refers to the dimension that centers on the idea of an efficient and responsible use of resources that leads to long-term profitability.

- *Social/Cultural* focuses on the interrelationship of systems and processes that support creating healthy, livable communities that can sustain themselves.

Only when these dimensions are established and in harmony will sustainability be achievable. If one of these dimensions is neglected, the others will also be at risk. *Figure 1* shows how the interaction between the three (3) dimensions leads to sustainable tourism development.

In summary, a balance between the environmental and economic dimensions makes development **viable** (something that can be achieved). A balance between the economic and social/cultural dimensions makes development **equitable** (fair regarding the area of concern and its community). A balance between the environment and social/cultural dimensions makes development a tool for an **acceptable** area (fit for human habitation). The balance of all three (3) dimensions makes development sustainable and may continue for an indefinite period.

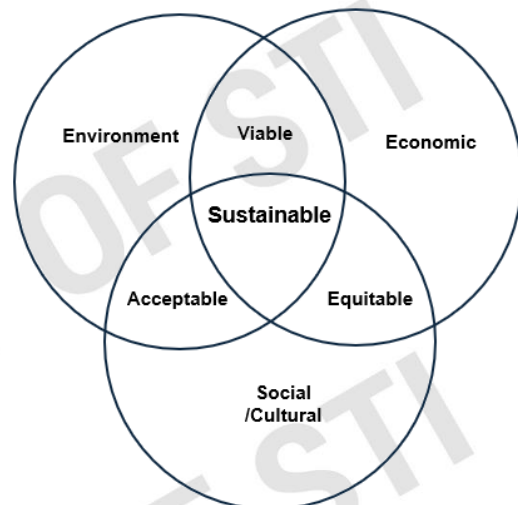


Figure 1. Path to Sustainability Diagram
Source: Sustainable Tourism, 2023.

Based on the dimensions, the following are the reasons why tourism needs to be sustainable (Cruz, 2019):

Environmental dependence

Tourism relies on various resources to meet tourists' needs (e.g., accommodation and food). The sustainability of these resources is important to maintain tourism and environments (natural and man-made), as tourism activities depend on them. For example, The Galapagos Islands in Ecuador is known for attracting nature enthusiasts because of its diverse ecosystem and pristine environment suitable for various water activities and wildlife observation. To protect the wildlife and the natural resources, conservation organizations implement measures and programs to protect the island to ensure that tourists can continue experiencing the unique attraction.

Economic activity

Tourism provides economic opportunities and chances for local people to be involved in the global economy. The goal of tourism in the economic context is to grow local, regional, and national economies through profits made by providing tourism products and services. For instance, local entrepreneurs benefit from tourism by operating businesses such as souvenir shops and traditional craft markets and facilitating cultural tours, which enables them to have an income while preserving their cultural practices.

Social welfare

Tourism contributes to the welfare of people, particularly the poor. Some of the main goals of tourism in the social welfare context are to alleviate poverty and to empower marginalized groups such as women and minorities. For instance, community-based tourism projects that involve ethnic groups are becoming common to create new sources of income for local families. The revenue generated from tourism helps to alleviate poverty by providing stable incomes for them such as guided village tours and homestays.

Understanding these dimensions should allow the stakeholders to determine their roles in promoting sustainable tourism. The goal is to ensure that each contributes to the well-being of destinations, allowing them to become more resilient and attractive for future generations.

Sustainable Tourism Stakeholders (Santos, 2023)

The role of sustainable tourism stakeholders is to ensure that tourism benefits everyone and the world. They need to work together to promote and deliver sustainability practices that preserve and conserve all the resources used in the tourism industry.

The following are the key players, each with specific roles, that may positively or negatively impact sustainable tourism development and management.

Tourists are considered the primary consumers of tourism products and services. They are often viewed as the major causes of problems in tourism. In the perception of the host community, tourists can be blamed for the negative consequences tourism brings. However, efforts are being made to establish regulations and policies to influence tourist behaviors. There are also attempts to educate tourists about the impacts they make on tourism sustainability so they can be utilized as contributors to the sustainability of tourism.

Local communities/residents are a diverse group of people within geographical and political boundaries. They consist of people from different ancestry, attitudes, backgrounds, and beliefs. However, they share a mutual understanding of preferences in various aspects and ways of life. They can be a major attraction to tourists as they offer their cultural heritage, which includes artworks and crafts, music, dance, and religious festivals.

Below shows how the local community is involved in sustainable tourism (McCool & Bosak, 2016):

- They actively participate in the decision-making process since it is a democratic process, which means that their voices and needs are considered and respected.
- They ask questions and raise concerns regarding the direct effects of tourism in their community.
- They provide accurate information and proper guidance to the decisions that will be made regarding sustainable tourism.
- They can provide cultural education for tourists by helping them understand and respect local customs, traditions, and values so that they will become aware and sensitive to avoid misunderstandings and disrespectful behavior.

The **public sector** includes government ministries and departments and local government tourism departments. The public sector is involved in sustainable tourism because it is mandated to represent the whole population, focus on the benefits of all affected by tourism development, and create long-term plans for sustainable tourism development rather than the private sector. It also regulates and markets tourism.

Government agencies may use tourism marketing and promotion as a controlling measure for sustainability reasons. For example, an ecotourism site may be advertised only to domestic tourists to limit the number of visitors and meet its capacity to prevent damage.

The **tourism industry** includes all businesses providing and supplying tourists with products and services. They should contribute to creating, developing, and implementing sustainable tourist products and services that encourage the respectful use of tangible and intangible natural and cultural heritage that transmit the destination identity through the tourism experience.

Other Stakeholders

- **Voluntary sector organizations** include pressure groups, voluntary trusts, charities, and tourism industry organizations that address concerns about the impacts of tourism. Below are some examples of voluntary sector organizations that help promote sustainability:
 - **Haribon Foundation** advocates biodiversity protection and conservation through building and empowering communities to apply various disciplinary approaches. (Haribon, n.d.).
 - **Philippine Reef and Rainforest Conservation Foundation, Inc. (PRRCFI)** is a non-stock, non-profit organization focused on environmental conservation. This foundation manages Danjungan Island,

- a marine sanctuary and environmental education destination in Cauayan, Negros Occidental, known for its limestone forests and mangroves (PRRCFI, n.d.).
 - **Eco Explorations** is an organization that promotes responsible travel and environmental conservation in the Philippines by organizing eco-tours and volunteer programs that focus on wildlife conservation, community development, and sustainable practices (Eco Explorations, n.d.).
- **Media** make tourism content available to the public through television, radio, print, and the Internet.

These stakeholders must be able to fully understand their roles so that they may be wary of their actions toward achieving sustainability. It is also essential that the following elements are met for tourism to be sustainable:

- **Stakeholders are adept in their function/role.** This means that all stakeholders should implement sustainable practices in operations, promote eco-friendly options, and follow policies and regulations that support sustainable tourism.
- **The presence of strong political leadership to make sure there is wide participation and collaboration among all key players.** The public sector should be able to lead and set a clear vision for sustainable tourism to facilitate collaboration and ensure cooperation among stakeholders towards sustainability.
- **Impacts are continuously monitored, and preventive or corrective actions are utilized when necessary.** The public and voluntary sectors should be able to conduct regular assessments, enforce regulations and adjust policies, and implement sustainability reporting on tourism's impacts on the environment and local communities.
- **Tourism should provide meaningful experiences and high levels of satisfaction for tourists.** Tourism businesses should be able to create authentic and engaging experiences that offer unique cultural experiences and highlight sustainable tourism options and the benefits of responsible travel.
- **Raising tourists' awareness about sustainability issues and practices.** This involves voluntary sector organizations and the media launching awareness campaigns to inform and educate all stakeholders about the importance and issues faced regarding tourism sustainability.

Clearly defining each stakeholder's roles and responsibilities allows an effective and organized approach to sustainable tourism. This ensures that tourism development will benefit all parties involved.

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