

Green Travel

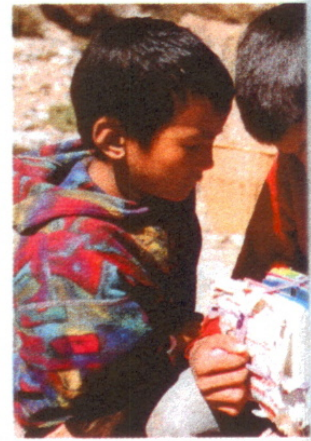
TRENDS IN ECOTOURISM

ECOTOURISM IS TRAVEL with ethics. It has, in essence, three core tenets: (1) Protect and enhance the natural environment; (2) Respect local cultures and provide tangible benefits to local communities; (3) Be educational and enjoyable for the traveler. LOHAS and ecotourism are part of the same growing consumer movement focused on sustainable living, social justice and personal development.

Ecotourism emerged from the environmental movement of the late 1970s. By the early 1990s it was the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry, expanding globally between 20 and 34 percent per year. In 2004, ecotourism and nature tourism were growing three times faster than the global tourism

industry as a whole (World Tourism Organization—a specialized agency of the United Nations). In 2002, LOHAS found that ecotourism was a \$77 billion market in the U.S. alone. According to Travel Weekly, sustainable tourism is expected to grow to 25 percent of the world's tourism market by 2012, taking the value

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sector to approximately \$473 billion a year. Current trends in the dynamic field of ecotourism include:

Travelers' Philanthropy

A growing source of international development aid, spearheaded by ecotourism companies, supports community projects in host destinations. Increasingly, conscientious companies and travelers are providing "time, talent, and treasure" to further the well-being of host communities. Travelers' Philanthropy projects help empower local communities by providing social services, jobs, skills, ownership, education and environmental stewardship.

Case-in-point: After a trek in Nepal, Dr. Antonia Neubauer, founder of Myths and Mountains, a Nevada-based travel company, asked her Sherpa guide what he would do for his village. "Build a library," he responded. That library project has since evolved into READ (Read Education and Development)—today a network of 40 community-owned and operated libraries across Nepal. Myths and Mountains donates \$50 from every traveler to support READ. For about \$46,000, READ builds a library, stocks it with 3,000–5,000 books, trains locals and funds sustainable community projects. The program won the 2006 Access to Learning Award from the Gates Foundation.

"Voluntourism"

Closely linked to Travelers' Philanthropy is the movement for "Voluntourism": active, hands-on, volunteer vacations that address global issues of environmental degradation and poverty while fostering understanding between visitors and host communities. Its origins trace back to the days of healers, explorers and sailors who traveled while offering services to those in need. With growing awareness of global citizenship and social responsibility, it is no surprise that "voluntourism" is booming. According to Peter Yesawich, CEO of America's leading hospitality marketing agency, six percent of all U.S. active travelers took a volunteer vacation last year.

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