

ECOTREKKING: A VIABLE DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE FOR THE KOKODA TRACK?

by

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature of Candidate

S. Grabowski

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ABSTRACT

Tourism as an industry in the 20th and 21st Century has primarily been an international money-making industry which has attracted many governments of less developed countries as a fast mechanism for development. This has often involved a trade-off between the pursuit of economic wealth and support for the social, cultural and natural environments. The negative impacts of mass tourism in these economies are countless and well documented, especially as many of these countries are still trying to deal with impacts caused during colonial occupancy. Consequently, alternative tourism has been presented as a way to manage tourism development which is economically, social and ecologically sustainable. One manifestation of this trend is community-based tourism, which aims to be inclusive of the host communities as they plan for tourism and considers the socio cultural and natural resources and desires of tourists in a more equitable manner.

The aim of this thesis is to determine how ecotrekking as a form of community-based tourism can provide a foundation for development for remote rural communities in developing countries. It was conceptually determined that if the needs of the community matched those of the tourists, then a sustainable ecotrekking industry can evolve. To explore this issue contextually, a case study of the Kokoda Track (KT) in Papua New Guinea is presented based around three research questions:

1. What role can market segmentation play in sustainable tourism development in remote rural communities?
2. What outcomes do the Kokoda Track communities envisage for the future of tourism on the Kokoda Track?
3. Do Kokoda tourists meet the outcomes envisaged by the community?

A review of the literature found that market segmentation is a tool used in destination planning to assess visitor characteristics and match these to resource capabilities. It was employed in this study to determine the characteristics and needs of Kokoda tourists through a questionnaire survey distributed to trekkers via the tour operators. It was found that the Kokoda tourist is a university educated, middle-aged man who visits the KT for adventure and historical reasons. They have higher-order needs of personal development and knowledge and value the authenticity of the experience.

The second research question was approached using secondary data analysis. Notes from Participatory Rural Appraisal workshops with community leaders in 2004 and 2005 were reinterpreted. The key themes to emerge were that the communities have a great need for basic facilities (education, transportation, telecommunications, medical infrastructure and water supplies) and they see tourism as an economic means to develop those facilities. They would like to build more guesthouses and provide food for tourists to increase revenue however, they are unsure of the extent to which this will be supported by trekkers.

A comparative analysis of the findings from research questions 1 and 2 was employed to address the third research question. The quantitative needs of the tourist market segment were matched to the qualitative expectations of the communities. It was found that the current Kokoda tourist is in favour of many of the outcomes that the Kokoda communities envisage. These include the provision of locally made food and guesthouses.

Further to this, the empirical results from the questionnaire found that ecotourists and cultural tourists are the tourist types that need to be targeted by operators. They indicated a strong match with the desires and needs of the Kokoda communities. For example, they indicated that the KT can cater for a much smaller number of trekkers than the other three pre-determined tourist types (adventure, organised and historic tourists). Additionally, the natural and cultural environments are more important to these tourist types inferring that the protection of these resources is of primary importance.

Consequently, it was established that ecotrekking can play an important role in development in less developed countries, if the right market segment is targeted to meet the needs of the community. Generally this can then ensure a slower rate of development, which allows the communities to adjust to the changes that occur at both a socio-cultural level and also in the infrastructure within their communities. In the longer term it also allows them to see how tourism can provide long term benefits not offered in extractive industries such as forestry and mining.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AT – Alternative tourism

CBE – Community-based ecotourism

CBT – Community-based tourism

CMT – Conventional mass tourism

HDI – Human development index

KT – Kokoda Track

KTA – The Kokoda Track Special Purpose Authority

KTF – Kokoda Track Foundation

LDC – Less developed country

NGO – Non-government organisation

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature