

## 3 tips to ensure ecotourism sustainability, economic growth

Ecotourism has become underpinned by travel, which places a great deal of importance on conserving the environment and the welfare of the people who live in tourist destinations across the globe. In South Africa, the growth in ecotourism has the potential to alleviate poverty through economic upliftment and creating jobs in parts of the country that require it most.



Ashim D'Silva via [Unsplash](#)

"Essentially, ecotourism should unite conservation, communities and sustainable travel. The greatest opportunity for South Africa is capitalising on ecotourism to ensure that the people living in the areas being visited are benefiting from the economic growth," says Charnel Kara, a tourism expert at FNB Business.

While there is no formal data to substantiate exactly how many people are employed within the sub sector, it is generally known that for every 8 to 10 tourists in South Africa one job is created. As a sub-sector, ecotourism is one of the fastest growing sub-sectors worldwide, reporting growth of between 10–15% annually. South Africa generates over R100bn a year in total tourism revenue, with ecotourism contributing a notable portion to this revenue, and making it an important sub-sector.

"A portion of the total income from ecotourism goes directly into the communities where the hotel and lodges are located, which helps reduce poverty and brings about higher paying jobs to the locals, spurring economic activity," explains Kara.

### **Kara advises that businesses in the tourism sector can exploit this growing niche by ensuring three main things:**

- **The wellbeing of the local environment** – The central tenant that drives ecotourism is the travellers' search for pristine environments around the world. South Africa already stands head and shoulders above many as we have some of the best coastal lines around the world. We have natural forests and wildlife, which make us competitive, the focus for businesses should be on creating systems that ensure sustainability.

- **The wellbeing of the locals** – The beauty with ecotourism is that it encourages local communities to take part in the running and continuity of the various businesses that bring in tourists. Businesses should be developing supply chains and human resources to ensure that income from tourism is spent and shared among the community.

- **The high-quality experience of the tourist** – The single biggest differentiating factor is customer service. When one travels, they are searching for an experience, often customer service makes the real difference for tourists, people are more likely to recommend you or return if they feel their experience was memorable and had a meaningful impact.

"Ecotourism awakens a certain awareness in tourists, which in turn significantly increases the quality of his/her travels whilst impacting on businesses and economies. It teaches travellers to be more responsible toward protected areas of the world, it helps educate people, it provides funds for conservation as well as for local communities, if done right, it is a win for everyone," concludes Kara.

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