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Sustainable tourism: Preservation or Exploration? Examining the viability of sustainable tourism efforts in the Amazon

Tourism poses a number of potential economic and social challenges to the Amazon basin however, successful sustainable tourism (ecotourism) has significant potential to improve the well-being of the Amazon rainforest and its inhabitants. This paper will review the relevant threats posed by unsustainable tourism, the potential benefits of sustainable tourism, and the effectiveness of various sustainable tourism initiatives within Brazil and Ecuador.

While, consensus exist that sustainable tourism plays a vital role in present and future preservation of the Amazon Rain excessive tourism can still pose a threat to the overall health of the rainforest and its inhabitants. High tourism volumes can result in harm to critical regions by increasing infrastructural needs such as roads land clearance for hotel construction. Additionally, interactions between people and wildlife can have negative health outcomes for wildlife. During a roundabout discussion conducted with representatives from each country signatory to the Amazon Cooperation Treaty identifiedfor potential major challenges to sustainable tourism in the Amazon basin (Jaywardena, & Sinclair) "resources needed for proper development of the industry" 2.) "level of infrastructure needed in the Amazon region" 3.) "in adequate legislative framework to protect the rainforest from Tourist," 4.) "Limited development standards for the practice of tourism in the Amazon"and 5.) "Issues of visitor health and safety in the Amazon" (Jaywardena & Sinclair).

While these factors remain a concern successful sustainable tourism poses significant potential to solve interrelated economic environmental problems within the Amazon. Sustainable tourism is often cited as a vital instrument for protection of the Amazon rainforest since it provides an alternative to more environmentally destructive industries such as mining and logging (Yanez, Elva, & Edauro). In addition to providing local income sustainable tourism creates stakeholder interest in Amazonian preservation as opposed to stakeholder interest in rainforest destruction (Yanez, Elva, & Edauro). The line of thinking goes in order to maintain ecotourism rainforest must remain pristine creating local interest in preservation as it is a matter of economic vitality. Indigenous tribes in the Peruvian Amazon were among the first advocates of sustainable tourism as an alternative model of economic development (Reyes, & Maria). The Anaconda, Jaguar, and Flote Orelleje, cultural centers and promoting tourism within the region a tool to fight the development of newly discovered oil on their lands (Reyes, & Maria). In the quote below one member of Peru's Achuar tribe promotes the tribe's new cultural center and describes ecotourism as vital to preserving the health of the rainforest.

"We, the Achuar, were born in the forest. Our traditions are still intact, our land untouched by logging or oil companies and our skies covered by flocks of colourful Macaws. Kapawi is an important part of our plans to preserve our culture and conserve the rainforest for our children and grandchildren. We want a sustainable future, and we invite you to be part of it." (Armstrong,

In addition to developing tribal economies and protecting tribal lands sustainable tourism has also helped to revive many indigenous cultures. This occurred in part due to newfound pride and identify it as an indigenous tribe member resulting from increased towards interest in indigenous peoples (Stronza). One journal article entitled Reflections on Identity in the Amazon found that sustainable tourism has increased the number of people speaking indigenous languages as tribes maintaining their native language we're more successful at attracting Tourist (Stronza). The quote below describes the cultural decline of the Eja esa tribe prior to intense western tourism and subsequent revival after.

“It was common to hear that the natives in Infierno had lost their authenticity, or that they were somehow not "real." Yet, when the community signed the contract with Rainforest Expeditions, many onlookers outside of the community were quick to protest, arguing that the influx of tourists to Infierno would destroy Infierno's ethnic identity. Here was an irony: on the one hand, the natives of Infierno were perceived as having little identity left to lose, but on the other hand, something about their identity was still worth saving from the Westernizing influences of tourism(Stronza)”

Brazil's federal government has undertaken some policy initiatives in order to ecotourism. The heart of the governments strategy for advancing ecotourism is in its pro eco-tour plan which have identified priority regions for tourism with in the Amazon basin (Reyes, Maria). In addition the plan callscalls for the creation of stakeholder forums (). In

addition to facilitating interactions among a diverse group of stakeholders stakeholders (Reyes, Maria). In addition the government is in the process of developing a procedure for assessing the viability of future ecotourism sites(Reyes, Maria).

All the efforts of the Brazilian government represents a positive step towards developing ecotourism is a vital part of its economy there are still efforts that can be undertaken to better facilitate this industry. Primarily when of enforcement on activities harmful the Amazon rainforest. Illegal logging mining and agricultureto remain highly prominent within the Amazonian region.

In conclusion ecotourism poses a considerably lower environmental impact relative to other major industries in the Amazon region and will continue to be an invaluable tool in promoting well-being of both the Amazon as people.

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