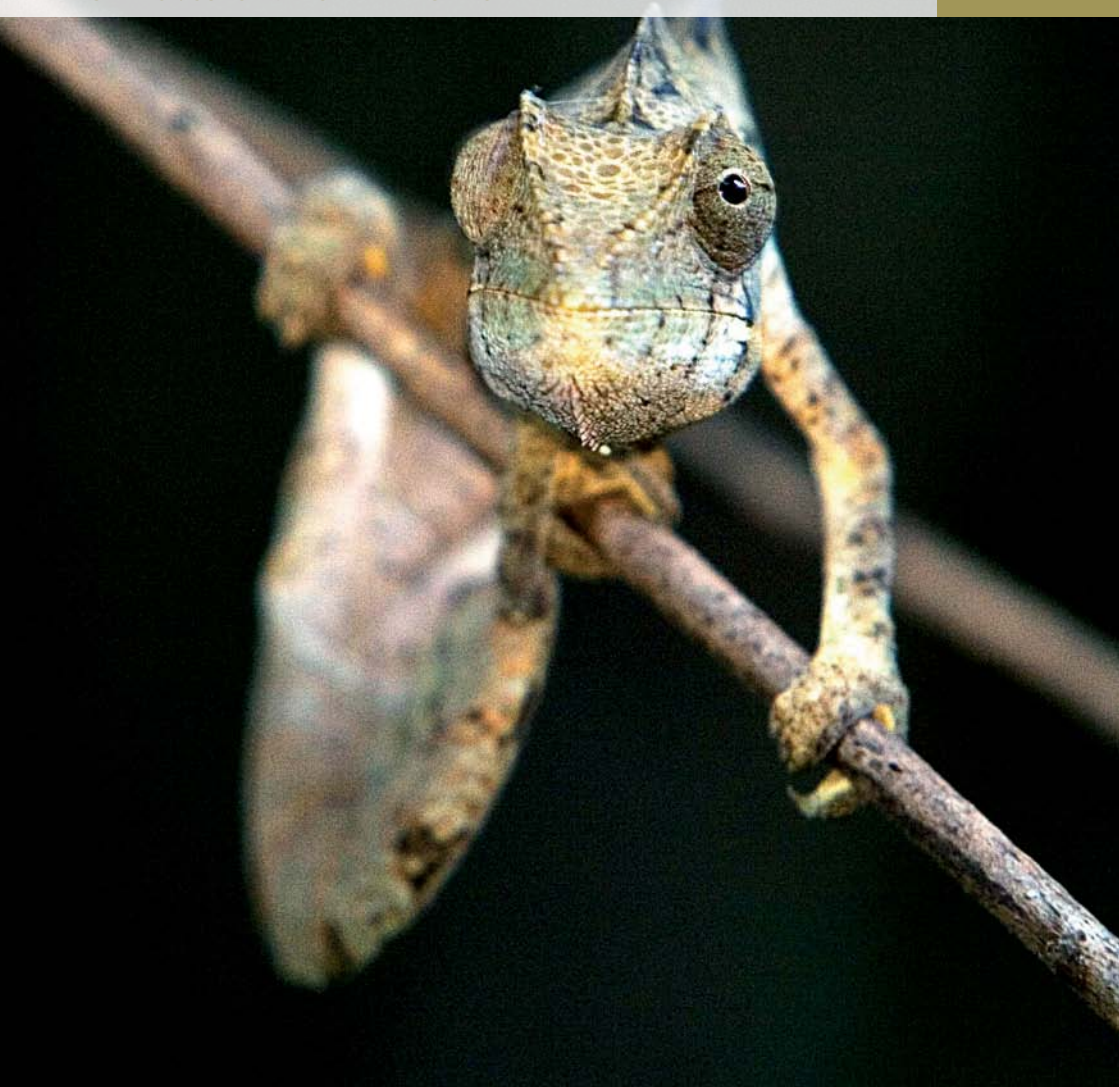


## ECO-TOURISM

By Shawn Peabody and Taylor Veriza

AUDIENCE: CONSERVATION FIELD AGENTS

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## Introduction

**For many communities who depend heavily on marine resources eco-tourism offers the possibility of supplementing or replacing income from fishing. In places that meet a few key criteria, eco-tourism offers the potential to revolutionise local economies, shifting the focus of most people's livelihood strategies away from fishing. In other communities, less well suited for tourism, the impact on livelihoods may be relatively small, but community income from eco-tourism can still play an important role in supporting conservation and development activities. This handbook, while potentially useful in all communities, is aimed at those who already have some tourism in the region.**

Through use of this handbook and with support from a government or non-governmental organisation (NGO) partner, it is hoped that these communities will be able to bring the benefits of tourism down to the community level while encouraging sustainable resource management.

### Criteria for eco-tourism

The following criteria are favourable for the development of eco-tourism. In general, the more criteria and the greater their presence in a community, the greater the potential for eco-tourism. These criteria will also determine to a large extent the kind of eco-tourism

(luxury, mid-range, adventure) and scale of tourism which are possible at a given site.

### Touristic infrastructure

Roads, airports, hotels, restaurants, park offices, tour agencies, and tour guides make visits to a site easier and more attractive for tourists. Sites without at least a minimal level of this type of infrastructure will be severely limited in the number of tourists that can be accommodated and will deter all but the most adventurous visitors.

### Health and security infrastructure

The presence of hospitals, clinics, trained doctors, police stations, and police supports tourism by reducing the risks of travel. Of these, security is the most critical. Areas with even small levels of banditry, violent conflict, or a history of attacks on tourists will severely deter tourism. Health infrastructure is especially important for groups travelling with children, the elderly, or the disabled.

### Communications infrastructure

Mobile telephone reception and internet access make it easier for tourists to plan their visits and also promote a sense of security and connectedness with friends and family in the tourists' home destination. A lack of communication infrastructure will limit tourism, but is a minor factor by itself. Security issues combined with poor communication will greatly increase the deterrent effect.

### Pristine natural resources

Eco-tourism is focused on wildlife and so pristine ecosystems are much more attractive

than degraded ones. Beautiful beaches are relatively common around the world and therefore they don't attract tourists away from local tourism markets. Pristine coral reefs and other marine systems are much less common and will attract visitors from much larger areas.

#### Presence of charismatic wildlife

All natural systems are not equal in terms of tourism attraction potential. Marine turtles, sharks, rays, reef fish, whales and dolphins are among the most important for tourism as are endemic species (animals only found in the local area, but not anywhere else), especially baobabs, birds, reptiles, and larger mammals (monkeys, lemurs). Seabirds, pelagic fish, mangrove forests and seagrass beds, are less important for tourism although can still attract tourists if other criteria are met.

#### Proximity to other touristic destinations and high-value tourism markets

Often the largest cost incurred by eco-tourists is travel and of these costs, airfare is the most expensive. The more expensive a place is to reach, the less likely tourists are to come, all else being equal. Most eco-tourists originate from the same areas. For the WIOMSA region, these are (in order from largest to smallest tourism market):

- Western Europe (especially France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Germany)
- The United States and Canada
- Japan
- South Africa

The cheaper and easier (fewer connecting flights needed) that it is to reach a site from these places, the more tourism potential will exist.

#### Different kinds of tourists

The tourism market consists of several different kinds of tourists. It is important that eco-tourism development be focused on attracting the most appropriate kinds of tourists, based on the qualities of the area. Targeting tourists who are unlikely to come to your area, or are unlikely to enjoy coming to your area will result in wasted time, money, and energy. These tourist classifications are:

##### Adventure tourists

These tourists are, as their name suggests, adventurous. They are most likely to brave difficult travel conditions to explore places that are new and different. These tourists generally don't mind staying in simpler accommodations and eating local cuisine. These tourists are most attracted to pristine wild places, endemic species and adventure sports like hiking, climbing, kayaking, and biking.

However, it must be remembered that even these tourists must be provided with a good standard of safety and comfort. Rooms need to be well ventilated, secure, have a constant source of water (though buckets are fine), and a clean bathroom. Additionally, while relatively easy to attract, these tourists generally have the least amount of money to spend.



### Mid-range tourists

Mid-range tourists have more money than adventure tourists and demand a higher level of eco-tourism infrastructure, but less so than luxury tourists. Mid-range tourists often travel in groups (arranged by their tour agency) and are generally older than adventure tourists. Security is a very important consideration for these tourists as is cleanliness and food.

### Luxury tourists

Luxury tourists require the highest levels of tourism infrastructure, but are willing to pay large sums of money to access it. Remoteness and exclusivity are highly valued, so it is hard to attract many of these tourists to the same place. Luxury tourism is likely to be out of the capacity of most rural communities to provide, however partnerships with luxury tour operators and hotels where community members provide services such as guiding, trail maintenance, or fresh food produce (seafood, agricultural products) is possible.

### Eco-tourism development planning

For many communities, there is little possibility of changing the tourism criteria in the short term. In the long term, however it is possible to improve on many of the criteria through investments in infrastructure and partnerships with government agencies and NGOs that also have an interest in growing tourism or protecting the environment. To facilitate the tourism development of a site, communities should work with these partner organisations to create an eco-tourism development plan.

The plan begins with a detailed survey of the criteria described in the section 'Criteria for eco-tourism', along with a number of other factors important to tourism development. The survey should identify the segments of the international and national tourism markets that have the most potential for growing tourism at your site. The survey may indicate, for example, that due to poor infrastructure and high distance to international markets, adventure tourism offers the greatest potential, while high-end luxury tourism will be impossible without the construction of an airstrip.

This will allow the community and its partners to focus energy and marketing resources on attracting adventure tourists rather than luxury tourists. On the other hand, the survey may indicate that a lack of charismatic fauna combined with a degraded reef system, but well developed communication and tourism infrastructure, provide an opportunity for development of eco-tourism focused on mangroves and water fowl which are still relatively pristine.

Once a survey has been conducted that identifies the greatest areas for eco-tourism development, communities should work with partners to create a tourism development plan. This plan should describe the key actions and investments that need to be made by the different eco-tourism stakeholders over the short, medium, and long term. Specific measurements should be indicated and each party should commit to the plan in writing.





Examples of actions might be:

- Training of 20 community eco-guides
- Construction of an information centre (reception area)
- Development of marketing materials (website, brochures to be placed in areas frequented by tourists)
- Letters written to major travel book publishers (*Lonely Planet, Bradt*)

A tourism oversight committee should be created which will monitor progress of the eco-tourism development plan. The committee should be heavily represented by local people and should focus not just on the development of tourism but more importantly, on integrating local people into the tourism industry in a way that improves standards of living without infringing on their rights, cultural heritage or degrading the local environment. Highly profitable commercial tourism has been repeatedly shown to marginalise local people, often through a weakening of traditional values and social systems, environmental degradation, and a loss of land. Eco-tourism should embrace local people and eco-systems, empowering locals to lead the development of their communities and assisting them in the conservation of natural resources.

### **Community eco-lodge**

One way to ensure that local communities benefit from tourism is for the community itself to build, manage and operate a hotel. Community eco-lodges are common around

the world and are a major attraction for many tourists who are interested in protecting the environment and supporting local communities in developing countries as well as experiencing interesting and unique wildlife.

Eco-lodge projects are major undertakings that require a lot of planning, technical knowledge and start-up capital. In most cases, support will need to be provided by a NGO that can assist with lodge design, fundraising, and project management.

Eco-lodges work best away from mainstream tourism markets which reduce the attractiveness of these sites. Much of the attraction of these lodges is the experience of interacting with local people away from the degrading influences of main-stream commercial tourism.

Eco-lodges also work better in areas with tight-knit, well-organised communities that are able to resolve internal conflicts easily. Transparency and trust between the eco-lodge managers and staff and the wider community must be a top priority to ensure that the lodge meets its goals of distributing the benefits of tourism throughout the entire community.

### **Community eco-guides**

All touristic sites need experienced locals who can guide tourists around the local area. The presence of trained guides will increase the number of tourists in a site as happy tourists return to their home countries and recommend to friends and family their

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preferred destinations. With marine parks, even more than terrestrial parks, guides are needed to show tourists to natural landmarks, marine reserves, and other places of interest. Additionally, guides need to ensure the safety of tourists by keeping them away from dangerous places and wildlife. They also prevent tourists from damaging the environment by preventing them from among other things, collecting wild species or accidentally starting fires. Guides can also arrange for food and lodging of tourists, making it possible to stay in places where no hotels exist.

The first step in the process of developing an eco-guide programme is create an association of interested local volunteers. Guides should be responsible, personable, outgoing, and motivated to learn. Next the association needs to find a partner organisation to assist with training. Government agencies and NGOs can often provide this assistance. Local school teachers, village elders, and other people with foreign language skills should also be approached for assistance.

Training should focus on foreign language skills, story-telling, basic environmental science, and local history and culture. The association should create a code of conduct for guides while upholding and enforcing all park rules for tourists. The code of conduct is a written set of rules that all members of the association must follow. Rules might include:

- Guides will not be late for appointments with tourists

- Guides will not attempt to negotiate prices higher than those posted in the guide reception
- Guides will not beg gifts from clients
- Guides will not steal from clients or commit any other acts of dishonesty
- Guides will make the safety of clients a top priority at all times
- Guides will not break any park rules or allow tourists to break these rules

Fines should be set for transgression of the code of conduct and should be taken very seriously by the association. One poorly behaved guide can easily and quickly ruin the reputation of the whole association and the entire region.

Aside from upholding a strict code of conduct and ensuring the safety of tourists, the eco-guides main goal is to make the tourists' trip to their area as pleasurable as possible. Guides should be friendly and charismatic and cater to the needs, interests and personalities of each group of tourists they take out. In order to do so, guides must be fluent in the most common foreign languages and regional dialects of visitors to the region. Moreover, guides should make an effort to speak with tourists often and to clarify quickly any misunderstandings, which naturally occur between people of different regions and native languages.

Eco-guides are expected to be knowledgeable about local wildlife, culture and history and





should therefore be prepared to discuss a wide range of topics. Guides should be prepared to relate local stories about wildlife and places of interest. Stories can be acquired from village elders, friends, and family members and should be shared between all the guides to widen everyone's vocabulary of anecdotes, fairytales, and local knowledge.

### **Educational resources**

The comic attached to this handbook gives more information on developing an eco-guide programme for communities located near marine protected areas. This should be used to encourage people to create an association and maintain the association through the initial training. Many other educational materials will be needed by the guides and trainers such as language resources (dictionaries, grammar books, exercise books, language CDs), and wildlife identification guides. Many resources are online and can be accessed free of charge. Partner organisations can also help the association to apply for grants for materials and eco-tourism infrastructure development.

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## Conclusion

Ultimately, the success of the eco-guide association and eco-tourism in general will depend on the community's ability to attract and satisfy tourists to the area while maintaining oversight of tourism development activities in the community. The tourism oversight committee is essential to achieving the goals of environmental protection and community development through tourism; otherwise commercial tourism may quickly outcompete and overwhelm eco-tourism efforts leading to environmental degradation and marginalisation of local people.

For the vast majority of communities, eco-tourism will not bring revolutionary change to the local economy or livelihoods of most community members. Partner organisations should be careful not to oversell the benefits of eco-tourism as this will lead to disappointment and mistrust.

However, many communities will benefit from the development of small scale eco-tourism. Expectations should be managed so that communities understand that much of the benefits will be unevenly split, but with at least some benefits reaching everyone.

Local business owners, eco-guides, porters, cooks, eco-lodge staff and others will all receive direct income from eco-tourism, however this will be small and infrequent in the early stages of development.

A tourism fund, which draws money from tourist income to put towards community development projects and managed by the eco-tourism oversight committee, will spread the benefits further. Similarly, a community eco-lodge could provide further employment and contribute heavily to the community development fund. Again, in the early stages of development, the fund is likely to be very small and an eco-lodge may not be possible. Communities should be prepared for a long road to eco-tourism development, but one that offers the possibility of making a strong contribution to community development and environmental protection in the medium and long-term.

# Eco-Tourism

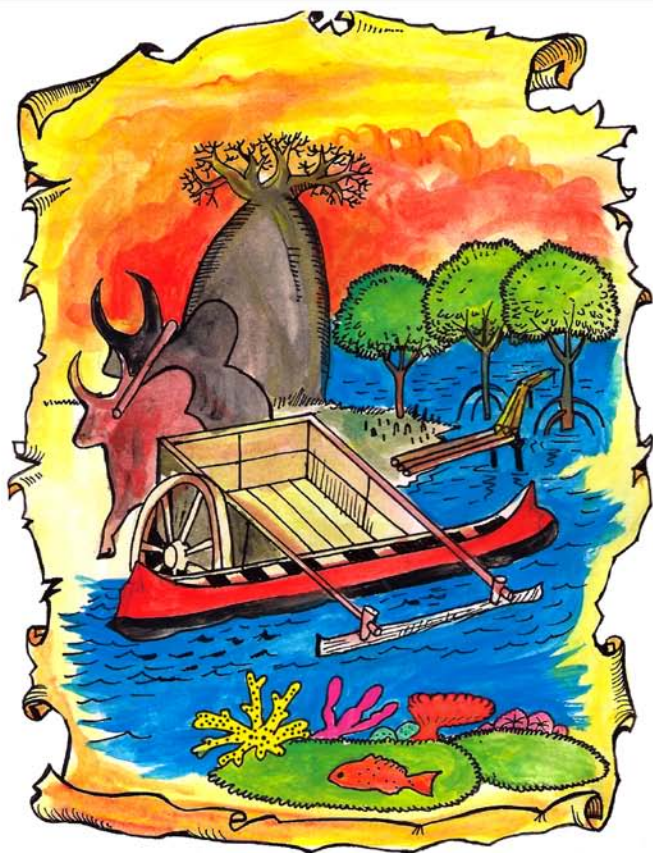
INDIAN OCEAN COMMUNITY CONSERVATION HANDBOOK 10

**ECO-TOURISM**

BY SHAWN PEABODY, TAYLOR VERIZA

AUDIENCE: STUDENTS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS

ARTWORK: NADY RATSIMBAZAFY



**blue ventures**  
discovery through research

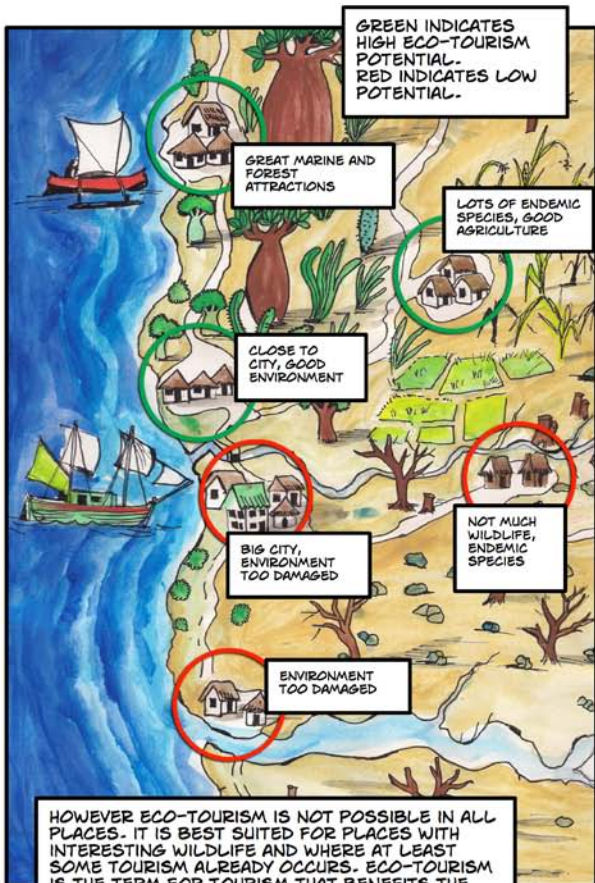
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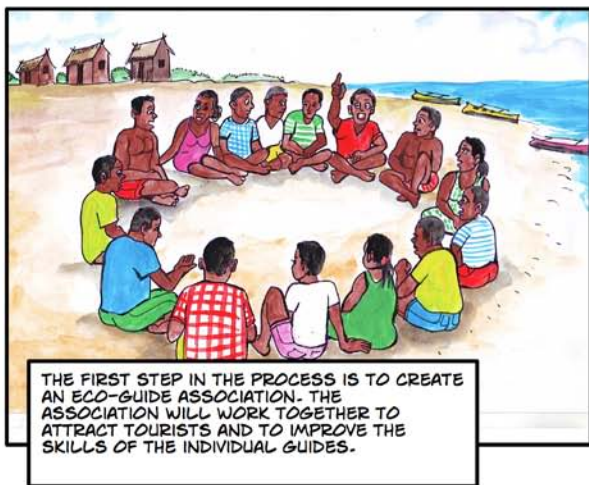




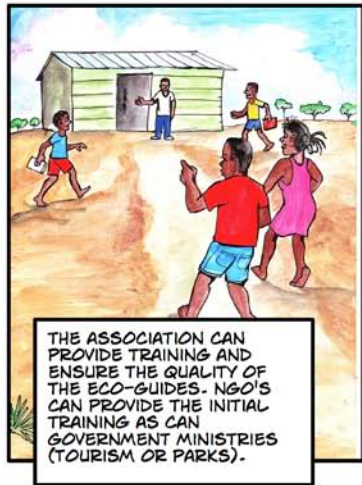
TOURISM IS ALREADY A MAJOR ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN MANY PARTS OF THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN. UNFORTUNATELY, MANY COMMUNITIES HAVE YET TO BENEFIT FROM IT.



HOWEVER ECO-TOURISM IS NOT POSSIBLE IN ALL PLACES. IT IS BEST SUITED FOR PLACES WITH INTERESTING WILDLIFE AND WHERE AT LEAST SOME TOURISM ALREADY OCCURS. ECO-TOURISM IS THE TERM FOR TOURISM THAT BENEFITS THE ENVIRONMENT, COMBINING THE WORDS ECO (NATURAL) AND TOURISM.



THE FIRST STEP IN THE PROCESS IS TO CREATE AN ECO-GUIDE ASSOCIATION. THE ASSOCIATION WILL WORK TOGETHER TO ATTRACT TOURISTS AND TO IMPROVE THE SKILLS OF THE INDIVIDUAL GUIDES.



THE ASSOCIATION CAN PROVIDE TRAINING AND ENSURE THE QUALITY OF THE ECO-GUIDES. NGO'S CAN PROVIDE THE INITIAL TRAINING AS CAN GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES (TOURISM OR PARKS).





ECO-GUIDES SHOULD BE ABLE TO TELL STORIES ABOUT LOCAL HISTORY, PEOPLE, AND WILDLIFE. THEY SHOULD KNOW GUIDING ETIQUETTE.



THEY SHOULD HAVE GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, ESPECIALLY FRENCH AND ENGLISH. NGO WORKERS CAN TEACH THESE LANGUAGES, BUT TRAINEES NEED TO PRACTICE SELF-STUDY OUTSIDE THE TRAINING CENTRE AS WELL.



BUILDING SIMPLE INFRASTRUCTURE SUCH AS PATHS, STAIRS OR MANGROVE WALKS WILL ATTRACT MORE TOURISTS AND ALLOW GUIDES TO CHARGE HIGHER PRICES. FOR ALL SITES, SIGNS SHOULD BE BUILT SHOWING A LOCAL MAP AND THE PARK RULES.



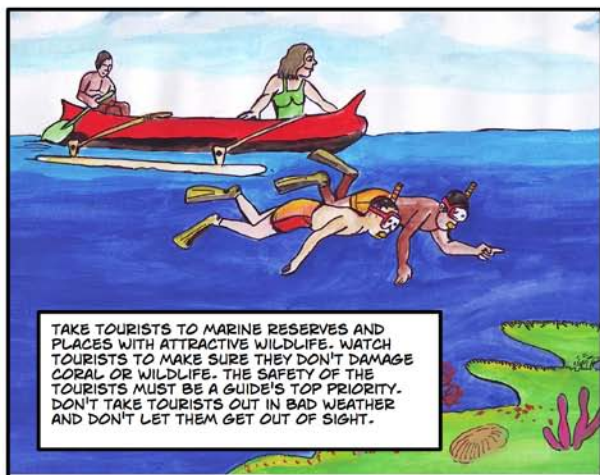
AN INFORMATION CENTRE WITH A RECEPTIONIST IS KEY TO ATTRACTING TOURISTS AND SUPPORTING A LOCAL ASSOCIATION OF ECO-GUIDES. HERE YOU CAN SELL TICKETS AND RECEIVE RESERVATIONS.



GUIDES SHOULD POINT OUT WILDLIFE, GIVING NAMES AND LOCAL TRADITIONS AND STORIES INVOLVING THE ANIMAL OR WILDLIFE.



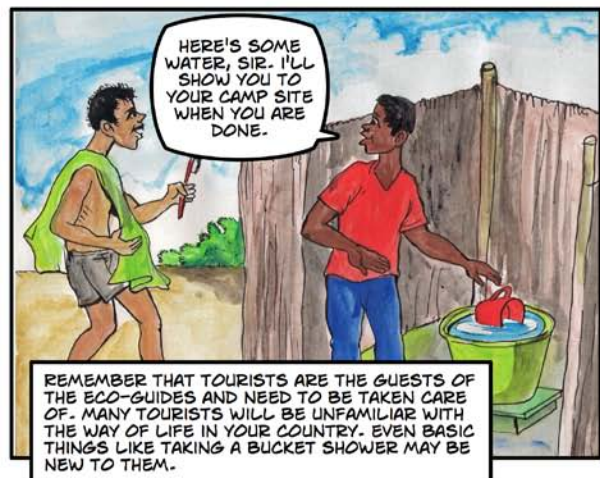
GUIDES SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE PURCHASE OF LOCAL GOODS AND INTERACTION WITH LOCAL PEOPLE. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION CAN INCLUDE LOCAL CUSTOMS, HISTORY, LOCAL FOOD AND BUILDING MATERIALS.



TAKE TOURISTS TO MARINE RESERVES AND PLACES WITH ATTRACTIVE WILDLIFE. WATCH TOURISTS TO MAKE SURE THEY DON'T DAMAGE CORAL OR WILDLIFE. THE SAFETY OF THE TOURISTS MUST BE A GUIDE'S TOP PRIORITY. DON'T TAKE TOURISTS OUT IN BAD WEATHER AND DON'T LET THEM GET OUT OF SIGHT.



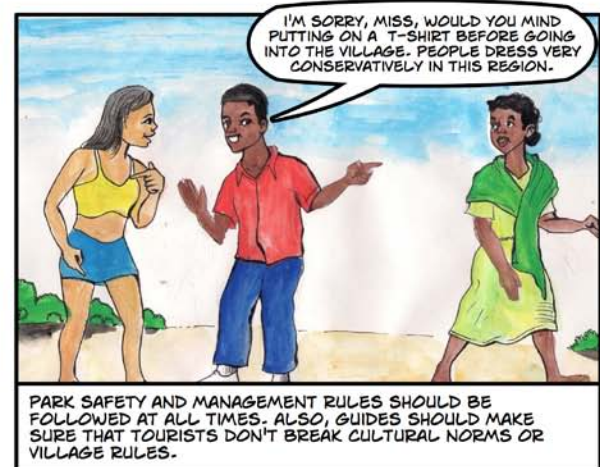
FOR LONGER TRIPS, GUIDES SHOULD ARRANGE FOOD AND LODGING.



REMEMBER THAT TOURISTS ARE THE GUESTS OF THE ECO-GUIDES AND NEED TO BE TAKEN CARE OF. MANY TOURISTS WILL BE UNFAMILIAR WITH THE WAY OF LIFE IN YOUR COUNTRY. EVEN BASIC THINGS LIKE TAKING A BUCKET SHOWER MAY BE NEW TO THEM.



GUIDES SHOULD STRIVE TO BE INTERESTING, EDUCATIONAL, AND FUN WHILE ALSO LOOKING AFTER THE SAFETY OF THE TOURISTS AND THE HEALTH OF THE LOCAL ECOSYSTEMS.

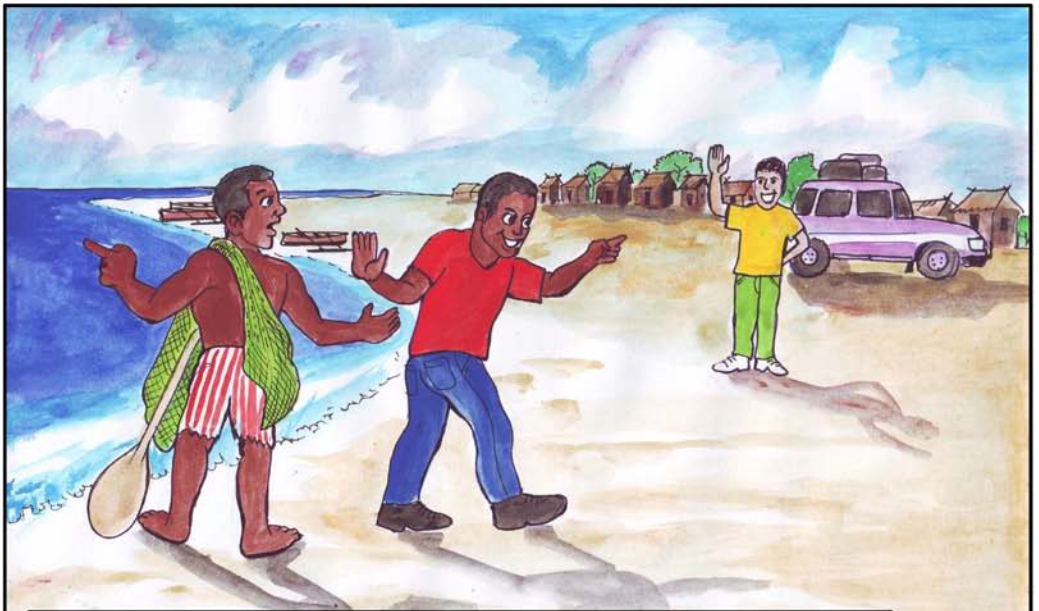


PARK SAFETY AND MANAGEMENT RULES SHOULD BE FOLLOWED AT ALL TIMES. ALSO, GUIDES SHOULD MAKE SURE THAT TOURISTS DON'T BREAK CULTURAL NORMS OR VILLAGE RULES.

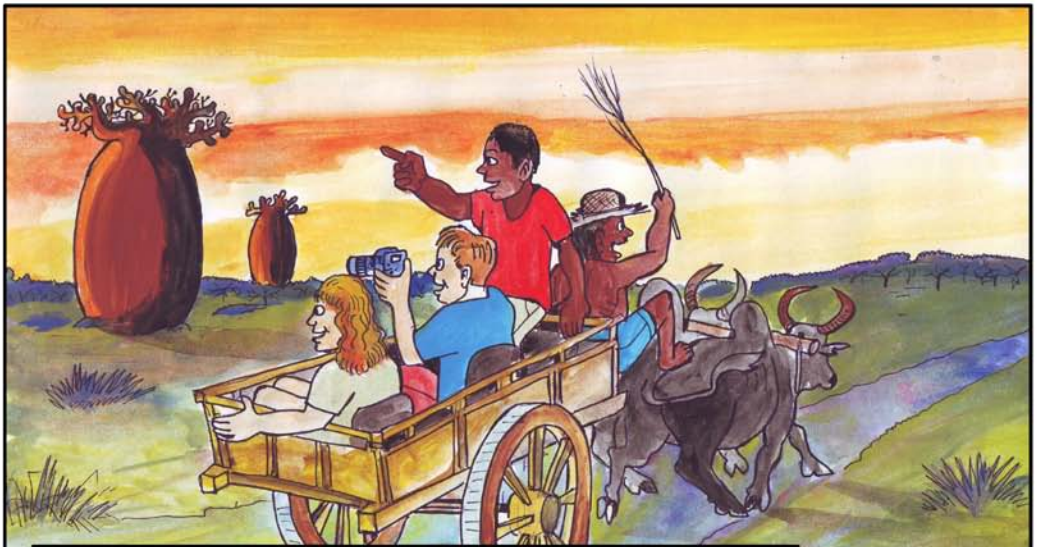


A HURT TOURIST OR DAMAGED ENVIRONMENT WILL BRING SHAME AND DISREPUTE TO THE ENTIRE AREA AND THE ECO-GUIDE ASSOCIATION.





AS TOURISM GROWS, GUIDES WILL SPEND MORE TIME WITH TOURISTS THAN FISHING. THIS WILL REDUCE FISHING PRESSURE, WHICH WILL MEAN BIGGER CATCH FOR FISHERS.



TOURISM WILL ALSO BENEFIT OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS THROUGH THE SALES OF LOCAL GOODS AND SERVICES. COMBINED WITH OTHER CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES, ECO-TOURISM CAN HAVE A STRONG EFFECT ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY WHILE ALSO ENCOURAGING MORE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION. AS A FINAL NOTE- GUIDES MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT THE KEY TO GROWING AND SUSTAINING ECO-TOURISM IS HIGH CUSTOMER SATISFACTION.

**END**

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