

*Reading from, The Pros and Cons of Ecotourism in Costa Rica by Julie Dasenbrock at <http://www.american.edu/TED/costa-rica-tourism.htm>

Conclusion

Costa Rica has developed an environmentally sound and lucrative ecotourism industry that has allowed it to protect its vast natural treasures while bringing economic opportunities to typically disadvantaged rural areas. While the industry has faced difficulties in reconciling its environmental ideals with the growing demand for ecotourism and the temptation for profit-seeking, the environmental and economic benefits of ecotourism have far outweighed these drawbacks. As Martha Honey, the author of *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who owns Paradise?* and former resident of Costa Rica, puts it, "They do ecotourism very well in Costa Rica." (Egan, 2001).

Given the lofty environmental goals and social ideals of ecotourism, it is easy for skeptics to criticize the industry, claiming that the world's delicate ecosystems cannot be adequately protected by a profit oriented business. These critics may argue that wildlife reserves and natural areas should be strictly preserved, rather than open to the public. However, although such conservation goals are laudable, they are not realistic. As Honey explains, "We're not going to stop the movement by people to the last unvisited places on the planet." (Egan, 2001). Once this fact is accepted, environmentalists can look for ways that tourism and conservation can coexist. Although ecotourism may not be able to preserve these untouched areas as they would if human contact were prohibited, it can help protect them from the dangers of destructive agricultural practices, mining, and industrialization. The flora and fauna may be bothered, but at least it will not be destroyed.

Developing countries face tough choices in the race to join the modernized world and frequently environmental resources are seen more as tools of progress than treasures to be guarded. However, as Costa Rica's ecotourism industry has proven, conservation and economic growth can go hand in hand. The overhead costs of training, infrastructure construction, and promotion can be a burden on poor nations, and the risks can be considerable; but the growth potential and environmental benefits of ecotourism make the investment worth the while in the long run. Development of ecotourism industries have sprung up throughout Central America and the developing world in general, and I think this development trend is a positive one for our environment and our people.