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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Rise of Ecotourism and Its Contribution to Green Economic Development

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ABSTRACT

The increasing global awareness of environmental sustainability has led to the rise of ecotourism as a vital component of green economic development. Ecotourism emphasizes responsible travel to natural areas, conservation efforts, and community engagement, making it a key driver of sustainable economic growth. This study employs a qualitative approach using literature review and library research methods to explore the contribution of ecotourism to green economic development. The research synthesizes findings from recent studies, analyzing the environmental, social, and economic benefits of ecotourism in various regions. The results highlight that ecotourism plays a crucial role in biodiversity conservation, employment generation, and sustainable business practices. By promoting responsible travel behaviors, ecotourism fosters environmental awareness and local empowerment, ensuring that economic benefits directly reach indigenous and rural communities. Furthermore, ecotourism attracts investment in green infrastructure, renewable energy, and eco-friendly accommodations, which support long-term economic resilience. However, challenges such as over-tourism, inadequate regulatory frameworks, and the commercialization of ecotourism sites threaten its sustainability. This study underscores the importance of government policies, corporate responsibility, and community-driven initiatives in ensuring that ecotourism remains a genuine catalyst for green economic development. Future research should focus on measuring the long-term economic impacts of ecotourism projects and exploring strategies to balance environmental conservation with economic growth. By fostering sustainable tourism practices, ecotourism can contribute significantly to achieving global environmental and economic sustainability goals.



INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, ecotourism has emerged as a key sector within the tourism industry, fostering sustainable economic growth while preserving natural resources (Sarpong et al., 2025). The growing awareness of environmental conservation and climate change has propelled ecotourism as a sustainable alternative to mass tourism (Opoku, 2025). Countries worldwide are increasingly recognizing the potential of ecotourism to drive economic growth while maintaining environmental integrity (Owusu et al., 2025). Green economic development, which prioritizes low-carbon and resource-efficient policies, aligns seamlessly with the objectives of ecotourism (Islam & Hossen, 2025). This study explores the interplay between ecotourism and green economic development, highlighting its potential for long-term sustainability.

While numerous studies have examined the economic and environmental benefits of ecotourism, gaps remain in understanding its direct contribution to green economic development in various regions (Vinh et al., 2025). Existing research tends to focus on the impact of ecotourism on local communities and biodiversity conservation (Le et al., 2025). However, limited studies explicitly analyze how ecotourism integrates with green economic policies, financial sustainability, and employment generation in developing economies (Jain et al., 2025). By addressing this gap, this research aims to provide empirical evidence on the economic and environmental sustainability of ecotourism-based economies.

The urgency of this research stems from the increasing need to transition toward green economies to combat climate change (Mahadevan, 2025). The tourism industry, responsible for significant carbon emissions, requires sustainable solutions that balance economic benefits with environmental protection (Rathnasiri, 2025). Ecotourism presents an opportunity to foster economic resilience while minimizing environmental degradation (Luu et al., 2025). Policymakers and industry stakeholders require comprehensive data to develop strategies that optimize ecotourism's contributions to green economic growth.

Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of ecotourism on local economies and the environment. For example, a study by Nguyen et al. (2025) demonstrated that ecotourism initiatives in Southeast Asia improved community livelihoods and biodiversity conservation. Similarly, research by Roy et al. (2025) emphasized that ecotourism fosters environmental stewardship among local populations. However, these studies did not address ecotourism's direct role in supporting green financial models and policy-driven economic transformations.

This study introduces a novel perspective by examining the direct correlation between ecotourism and green economic development through a policy-driven approach. Unlike previous research, this study integrates financial sustainability, regulatory frameworks, and ecotourism's role in shaping economic policies (Desti, 2025). By doing so, it provides a more holistic view of how ecotourism contributes to a sustainable and environmentally responsible economy.



The primary objective of this study is to analyze the impact of ecotourism on green economic development by assessing its influence on job creation, environmental sustainability, and economic resilience. Specific objectives include:

1. Identifying key factors that drive ecotourism's integration into green economic policies.
2. Evaluating the socio-economic benefits of ecotourism-based economies.
3. Assessing the long-term environmental sustainability of ecotourism initiatives.

This study holds significant implications for policymakers, investors, and local communities. It offers a comprehensive understanding of how ecotourism can be leveraged to foster economic growth without compromising environmental sustainability (Shinde & Kumar, 2025). By providing empirical evidence, this research informs policy decisions, encourages sustainable investment in the tourism sector, and promotes environmentally responsible economic practices (Dani, 2025).

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that emphasizes responsible travel to natural areas, conserving the environment, and improving the well-being of local people (Jain et al., 2025). It is characterized by minimal environmental impact, active cultural engagement, and economic benefits for local communities (Luu et al., 2025). Ecotourism initiatives typically include eco-lodges, wildlife conservation tours, and nature-based experiences that adhere to sustainability principles (Owusu et al., 2025). Its growing popularity has led to the development of certification programs and policies to regulate sustainable tourism practices.

Green economic development refers to economic growth strategies that prioritize sustainability, resource efficiency, and environmental protection (Mahadevan, 2025). It integrates renewable energy, green finance, and regulatory policies to ensure long-term ecological and economic stability (Rathnasiri, 2025). Countries adopting green economic policies focus on reducing carbon emissions, promoting circular economies, and investing in sustainable industries (Vinh et al., 2025). Ecotourism contributes to this model by generating green jobs and fostering environmentally friendly business practices.

Economic and environmental sustainability entails balancing economic growth with environmental conservation (Nguyen et al., 2025). It ensures that natural resources are utilized efficiently while maintaining ecological integrity for future generations (Roy et al., 2025). Ecotourism plays a crucial role in achieving this balance by promoting sustainable business models, reducing pollution, and supporting conservation efforts (Le et al., 2025). Through responsible tourism, economic benefits are distributed equitably, creating long-term sustainability for local communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between ecotourism and green economic development can be analyzed through several theoretical frameworks, including sustainable development theory, green economy theory, stakeholder theory, and the triple bottom line approach. This



section reviews relevant literature on these theories and how they underpin the role of ecotourism in fostering economic sustainability while protecting natural resources.

Sustainable Development Theory

The sustainable development theory, first articulated by the Brundtland Commission (1987), defines sustainability as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This theory serves as the foundation for ecotourism, emphasizing environmental conservation, socio-economic benefits, and cultural preservation (UNEP, 2024).

Recent studies highlight that ecotourism aligns with the principles of sustainable development by promoting resource efficiency, reducing environmental degradation, and supporting community-based conservation efforts (Basyuni et al., 2025). For instance, Nguyen et al. (2025) found that ecotourism initiatives in Southeast Asia contributed to biodiversity conservation and provided alternative livelihoods for local populations, reducing dependence on extractive industries. Similarly, Rathnasiri (2025) argues that ecotourism plays a critical role in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 15 (Life on Land).

Green Economy Theory

The green economy theory posits that economic growth and environmental sustainability can coexist through investments in renewable energy, green jobs, and eco-friendly business models (UNEP, 2025). This theory has been widely applied to ecotourism as a sector that generates economic benefits while preserving natural ecosystems.

According to Islam and Hossen (2025), ecotourism serves as an integral part of the green economy by promoting responsible travel, supporting carbon-neutral tourism initiatives, and financing conservation projects. Furthermore, Vinh et al. (2025) found that ecotourism contributes to economic diversification in developing countries, reducing reliance on high-carbon industries like mining and deforestation. By shifting towards low-carbon and resource-efficient tourism models, ecotourism enhances the economic resilience of communities affected by climate change.

Stakeholder Theory in Ecotourism

Stakeholder theory, proposed by Freeman (1984), emphasizes the role of multiple stakeholders—government agencies, businesses, local communities, and tourists—in shaping sustainable outcomes. In the context of ecotourism, collaborative governance and multi-stakeholder engagement are crucial for balancing economic, environmental, and social objectives.

Shinde and Kumar (2025) argue that successful ecotourism initiatives depend on active participation from local communities, as they are the primary custodians of natural resources. This aligns with research by Dani (2025), which found that community-based ecotourism (CBET) programs in Africa and Latin America have significantly improved socio-economic conditions by generating employment and funding education and healthcare services. Moreover, Le et al. (2025) highlight that businesses adopting



ecotourism models benefit from strong consumer demand for ethical and sustainable travel experiences, reinforcing the economic viability of green tourism.

Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Approach

The triple bottom line (TBL) framework, developed by Elkington (1994), evaluates business success based on three pillars: People (social impact), Planet (environmental sustainability), and Profit (economic viability). In ecotourism, this framework ensures that tourism development prioritizes economic benefits, community well-being, and environmental conservation simultaneously.

Roy et al. (2025) conducted a study on ecotourism destinations in Europe and found that businesses implementing TBL principles experienced higher long-term profitability and consumer loyalty compared to mass tourism operators. Additionally, Mahadevan (2025) suggests that the integration of eco-certifications (such as GSTC and EarthCheck) within tourism businesses strengthens sustainability standards and attracts impact investors interested in green economy models.

Ecotourism as a Mechanism for Environmental Conservation

From a conservation economics perspective, ecotourism provides financial incentives for biodiversity conservation by assigning economic value to natural assets. Monroy-Gamboa et al. (2025) found that ecotourism initiatives in Latin America generated significant revenue for conservation projects, reducing deforestation rates in protected areas. Similarly, Owusu et al. (2025) highlight that ecotourism businesses investing in carbon offset programs and reforestation projects contribute to climate change mitigation efforts.

Furthermore, payment for ecosystem services (PES) models, where tourists pay entrance fees or conservation taxes, provide direct financial support for environmental protection (Desti, 2025). This is increasingly being adopted in national parks and UNESCO World Heritage sites to fund ecological restoration and wildlife protection programs.

Policy and Regulatory Frameworks Supporting Ecotourism

Government policies play a significant role in mainstreaming ecotourism within national and regional green economy strategies. According to Rathnasiri (2025), countries with strong regulatory frameworks, such as Costa Rica, Bhutan, and New Zealand, have successfully leveraged ecotourism for economic development while preserving biodiversity. Key policy interventions include:

1. Tax incentives for eco-friendly businesses
2. Green financing mechanisms for tourism entrepreneurs
3. Strict environmental regulations to prevent over-tourism and resource depletion

Luu et al. (2025) found that public-private partnerships (PPPs) have been instrumental in financing large-scale ecotourism projects, particularly in regions with high conservation value. The study emphasizes that collaboration between governments, NGOs, and investors is essential for scaling up ecotourism as a viable economic sector.



METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a literature review (systematic review) method to explore the relationship between ecotourism and green economic development. A qualitative approach is chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of concepts, theories, and empirical findings related to sustainable tourism and economic policies (Lechuga-Nevárez et al., 2025). The literature review method involves analyzing existing academic sources, including journal articles, books, reports, and policy documents, to synthesize the key findings on ecotourism's role in fostering green economic growth (Fuady et al., 2025).

Data Sources

The data for this research is derived from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and conference proceedings published within the last five years. The selection criteria for these sources include relevance to ecotourism, sustainability, and green economic development, as well as their credibility and impact factor in academic research (Isani et al., 2025). The sources are obtained from databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and institutional repositories (Yeganehpouya et al., 2025). Additionally, government and non-governmental organization (NGO) reports on sustainable tourism policies are included to provide practical insights into the integration of ecotourism within green economic frameworks.

Data Collection Techniques

This study follows a document analysis approach as the primary data collection technique. Relevant literature is identified through systematic keyword searches using terms such as "ecotourism," "sustainable tourism," "green economy," and "economic sustainability." A screening process is conducted to ensure the inclusion of only high-quality and relevant sources (Basyuni et al., 2025). Data extraction is performed using a thematic coding method, where key themes such as environmental sustainability, economic benefits, and policy frameworks are categorized and analyzed (Khedy, 2025).

Data Analysis Method

The data is analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method. This involves systematically reviewing and synthesizing themes from the selected literature to identify patterns, gaps, and emerging trends in ecotourism and green economic development (Taskarayeva et al., 2025). Thematic analysis is used to categorize data into key themes such as socio-economic benefits, environmental impact, policy interventions, and sustainable business models (Sugiarto, 2025). The study follows an inductive approach, allowing patterns to emerge organically from the data rather than being imposed by predefined hypotheses (Sitiningrum, 2025).

By employing a systematic literature review combined with qualitative content analysis, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of ecotourism's contribution to green economic development, addressing both theoretical and practical perspectives. The findings aim to guide policymakers, industry stakeholders, and researchers in promoting sustainable ecotourism as a driver of economic resilience and environmental conservation.



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The table below presents ten selected research articles published in the last five years (2019–2025) sourced from Google Scholar. These articles were carefully selected from a broader pool of literature based on their relevance to the research topic, “The Rise of Ecotourism and Its Contribution to Green Economic Development.” The selection criteria included peer-reviewed status, high citation rates, and strong empirical or theoretical contributions to the discussion on ecotourism’s role in sustainable development.

No	Author(s) & Year	Title	Key Findings
1	Hardianti, Kartini & Waworuntu (2025)	Potensi Pengembangan Ekonomi Hijau di Kabupaten Pangkajene dan Kepulauan	Green economy initiatives linked to ecotourism boost local economic development while preserving natural resources.
2	Shodibek o'g'li (2025)	Forming a Green Economy in the Context of Climate Change	Ecotourism as a crucial component in addressing climate change and transitioning to a green economy.
3	Remenyik, Szőke & Veres (2025)	Innovative Sustainability Practices in Ecotourism	Ecotourism facilitates circular economy practices, fosters community integration, and enhances green energy use.
4	Pratama Risdarmawan (2025)	& Revitalization of Former Coal Mines for Green Economy	Repurposing degraded lands for ecotourism supports sustainable development and alternative economic sources.
5	Monroy-Gamboa et al. (2025)	Biodiversity Conservation and Ecotourism	Ecotourism contributes to biodiversity conservation by generating economic value that funds conservation efforts.
6	Zukhri et al. (2024)	Financial Benefits of Mangrove Restoration	Mangrove-based ecotourism provides economic and ecological benefits by supporting fisheries and mitigating climate risks.
7	Tiurina, Leonenko & Liashenko (2024)	Asian Experience in Ecotourism Development	Case studies show how ecotourism can be a strategic tool for green economic policies in developing nations.

8	Akbar et al. (2024)	Community-Based Ecotourism Development	Local participation in ecotourism strengthens conservation efforts and ensures long-term sustainability.
9	Mahandito Tsabita (2024)	& Climate Finance and Ecotourism	Green financing mechanisms help scale up ecotourism projects as a sustainable economic sector.
10	Morrar (2024)	Investment in Green Infrastructure for Ecotourism	Sustainable infrastructure investments, such as renewable energy and eco-friendly transport, enhance ecotourism development.

The findings from the selected literature highlight that ecotourism plays a significant role in green economic development by integrating conservation, community involvement, and economic sustainability. Hardianti et al. (2025) emphasize that ecotourism serves as a catalyst for local economic growth while ensuring environmental preservation. This aligns with the notion that sustainable tourism can balance economic and ecological priorities in developing regions.

A crucial theme emerging from these studies is the role of ecotourism in mitigating climate change. Shodibek o'g'li (2025) discusses how green economy frameworks leverage ecotourism to support carbon sequestration, renewable energy adoption, and climate adaptation strategies. This finding underscores the broader environmental benefits beyond mere economic growth, reinforcing ecotourism's relevance in global climate action.

Another key finding is that ecotourism enhances circular economy models. Research by Remenyik, Szőke, and Veres (2025) highlights how sustainable tourism can drive resource-efficient practices, such as green construction, eco-lodging, and responsible waste management. This aligns with the concept that ecotourism not only generates economic revenue but also promotes environmentally conscious consumption patterns.

The economic feasibility of repurposing degraded landscapes into ecotourism hubs is another emerging insight. Pratama and Risdarmawan (2025) explore how former coal mines can be transformed into ecotourism destinations, creating new employment opportunities while restoring ecological balance. This demonstrates that ecotourism can be a tool for economic transition in post-extractive economies, ensuring that abandoned industrial areas do not become economic burdens.

Biodiversity conservation remains a central focus of ecotourism's contribution to green economic development. Monroy-Gamboa et al. (2025) argue that ecotourism generates revenue for conservation projects, incentivizing the protection of endangered ecosystems. This is consistent with findings from Akbar et al. (2024), who highlight that



community-driven ecotourism can directly finance conservation efforts while providing sustainable livelihoods for local populations.

Lastly, investment in green infrastructure is essential for scaling ecotourism initiatives. Morrar (2024) emphasizes that green financing mechanisms, such as climate funds and impact investments, are crucial for the long-term success of ecotourism projects. This underscores the importance of integrating public-private partnerships to expand ecotourism beyond isolated projects into scalable economic strategies.

Ecotourism and Green Economic Development: A Contemporary Perspective

The findings from this literature review align with current global trends, where ecotourism is increasingly recognized as a key driver of sustainable economic recovery and climate resilience. In a post-pandemic world, governments and organizations are prioritizing green recovery strategies that balance economic growth with environmental sustainability. The rise of nature-based tourism, sustainable travel certifications, and carbon-neutral tourism initiatives reflects a broader shift towards responsible tourism practices that align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

One of the most pressing issues today is climate change, which is accelerating environmental degradation and threatening biodiversity. As highlighted by Shodibek o'g'li (2025), ecotourism offers a solution by reducing carbon footprints and supporting conservation efforts. The COP28 global climate summit emphasized the importance of nature-based solutions, including ecotourism, as part of climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Countries such as Costa Rica, New Zealand, and Bhutan have successfully integrated ecotourism into their national sustainability policies, setting benchmarks for other regions to follow.

Additionally, the rise of community-driven tourism models is reshaping how ecotourism contributes to green economic development. Akbar et al. (2024) found that community-based ecotourism empowers local populations, creating economic incentives for environmental stewardship. This trend is evident in recent projects, such as the African Wildlife Foundation's (AWF) community-led safari initiatives, which promote wildlife conservation while generating income for indigenous groups. Similarly, in Indonesia, sustainable tourism villages have received increased government funding to support local economic resilience through ecotourism.

Another contemporary phenomenon is the growing demand for sustainable travel among consumers. Recent surveys by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) indicate that travelers are willing to pay a premium for eco-friendly accommodations and low-impact tourism experiences. This aligns with the findings of Remenyik, Szőke, and Veres (2025), who highlight how hotels and resorts are adopting circular economy principles, using renewable energy sources, and reducing waste. The emergence of eco-certifications such as EarthCheck, Green Key, and Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) standards further illustrates this shift in consumer behavior.

Financial investments and policy shifts towards ecotourism development are also increasing. According to Morrar (2024), green financing mechanisms, such as climate adaptation funds, carbon offset markets, and impact investing, are playing a crucial role in scaling up ecotourism projects. The European Union's Green Deal, for instance, has allocated substantial funding towards sustainable tourism development, emphasizing the



role of ecotourism in achieving carbon neutrality. Similarly, developing economies are leveraging public-private partnerships to attract investment in ecotourism infrastructure, fostering long-term economic sustainability.

Lastly, the post-pandemic recovery of the tourism industry has placed sustainability at its core. Governments worldwide are incorporating green economic principles into tourism policies, ensuring that nature-based tourism benefits both the economy and the environment. Countries like Thailand, Kenya, and Ecuador have introduced strict ecotourism regulations to preserve fragile ecosystems while ensuring the financial viability of green tourism businesses. As noted by Pratama and Risdarmawan (2025), revitalizing degraded lands into ecotourism hubs provides a sustainable economic alternative for regions transitioning from extractive industries.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study emphasize that ecotourism plays a crucial role in driving green economic development by fostering sustainable livelihoods, conserving biodiversity, and promoting environmentally responsible business practices. Theoretical frameworks such as sustainable development theory, green economy theory, stakeholder theory, and the triple bottom line approach reinforce the argument that ecotourism is not only a tourism sector but also a strategic economic model for balancing environmental conservation and economic growth. As evidenced by recent literature, countries that have successfully integrated ecotourism into their national policies—such as Costa Rica, Bhutan, and New Zealand—demonstrate higher economic resilience, enhanced community participation, and stronger conservation efforts. The increasing global emphasis on sustainable travel, climate action, and green financing mechanisms further supports the need for expanded ecotourism initiatives worldwide.

Despite the evident contributions of ecotourism, several challenges remain in ensuring its long-term sustainability. Issues such as over-tourism, regulatory inconsistencies, inadequate infrastructure, and climate change vulnerabilities pose threats to ecotourism's success. While many governments and businesses have adopted eco-certifications and sustainable tourism policies, enforcement and monitoring remain uneven across regions, leading to unsustainable practices in certain destinations. Additionally, the economic benefits of ecotourism must be equitably distributed to prevent the exploitation of local communities and ensure that conservation efforts receive adequate financial support. Strengthening multi-stakeholder collaborations between governments, private sectors, local communities, and international organizations will be essential for maintaining ecotourism's contributions to a green economy.

For future research, it is recommended that studies explore the scalability of ecotourism models in developing countries, focusing on policy innovations, financial mechanisms, and capacity-building initiatives. Comparative analyses of ecotourism policies across different regions could provide insights into best practices and challenges in implementing green tourism strategies. Additionally, studies on the long-term economic impact of ecotourism on local communities would be valuable in assessing its sustainability beyond initial development phases. Given the rising influence of digitalization in tourism, future research could also examine how technology, smart



tourism, and artificial intelligence (AI)-driven eco-tourism platforms can enhance sustainable travel experiences while minimizing environmental footprints. By addressing these research gaps, scholars and policymakers can further refine ecotourism strategies, ensuring its role as a cornerstone of green economic development in the future.

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