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MARKETING ECOTOURISM FOR WILDLIFE AND BIRD WATCHING

Series of training resources for bird-related tourism

Introduction to Ecotourism Marketing

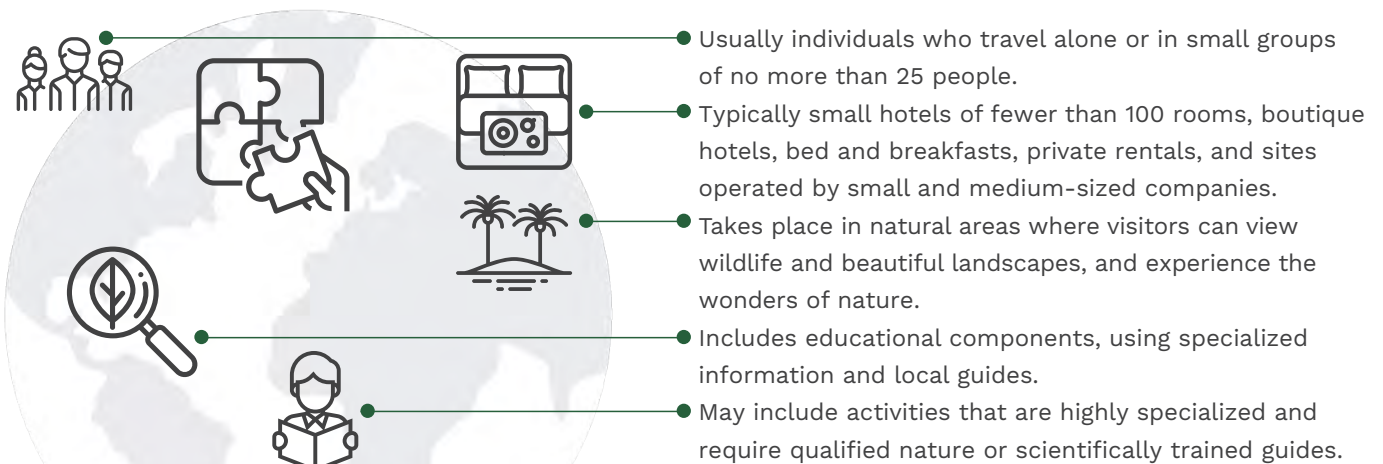
Tourism, like any industry, is governed by supply and demand. Tourism can be local, regional, national or international, and tourism products and services are sold and used at each of these levels.¹

Tourists are defined as travelers who leave their homes seeking recreation and leisure or to participate in conferences, who use services offered on the tourist market, such as accommodation, meals, transportation, tours, events and entertainment.

A market niche is a market subcategory that meets certain common characteristics. Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing market niches in this industry.

Marketing strategies often use the terms ecotourism and adventure tourism interchangeably. In ecotourism, the tourist's primary motivation is to experience and enjoy aspects of nature, wildlife and culture, while the adventure tourist is looking for physically challenging situations in a natural or outdoor environment.²

Common Features of Ecotourism



A Growing Tourism Niche

35%

In 2016, 35% of the world's tourists were interested in ecotourism activities.³

\$

Global spending on ecotourism, and nature, heritage and cultural tourism, is predicted to grow rapidly over the next two decades.⁴

20%

Worldwide, nature tourism is the motivation for an estimated 16-20% of international trips.⁵



Components of the Ecotourism Marketing Plan



Demand Analysis

Birding and wildlife watching in general are some of the most specialized ecotourism markets. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an individual who travels more than one mile from their place of residence for the primary purpose of watching birds is considered to be a bird tourist or birdwatcher.⁶ Globally, it is estimated that three million international trips are taken every year with the main purpose of observing birds.

A large percentage of this type of ecotourist is from the United States (with destinations primarily in the United States, Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica and Panama), Western Europe (especially the United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands and France, particularly to African destinations for safaris), and Australia.⁷

The Birding Market

Demand trends can be analyzed on a global, national and local scale. Some of the sources of information and data gathering methods are:

1

Published studies (from national tourism offices, wildlife and national park agencies, civil society organizations, international ecotourism networks).

2

Surveys of visitors who know or visit the destination.

3

Surveys of visitors in destinations similar to the target designation.

4

Interviews with birding organizations.

Key Market Data



United States⁸



86 million people engaged in wildlife watching activities



45 million people engaged in birdwatching activities, with 96 days per year devoted to birding on average



56% of American birdwatchers are women



US\$75.9 billion spent on wildlife watching activities

Canada⁹



89% of Canadians engaged in at least one nature activity during the year



18% of Canadian adults are birders, and devote an average of 133 days per year to birdwatching



52% of Canadian birdwatchers are women



57% of Canadians take at least one 20 km trip per year to engage in a nature activity



C\$41.3 billion spent by Canadians on nature-related expenditures in a year

Profile of Birding Ecotourists

In addition to the data obtained from tourism studies and reports, it is important to know the profile of ecotourists. You can obtain this information from tourism offices or regional chambers of commerce, which often conduct tourism market analysis, tourist polls and surveys. You can also consult national park visitor statistics.

Another option is to conduct your own surveys, focusing on specific aspects that interest you. It is important to design the survey so that you obtain the right type of data on enough people to identify trends that can guide




your decisions. The survey sample size should be large enough to cover the diversity of socioeconomic, age, and origin (national and international) profiles. Define the number of surveys based on your assessment goals, your budget, and the time available to conduct the study. Define the sample size based on the percentage of the target group that you want to analyze. For example, if you want to know more about ecotourism preferences, define your sample size and stratification based on local tourism statistics about ecotourism's market share.

Sample Survey for Tourist Profile

Tourist profile information			
Name		Site visited during the survey	
Gender	Age	Where are you from (country, region)?	
Destination: local, national, or international?		Which language(s) do you speak?	
What is your family status (e.g., student, young childless adult, young parent, parent with adolescents, retiree, single, widowed, divorced, etc.)?			
Vacation or business trip?		Duration of the trip	
Alone or accompanied?		If accompanied, by whom (family, coworkers, friends, etc.)?	
Type of travel (e.g., accompanied by a guide, unaccompanied with guidance from travel agency or road book, unguided)?			
Amount spent per person per day?			
When did you organize your trip (e.g., how many months, weeks, days before your departure)?			
How did you organize your trip (own research, tourism provider)? Where did you look for recommendations?			
What kind of activities are you doing on this trip?			
What other kind of activities would you be interested in doing?			
Would you be interested in any birdwatching activities?			
If you answered "yes" to the last question and agree to provide your email address, we will send you information on our birdwatching activities.			
Thank you			

Birdwatching Tourist Profiles¹⁰

Data reveal that birdwatchers are typically between 40 and 70 years old and that slightly more women than men are birders. They are usually highly educated, economically comfortable, and interested in various wildlife-related activities. Many birding enthusiasts are members of nature conservancy organizations and are nature photography buffs.

Types of birdwatching tourist	 Casual Birding Ecotourists	 Enthusiastic Birders	 Twitchers (extreme birders)
Degree of specialization	Not specialized. Nature lovers.	Broadly knowledgeable about the birds and wildlife in the places visited.	Very specialized in birdwatching.
Motivation	Birding is not their main interest; instead they seek outdoor and nature-related activities when on vacation.	Birdwatching occupies a large portion of their time when on vacation and they like to share their experience with friends.	Primarily interested in seeing as many birds as possible. Bring their own equipment and will travel long distances to sight new and rare species.
Tolerance for other visitors	Yes.	Yes.	Impatient with the unspecialized public.
Interest in other activities?	Interested in nature activities such as hiking, camping, nature photography, and wildlife watching in general. May be attracted to birding as a complementary activity. Prefer sites accessible by road.	Interested in wildlife in general; may broaden their birding trip to encompass visiting natural habitats in general and enjoying the local culture.	Very focused in their birding activity, yearning to catch sight of rare or endemic birds that remain unchecked on their list of sighted species.
Indicators of a rewarding experience	High degree of interaction with nature. Diversity of nature-based experiences. May be sensitive to inclement weather conditions.	Sighting of many birds and opportunities to socialize with like-minded people and with local communities, guides, etc. Not affected by weather or lodging features.	Quality bird sightings. Not affected by the quality of features of lodging sites, logistical difficulties or site remoteness.
Gender	Men and women	More likely to be women	More likely to be men
Approximate share of birdwatching tourism market	30%	50%	10%

Define your Offer¹¹

The table on the previous page will help you to target the type of bird watcher you want to attract. Answering the following questions will help you to analyze the tourism opportunities you are offering.



What kind of wildlife can be observed?

Consider the most important characteristics of the birds and wildlife in your area: number of species, spectacular bird congregations in certain seasons of the year, charismatic species, rare birds, other wildlife at the site (tortoises, whales, large land mammals, etc.).



Is the site safe for tourists?

Identify and minimize the risks to birdwatching tourists in isolated places. Avoid politically unstable situations. Assess accessibility and infrastructure.

Specialized guides

It is essential to offer skilled guides to ensure birders have a high-quality experience. Guides should know the area's most important species, where they can be seen, and their annual cycles. They should also know about the area's cultural attributes and be trained in first-aid, equipment use, logistics, and risk management. If the tourist is not a specialized birder, he or she is more likely to demand high-quality guides.



Create your Value Proposition

What are the different or unique aspects of your offer compared to other similar offerings in the same community, region, country, or worldwide?

...

Your unique value proposition is based on understanding the tourist's needs and how those needs will be satisfied.

...

The challenge is to nurture the type of experience the visitor most desires while minimizing the obstacles to achieving it.



Consider Offering:

- Experienced local guides and exposure to cultural heritage
- Safety and logistics superior to that offered by the competition
- A cook accompanying the group
- Simple, online reservations
- Information in the visitors' languages
- Opportunity for visitors to participate in community activities
- Opportunity for visitors to volunteer on conservation projects



Competitive Advantages

How do you evaluate your offer compared to that of the competition? What makes it different, unique, and extraordinary? What does the competition offer? How do they organize trips? How much does it cost per person? For this type of tourism, competition can be local, national or international. What are the strongest aspects of your offer that you would want to promote?

Design the Experience

Which experiences are you going to market?

What is your marketing message?

An experience is a general sensation of personal enrichment that is judged according to satisfaction criteria from participating in an extraordinary event.

An activity can be counted as an experience when it fulfills the following:

- Leaves a positive, unforgettable memory because it engages various senses;
- Stands out from products offered by the competition;
- Has an innovative aspect; and
- Has a unique character.

Bird festivals are a good way to market the sought-after birdwatching experience. They are aimed at a broad audience, which can include the three types of birding tourists.

Define your Target Market

What segments do you select?

Armed with the results of your supply and demand analysis and an appraisal of your ability to design new products and experiences to respond to the demand, you can define the market segments and type of visitor you want to attract.

You can make a list of visitor types based on the unique value proposition of your offering, considering the type of bird tourist or ecotourist you are targeting.

Marketing and Communication

How will you promote your offer?

Marketing is one of the most important strategic aspects of the plan. To correctly identify media and communication channels, the key question to ask is: Where do potential clients find information on birdwatching tourism experiences?

Given that the largest markets are in the United States, Canada and some European countries, specific research should be done on the communication media and channels that birders use in these countries, the conservation organizations to which they belong, the places they frequent, etc. Consider the age range of birdwatchers (who are generally between 40 and 70 years of age).

Where will you concentrate your outreach and marketing?

Establishing strategic partnerships with tour operators that specialize in ecotourism is an important way to support your marketing efforts. Operators can help market the services, because they participate in related domestic and international fairs and events and can offer services such as reservations, ground transportation, and other logistical support.

You can also create tourist routes in collaboration with other conservation and ecotourism initiatives, and integrate resources among various organizations to operate website points of sale and promotional platforms. For example, a birding route can include a region (i.e., birds of the Arctic, or of Western Mexico, or of the wetlands of Georgia) and various sighting stations along the route, which could be completed in two weeks or one month.

Marketing can be done through a trade association of local suppliers located at various key birdwatching sites. If you have the budget, identify specialized birding and ecotourism journals and invest in advertising to promote your offering. Some examples are magazines such as BirdWatching, Birding, Birds and Blooms, and Bird Watcher Digest.

Ten Tips for Online Success¹²

1

Have a good website

2

Offer secure online reservations and payment

3

Offer services for sale through an online travel agency

4

Be present and active on social networks

5

Provide a way for satisfied clients to tell you about their experience

6

Respond quickly to online client contact

7

Advertise products on various communication platforms

8

Build direct relationships with clients (e.g., personalized attention)

9

Collaborate with bloggers, journalists and/or travel writers in your region

10

Keep learning to provide better services

Use of Social Networks

In North America, Facebook is probably the most used social network for the target client age range, followed by Instagram, which is growing due to the importance

of photographic images in our society. X (formerly Twitter) is another influential social network, especially in the United States.

 What to post on Facebook?	 What to post on X ?	 What to post on Instagram?
<p>News on the experiences being marketed.</p> <p>Dates and events, such as Bird Festivals.</p>	<p>News and notable sightings in the regions being promoted for visits or festivals.</p>	<p>Images with original angles and trending hashtags to promote awareness of the species' appeal.</p>
<p>Partner information (in the framework of a mutual promotion agreement).</p>	<p>Reposts of influencers and partners.</p>	<p>"Backstage" pictures (e.g., the conservation team taking actions to improve the bird habitat).</p>
<p>Short-term promotion of the offer aimed at the potential client segment.</p>	<p>Interactions with clients and client prospects. Follow domestic and international environmental organizations and birding clubs.</p>	<p>Instagram stories showcasing the experiences you offer, or engaging followers through polls or contests.</p>
<p>Links to the website, where you can describe the products in more detail.</p>	<p>Some fun posts relating to trends, linked to bird sighting topics.</p>	



Think about trending hashtags (#) but stay on topic and consider the following: use them as little as possible on Facebook, only when essential on Twitter, and as much as possible on Instagram—here you can add any hashtags you need.

For all networks, invest in growing your base of followers by “liking” the websites of influencers, photographers, birders, travel agencies, researchers, conservation groups, media, etc.

Use “Calls to Action,” depending on the purpose of the post, i.e., with action verbs in the imperative form. For example, if your goal is to attract more visitors, a call to action can be: “Register today and travel alongside thousands of coastal birds.” To constantly improve communication, monitor the data analytics tools offered by most social networks.



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Additional Resources

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Ecotourism Series

1	Planning an Ecotourism Initiative	2	Marketing Ecotourism for Wildlife and Bird Watching	3	Community and Stakeholder Engagement in Ecotourism	4	Interpretation at Coastal Bird Sites
5	Cultural Values in Ecotourism	6	Birding Festivals as Ecotourism Experiences	7	Monitoring and Evaluation of Ecotourism Initiatives at Coastal Bird Sites	8	Bird-related Ecotourism Case Studies

About this Work



The Commission for Environmental Cooperation's (CEC) project "Conserving Shorebirds through Community Engagement" aimed to build capacity in communities along North American migration routes to conserve habitat and develop ecotourism linked to bird migration cycles. Bird-related ecotourism can be a significant source of additional income for local economies, and can incentivize communities to sustain conservation efforts. To this end, the project supported the development of education and outreach materials and training to improve knowledge, increase local support and strengthen the capacity of communities to deliver bird-related ecotourism activities such as bird watching, habitat conservation, and celebratory events. For more information visit: www.cec.org.

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