Evaluation of ecotourism in Armenia

Narine Yeghoyan

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Evaluation of Ecotourism in Armenia

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Hospitality Service Management at RIT in Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements for MS Degree

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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[November, 2005]

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Appendix A: Survey Sample - English version

Appendix B: Survey Sample - Armenian version
Abstract

Over the last decades ecological tourism has become very popular all around the world. Ecotourism has emerged as a development tool, which aims to protect the natural area and cultural diversity by attracting the ecotourists and generating benefits for the local community without harming nature. Good interpretation services, cultural sensitivity and involvement with local community are three characteristics that differentiate ecotourism from other types of tourism. Ecotourism can bring many benefits, but if it is not organized properly, it can have very serious environmental consequences. Therefore evaluation of ecotourism product in a destination is important. It can help policy makers determine the quality of ecotourism product based on global standards. Therefore the purpose of this study was the evaluation of the current ecotourism product in Armenia, based on criteria identified by international ecotourism organizations, and researchers, using site-specific indicators.

In order to evaluate ecotourism operations in Armenia a survey was conducted with Armenian tour guides. Based on each ecotourism criterion a set of site-specific indicators were developed to be included in the questioner. Site-specific indicators included environmental impact, sensitivity of activities, group size attitudes of local people, guide training, opportunities to contribute, benefits to locals and location of ecotours. The outcome of the study suggests that tour agencies that conduct ecotours in Armenia only partially satisfy the set of ecotourism criteria utilized for this evaluation. For some indicators, the operations of the tour agencies are mostly satisfactory, such as group size, interaction between the residents and tourists, attitudes of local people, while indicators such as pre-departure information about ecosystems, and behavioral norms, efficiency of the guide training are only partially satisfactory.
Chapter 1. Introduction

Ecotourism has emerged as a development tool, which aims to protect the natural area and cultural diversity by attracting the ecotourists and generating benefits for the local community without harming the nature (Mader, 2004). Ecotourism has been identified by the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of Armenia as a type of tourism that has a great potential in the country, due to the diversified ecosystems and rich cultural heritage (Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of RA, 2003). Ecotourism is seen as a tool for management of the protected natural areas in Armenia and a way to provide funds for the environmental protection of those territories. Ecotourism is also seen as an economic tool, for the development of rural areas of the country (Galyan, 2002). All eco-tours in Armenia are managed by local specialists, members of the scientific community and promoters of Armenia’s natural world (Tour Armenia, 2004). In order to maximize benefits and minimize impacts of this form of tourism in Armenia it is important to find out if nature-based tour operators meet global ecotourism criteria. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the ecotourism product in Armenia.

The paper also discusses the tourism sector in Armenia, as well as its tourism resources. It is very important to analyze the current tourism sector in the country, to understand the state of ecotourism and the factors that influence its development.
1.1 Introduction to the Study Area

Armenia is a landlocked country between the Black and the Caspian Seas, bordered on the north and east by Georgia and Azerbaijan and on the south and west by Iran and Turkey (See Map 1). The country terrain is very mountainous; the climate is continental with hot summers and cold winters. Armenia falls within the Caucasus Mountain system. Although very mountainous, Armenia has a varied terrain including valleys, forests, semi-desert, rivers and lakes. Lake Sevan is the largest of Armenia's natural lakes and the Lake Sevan National Park covers one-sixth of the country (US Department of State, 2004).

Map 1. Armenia and bordering countries
Armenia is slightly larger than Maryland, 29,800 square kilometers (11,500 sq. mile). The population of Armenia is 2,991,360 (July 2004 est.), there are approximately 6 million Armenians living outside Armenia. Armenia is a very homogeneous country; ninety eight percent of the population is Armenians. The official language is Armenian (96%). The official religion is Armenian Apostolic Church (more than 95% of population is nominally affiliated). The Holy Cathedral of Echmiadzin is where the Catholicos of all Armenians is located (The World fact Book, 2004).

The capital of Armenia is Yerevan, which is considered one of the oldest cities in the world. The official establishment of Yerevan dates back 782 BC. Throughout history Yerevan has been an important centre of Ancient Armenian Civilization (US Department of State, 2004).

Armenia was first mentioned in the history around 800 BC as a part of the Urartu Kingdom. The first Armenian state was founded in 190 BC. Armenia reached its zenith from 95 to 65 BC, and included the entire Caucasus region and the area that is now eastern Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon under the rule of king Tigran the Great. It became a part of Roman Empire in 64 BC, and adopted a Western political, philosophical and religious orientation (US Department of State, 2004).

In 301 AD Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion, and established a church that still exists independently of both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. Between 4th and 19th centuries Armenia was conquered and ruled by Persians, Byzantines, Arabs, Mongols, and Turks. It became an independent republic in 1918-1920. In 1920 it was invaded by communists’ Red Army, and in 1922 Armenia became part of the Trans-Caucasus Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1936 it became the Armenian Soviet
Socialist Republic. Armenia declared its independence from the Soviet Union on September 21, 1991. The official name of the country became the Republic of Armenia. The head of the state is the president, prime minister (head of the cabinet), Council of Ministers (cabinet) (US Department of State, 2004).

Under the old Soviet central planning system, Armenia had developed a modern industrial sector, supplying machine tools, textiles, and other manufactured goods to sister republics in exchange for raw materials and energy (The World Fact Book, 2004). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia has switched to small-scale agriculture away from the large agro-industrial complexes of the Soviet era. Armenia is a food importer, and its mineral deposits (gold, bauxite) are small. The ongoing conflict with Azerbaijan over the ethnic Armenian-dominated region of Nagorno-Karabakh, the breakup of the centrally directed economic system of the former Soviet Union and the 1988 earthquake contributed to a severe economic decline in the early 1990s. By 1994, however, the Armenian Government had launched an IMF-sponsored economic program that has resulted in positive growth rates in 1995-2001. Armenia has also managed to regulate inflation and to privatize most small- and medium-sized enterprises. The chronic energy shortages Armenia suffered in recent years have been largely offset by the energy supplied by one of its nuclear power plants at Metsamor (The World Fact Book, 2004).

New sectors, such as precious stone processing and jewelry making, information and communication technology, and tourism are beginning to supplement more traditional sectors such as agriculture in the economy (US Department of State, 2004). This steady economic progress has earned Armenia increasing support from international institutions. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and
Development (EBRD), as well as other international financial institutions (IFIs) and foreign countries are extending considerable grants and loans (The World Fact Book, 2004). The government joined the World Trade Organization on February 5, 2003. Armenia is a member of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Commonwealth of Independent States, NATO's Partnership for Peace, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the World Trade Organization (The World Fact Book, 2004).

1.2 Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study

Problem Statement

Ecotourism is seen as a very important tool for the country’s economic development, well being of local people, tourism development, as well as environmental protection. Ecotourism can bring many benefits; however, if it is not organized and managed properly, it can not only harm the environment, but also local communities. It is important to conduct an evaluation of ecotourism operations in Armenia. To help policy makers determine the quality of Armenia’s ecotourism product based on global standards.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the current ecotourism product in Armenia, based on criteria identified by international ecotourism organizations, and researchers, using site-specific indicators. At this stage in the research ecotourism will be defined generally as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” (International Ecotourism Society, 1999).
1.3 Definition of Terms

**Ecotourism:** In this research ecotourism is defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” (The International Ecotourism Society).

**Adventure Tourism:** Adventure travel is outdoor leisure activity that takes place in an unusual, exotic, or wilderness setting and tends to be associated with some level of physical activity (Alberta Economic Development).

**Cultural Tourism:** Cultural/Heritage Tourism is that form of tourism whose objective is, among other aims, the discovery of monuments and sites, and contributes to their maintenance and protection (JSDN).

**Sustainable Tourism:** Sustainable Tourism is tourism which is developed and maintained in an area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period, and does not degrade or alter environment (human physical) in which it exists to such degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being of other activities and processes (Butler, 1993, p.29).

The difference between ecotourism and other types of tourism such as adventure tourism, sustainable tourism, nature tourism will be discussed in the next –literature review chapter.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

The literature contributing to the understanding of the problem and attaining the objectives of this research is reviewed in this chapter. This material is divided into four sections. The first section describes the tourism sector in Armenia and its resources, as well as the current state of ecotourism in the country. The next section reviews the definitions of ecotourism that exist in the literature. The third section presents the various criteria for evaluating ecotourism suggested by international ecotourism organizations and researchers. The last segment presents a review of the main methods for conducting research in the area of ecotourism.

2.1 Tourism Resources and Institutions in Armenia

During the Soviet Era, Armenia had a developed tourism industry with more than 600,000 visitors a year (International Executive Service Corps 2003). Armenia had many hotels, resorts, health resorts, restaurants and other facilities. It is estimated that the number of visitors to Armenia pre-dating the collapse of the Soviet Union reached 700,000 to 800,000 in the late 1980s (World Bank, 2002). Tourism was centrally planned and “Intourist”, a state owned tourism agency, was in charge of the tourism market in the Soviet Union. “Intourist” arranged all the bookings, itineraries, and lodging for all visitors, both international and domestic. “Intourist” also operated hotels and other lodging accommodations, restaurants, tour guides, interpreters and transportation (World Bank, 2002). Armenia was being marketed by Intourist together with Azerbaijan and Georgia, as a
part of South Caucasus region (World Bank, 2002). The appeal of the Southern Caucasus region, to soviet citizens included the warm climate (sunny), rich culture, cuisine (wines and food, particularly fresh fruit, which were not available in the rest of the Soviet Union countries), its spas and recreational facilities (beaches in Georgia and skiing in Armenia). These amenities were marketed as such by Intourist. Armenia and the whole region were marketed to the international visitors mainly for the reach culture (World Bank, 2002).

The collapse of the Soviet Union, coupled with devastating earthquake in 1988, provided Armenia with major economic problems. Over the past decade the economy has began slowly to recover, and tourism development played a vital role in that recovery (International Executive Service Corps, 2003). According to the statistical analysis conducted by the Department of Tourism of Armenia (2002), tourism had a great impact on the business activities of the country, increased number of jobs for the population, generated an nflow of currency, and generated income for the small and medium-sized enterprises. According to the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development, the contribution of tourism industry to the economy for year 2001, was $100 million USA dollars. An average visitor’s expenditure for 5 day’s stay in Armenia was estimated at US $500-800 by the Department of tourism and was distributed as follows (The Department of Tourism of Republic of Armenia, 2002):

- Visas- US $60
- Accommodation - US $300-450
- Food and Beverage - US $50-100
- Retail - US $50-100
- Leisure - US $50-100
According to the data provided by the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development, the number of jobs in tourism sector in 2001 was around 17,000 people, distributed between direct and indirect employment. The indirect employment consisted of 8,500 workers and included merchants selling souvenirs and handcrafts. The direct employment including 8,500 workers was distributed as follows (The Department of Tourism of Republic of Armenia, 2002):

- Accommodation facilities – 4,000
- Travel agencies – 2,500
- Restaurants – 1,500
- Others - 500

Since 1997, the Government of Armenia has recognized tourism as an important branch of its economy and, therefore, created the Department of Tourism, within the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development. Five zones were identified for tourism development (Business Armenia, 2001):

1. **Yerevan and surrounding areas, including Geghard Monastery, Garni Pagan Temple and the churches in Echmiadzin.** Yerevan is the capital of Armenia, and is one of the world’s oldest cities. It was founded in 783 BC, as Erebuni. The ruins of the fortress at Erebuni are in the southeastern part of the present day Yerevan. There are many museums, art galleries in Yerevan. The main hotels are in Yerevan. Garni Pagan Temple is located 28km from Yerevan, and another historic site the Geghard Monastery is only 15-20 minutes from the temple. Garni temple represents the Hellenistic culture in Armenia today, and is over 2000 years old. It is a popular site among the tourists. Geghard Monastery is considered an architectural
wonder in Armenia; a complex of churches within a mountain carved from solid rocks. Echmiadzin is the residence of the Supreme Catholicos of all Armenians and the center of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Echmiadzin is located 20 minutes from Yerevan, and is one of the most important religious and spiritual centers in Armenia.

Map 2: Regional map of Armenia

2. **Vayots Dzor region, including Amaghou Valley, Noravank Monastery and the spa town of Jermuk.** Vayots Dzor region is known for its wine and cheese in Armenia. One of the most important sites of the region, is the Noravank Monastery, The Monastery is situated in Noravank canyon, and from a distance appears to be situated high on a flat surface of rocks. According to the legend
Noravank housed a piece of the True Cross stained with Christ’s blood. Jermuk, is the third largest city in the region, and has been a famous spa resort since Soviet times. Local spas provide mineral water treatment for various diseases. The area has beautiful nature, and is known for its waterfalls. Currently, most of the resorts in Dilijan region are not in the best conditions; they are not usable, because they were either designed according to Soviet standards, which do not match the western ones, or they are in the stage of disrepair due to the lack of maintenance. Currently, the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development is working on developing health resorts in the region.

3. **Siunik region, including Tatev Monastery.** Siunik region is known for its beautiful nature, diverse climate and unique mountains. Siunik is rich in cool natural springs and possesses numerous sources of mineral water. Tatev Monastery has played a vital role in the Armenian history and culture. In was built during the 9-13th centuries as an Armenian intellectual center, where philosophers, musicians, painters and monks lived, and produced manuscripts for the whole Armenia. St. Gregory the Illuminator, who spread Christianity throughout Armenia, is buried there in a small church.

4. **Northern Armenia, including the second largest city Gyumri.** Gyumri played a vital role in the Armenian culture. Until the Soviet expansion of Armenia's new capital of Yerevan, it was Gyumri or Alexandrapol as it was known at the time. It was then the largest city of the republic. Gyumri was destroyed in 1988 earthquake, but is being restored.
5. **Lake Sevan area, including the town of Dilijan.** Sevan is a fresh water lake, situated in 60km from Yerevan. Sevan is popular both among Armenians and tourists. On the Peninsula of Lake Sevan, two cross-shaped churches dating from 874 AD are located. Lake Sevan is known for summer camps, fishing, sailing swimming. Surrounded by a heavily forested area of mountains, Dilijan is a popular resort town, famous for its mineral water and the surrounding countryside and is home to a great variety of fauna, such as brown bear, wild boar, fox, marten, as well as 240 species of birds. Near Dilijan are some of the most interesting monasteries and churches in Armenia, including Hagartsin Monastery set in a scenic valley beside a stream.

A number of programs and projects are being designed and implemented aimed to development of tourism in those five zones of Armenia. The Armenian Tourism Development Agency (ATDA) was created by the government in June 2000, to act as its premier national tourism organization. The ATDA is independent from the Tourism Department, and is mainly responsible for tourism promotion. In 2000, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) granted funds to International Executive Service Corps (ISEC) for the implementation of a Tourism Development Initiative (TDI) to help the Government of Armenia promote tourism. The TDI is a tourism development program, with initiatives for destination marketing through trade shows, familiarization tours for international tour operators and press, and other activities. Currently, the Tourism Initiative is being implemented in Armenian by International Executive Service Corps in collaboration with The Armenian Tourism Development Agency, Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of RA, and various non-governmental organizations.
(International Executive Service Corps 2003). In September 2001, Yerevan’s first visitor information centre “Armenia Information” (VIC) was opened by ATDA and IESC. The VIC features an online database of tourist attractions, accommodations, transportation services, events, shops, restaurants. More that 50 Armenian organizations have placed promotional brochures for display in the VIC, including travel agencies, hotels, restaurants, museums, and others. Staff is trained to answer the questions seven days a week, from 9am-19pm (International Executive Service Corps 2003).

In order to introduce Armenia to the world, in 1998-2002 more than 40 visits of foreign journalists highlighting the tourism industry were organized; advertising posters and brochures were published and spread (The Department of Tourism of Republic of Armenia, 2003). Armenia participated in 20 world touring exhibitions, as well as the yearly exhibitions in London and Berlin (The Department of Tourism of republic of Armenia, 2003). In September of 2004, the Armenian Tourism Development Agency represented Armenia and the Armenian tourism industry at the Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA) World Tourism Congress and Travel Fair 2004 in Tokyo. Armenia participated in this event for the first time. This was an opportunity for Armenia to enlarge the tourism market population, specifically in the Asian market (ARKA News Agency, 2004).

The government has approved and implements the following programs and policies in the country (Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of Republic of Armenia, 2003):

- “The concept of tourism development of RA”
- “The program of tourism development in communities of RA”
- “The state program of tourism development of RA”

In 1997 Armenia joined the World Tourism Organization (WTO), and the relations with WTO have had a positive impact on the development of tourism in the country (BBC, 2002). Ara Petrosyan, Deputy of Trade and Economic Development Minister outlined, that the relations with WTO since 1997 have given an opportunity to Armenia to make progress in the sphere of tourism and organize the work according to international standards. WTO has helped Armenia in the development of tourism industry, training of the specialists and in many other aspects (BBC, 2002). In September of 2002, the Secretary-General of WTO, Francesco Frangialli had a two day visit to Armenia. During his meeting with the president of Armenia the Secretary-General noted that tourism in Armenia had a large potential, and that Armenia would attain its own worthy position among the courtiers that have tourist traditions (BBC, 2002). “In cooperation with WTO, Armenia has been involved in various international programs, such as “Great Silk Road” commercial program” (The Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of Republic of Armenia, 2003). The “Silk Road” program was launched by World Tourism Organization in 1994, as a long-term tourism project. The main purpose of the program is the contribution to the tourism development in the participating countries, enhance the cooperation between Caucasus and Central Asian region, establish new communication channels across the region, and revive the cultural legacy of the people of Caucasus and Central Asian. Currently 19 countries are participating in the project, including Armenia and its neighboring countries-Iran, Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan (World Tourism Organization). Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, were some of the main
trade destinations for the Silk Road caravans. The loaded caravans with silk, gold, perfume, carpets and other goods used to come from Iran along the shores of the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan and continued through Georgia and Armenia to Black Sea coast. Armenia has many interesting Silk Road sites. One of the important Silk Road sites in Armenia is the “Selim Caravansarai” (an old inn located on the Selim Mountain 2410m above sea level). It was built in 1332 to accommodate the caravans traveling along the Silk Road. The merchants spent the night at this inn before continuing their journey to the East. Marco Polo is known to have passed through this locale and described how the local Armenians lived. The inn is one of the most exquisite pieces of medieval Armenian architecture. The building itself is half-sunk into the hillside, and is well-protected against the effects of the weather. There is another old caravan-barn along this road. The distance between the two resting stops was equal to a day’s caravan travel. Functionally, the caravan-barns acted as the hub for commercial and political news, and interaction between the merchants (www.armeniatravel.am).

The Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of Armenia identified the following types of tourism that have potential in Armenia (The Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of RA, 2003):

- Cultural, Historical, Cognitive tourism- this type of tourism always had a predominant place due to the rich cultural-historical heritage of Armenia.
- Ecotourism- the potential of Armenia is great due to the landscape, virgin nature, variety of flora and fauna. At the same time historical monuments are in the harmony with the natural areas, which gives the opportunity to combine these types of tourism.
- Religious tourism - Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity as state religion in 301, and has rich traditions of Christianity.

- Ethnic tourism - Great Diaspora can play a vital role in this type of tourism. This type will allow the Diaspora Armenians visit the birthplace of their ancestors, and see the cultural and historic monuments that they have heard about.

- Rural and agrotourism- Armenian fruits, vegetables, wine-making, canning, making dry fruits have rich tradition. This type of tourism, will allow the visitors to be exposed to Armenian rural experience, as well as visit vineyards, orchards and try fresh fruity and vegetables.

- Winter sports tourism - the variety of resources creates conditions for development of such kind of tourism.

- Sanatorium tourism-this type of tourism was very popular during Soviet Union in Armenia. Medicinal springs create a potential for this type of tourism in Armenia. Currently, the tourism development strategy of Armenia is aimed to developing these types of tourism in the country.

2.2 Analysis of Armenian Tourism Market

Over the past few years tourism has been the fastest growing sector in Armenia (The Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of RA, 2002). "The Republic of Armenia offers many tourist attractions, namely a beautiful landscape, an authentic civilization and a great history, cultural heritage, as well as unique architecture inviting everybody to explore it" (EIU ViewsWire, 2003). Extensive marketing since 2001, when the
country celebrated the 1,700th anniversary of the proclamation of Christianity as state religion, has boosted the number of tourists from 47,000 in 1998 to 162,000 in 2002 (EIU ViewsWire, 2003). Armenia has a significant Diaspora market, primarily from the United States. According to the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of RA the U.S. is the single most important national market in Armenia accounting for 23.3% of visitors, followed by Russia and France. In total, the E.U. countries account for approximately 32.2% of visitors, and former soviet republics (CIS countries-Commonwealth of Independent States) for 22% (See the Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Incoming Tourists (Source: The Tourism Department, 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incoming Tourists by Countries in 2003</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIS countries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other CIS countries</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU countries</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other EU countries</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the data provided by the National Statistical Service of Armenia (NSS) 206,094 foreign visitors visited Armenia from January to December 2003; this figure represents 27.1% increase compared to the previous year (See Figure 2.1).
Based on the information collected from hotels and travel agencies in Armenia the growth rate for tourism industry in 2004 was estimated to be 15 % compared to the previous year (National Statistical Service of Armenia, 2004). According to the National Statistical Service of Armenia in January-July 2004 a total number of 93,545 tourists visited Armenia, which is 25% more than the in last year (See Figure 2.2). Many factors have influenced the increase in the visitor numbers. After the Celebration of 17,000 anniversary of Christianity, the numbers of visitors have grown. This was due to the wide publicity that Armenia got during that celebration. During that period the number of Diaspora representatives visiting Armenia grew significantly. In addition, the foreign tourists became more informed about the cultural and historical heritage of Armenia. Significant importance was given to the event, including the participation of international press, as well as to the visit of Pope John Paul II. Armenia has also participated in many trade shows, and international fairs which also helped
to promote it as a tourism destination. The quality of the service in the hotels has improved during the last years.

**Figure 2.2** *(Source: National Statistical Service of Armenia)*

![Bar chart showing foreign visitors' figures for January - July year 2003 and 2004](chart.png)

The National Statistical Service of Armenia also reported that an increase was noticed in inland tourism (4.4%). A total of 54,615 resident tourist traveled in Armenia in the first half of the 2004 (ARMINFO News, 2004).

The survey conducted by the National Statistical Service of Armenia revealed that the largest foreign groups in Armenia are people who are visiting their relatives, business and leisure travelers (Table 2.2). The survey also revealed that the length of the stay of the visitors was 1-10 days, 11-19 days and 30-60 days (2002 Survey, by National Statistical Service of Armenia)
Table 2.2 (Source: 2002 Survey conducted at Airport Zvartnots by NSS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign Visitors:</th>
<th>Number of visitors</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business travelers</td>
<td>1,089</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure travelers</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical treatment</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit, relatives, religious vents, etc</td>
<td>1,789</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of foreign visitors</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,535</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the calculations done by the Department of Tourism of Armenia, in 1999 tourism export made about 40 million US dollars, and in 2001 gross income from tourism industry in the country was about 164 million US dollars, 75% of which was an income from inbound tourism. The statistical analysis also showed that the departure country of tourists was enlarged; in 2001 tourists from 80 countries visited Armenia (The Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of RA, 2003).
2.3 Tourism Infrastructure

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia went through the process of privatization. The government of Armenia has taken several actions, towards improving the investment climate in the country; they encouraged the operation of charter flights, eased the issuing of building permits for hotels and tourist establishments, and allowed private investments in the infrastructure projects. For example, the main airport of Armenia has been rented by one of the leading companies in managing airports (Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of Republic of Armenia, 2003). In 2002 Armenia's government and an Argentine company, Aeropuertos Argentinos 2000, signed a contract on a 30-year concession of Zvartnots airport. The Argentine company is owned by an investor of Armenian origin (World Bank, 2004)

Due to the improved investment climate many investments have been made in the Armenian hotels (PR Newswire, 2004). In 2004, American-Armenian investors opened Armenia's first 5-star hotel, "Marriott Armenia" hotel. This hotel represents the largest US direct investment ever in the Republic of Armenia. In 1998, Massachusetts-based AK Development LLC purchased an 80% share in Hotel Armenia for $8 million US dollars, and invested $35 million dollars in rebuilding the hotel. Marriott International Inc. has been retained to manage the hotel. The Armenian Marriot Hotel is the first project in Armenia to receive funding through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), a US government agency, and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), an arm of the World Bank (PR Newswire, 2004). At the ceremony of the opening of the "Marriott-Armenia" hotel, the president of Armenia, Robert Kocharian, pointed out that tourism development is impossible without the development of infrastructure. He also noted that the presence of such
companies as “Marriott" in Armenia is necessary for tourism development in the country, and is an evidence of successful completion of the privatization program (ARMINFO, 2004).

According to the data provided by the Department of Tourism of Republic of Armenia, in 1998 the number of existing hotel beds was 1612, with rather low quality of service. During 2001 and 2002, 16 new high quality hotels have been added to the number of existing ones in Yerevan and the regions of Armenia. In 2002, the number of hotel beds increased to 2,272, with higher quality of service. The data provided by National Statistical Service of Armenia, also shows that the hotels have improved their services and offer more facilities to their customers. The number of the visitors who stayed in the hotels has increased compared to the previous year (See Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 (Source: National Statistical Service of Armenia)

![Graph showing foreign visitors figures for January - December 2002 and 2003](image)

Table 2.3 shows that there was an increase in the number of hotels, which are engaged in servicing foreign visitors. The total number of visitors to Armenia between January-December 2003 was 206,904, of which 29,083 stayed at the hotels. According to the reports
provided by the hotels to the National Statistical Service of Armenia, 26,075 visitors stayed in the hotels in 2002, which comprises approximately 16% of the number of visitors to Armenia in that year (National Statistical Service of Armenia, 2004).

Table 2.3: Foreign visitor’s figures for January-December year 2002 and 2003

| Source: National Statistical Service of Armenia |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Number of hotels which hosted foreign visitors | Jan-Dec 2002 | Jan-Dec 2003 |
| Foreign visitors who stayed in hotels | 26,075 | 29,083 |
| Foreign visitors who stayed with relatives, at rented apartments, etc. | 136,014 | 177,011 |
| Total number of foreign visitors | 162,089 | 206,094 |

The Statistical data shows that the number of hotels have increased, and the number of visitors who stay at the hotels has also increased. However most of the hotels, especially high quality ones, are situated in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan. Currently, the hotels within Yerevan are primarily business oriented, and are lacking facilities for family vacations. Prices are not particularly high as far as business people are concerned, but are high for the tourists (Armenian Chamber of Commerce).

According to the Armenian Chamber of Commerce, the number of “acceptable” (in usable condition) accommodations outside Yerevan is 24 % of total possible, and the number of accommodations that could be improved to “acceptable” standard is 13.5% of total possible (Armenian Chamber of Commerce). The majority of the existing accommodations in the regions are not usable, because they were either designed according to Soviet
standards, and do not match the western ones, or they are in the stage of disrepair due to the lack of maintenance (World Bank, 2003). It is obvious that there is need for new accommodations, and renewal of some old ones especially in the regions of Armenia. Currently, the tourism policy is drawn towards building hotel establishments mainly in the 10 Regions of Armenia. The tourism policy is aimed to encourage investments in the development of regional tourism. In order to encourage investments in the tourism sector, the government is granting the investors many advantages. “The Ministry of economic development has developed and submitted to the acting Minister on Regional Governance a conception-program called “establishment of tourism infrastructure objects” and appropriate map of their schematic allocation. The latest includes domestic tourist routes, and possible location of various infrastructure objects” (Ministry of Trade and Economic Development, Republic of Armenia, 2003).

Beginning in 2001 a Museum Renovation Program together with a big project on highway road signs and streets in Yerevan city started. The project was funded by LINCY Foundation. LINCY foundation has been set up by American businessman Kirk Kerkorian (Diaspora Armenian). The foundation has awarded hundreds of million dollars to a wide range of humanitarian efforts around the world, in areas such as, education, health and global economies. The headquarters of the foundation is in Beverly Hills. During recent years LINCY foundation has awarded more than US $165 million dollars to support Armenia’s government and economic organizations (Paul Tharp, New York Post, September 15, 2004).

In another case, a project was been developed for the construction of a ropeway to the South Summit (3900 meters) of Aragats Mountain (4096 meters). This ropeway will grant the visitors with a view of the mountain and the lake hidden between the four peaks. The
project includes the construction of a visitor center, service center and a parking area. It will contribute to the development of mountain tourism and alpinism in Armenia (Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of RA, 2003).

Various structures such as horse races, water world, bowling center, a golf course have been added to the touring package (Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of RA, 2003).

During past couple of years, visa procedures have also improved in Armenia, including the issuance of a single entry tourist visa upon arrival in the airport, land borders and through internet (International Executive Service Corps, 2003). According to the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development, currently, over a hundred specialized companies are involved in the touring industry in Armenia, while in 1997 that number was less than fifteen.

In 1998-2002 educational programs in tourism were opened in Armenia, including in the Open University, in the Russian-Armenian State University, in Yerevan State Humanitarian College, in the University named after Nerses Ashtaraketsi in Ashtarak town. The Institute of Armenian Tourism was established and specialized courses are carried out in about 10 educational institutions (Ministry of Trade and Economic Development, 2003).

A number of private institutions have opened to train people to work in tourism industry. The Directorate of Tourism Development has organized several training/educational activities, and Armenian government officials have participated in trainings organized by the World Tourism Organization (Ministry of Trade and Economic Development, Republic of Armenia, 2003).
2.4 Ecotourism in Armenia

Natural Resources

"The mountainous nature of Armenia results in a series of highly diverse landscapes, with variations in geological substrate, terrain, climate, soils, and water resources. These landscapes support a great variety of habitats, which support distinctive flora and fauna, and different human use. These landscapes are generally associated with particular altitude zones. Each landscape represents a different ecosystem, with a distinctive group of associated plants and animals" (Galyan, 2002). Armenian Fauna includes approximately 3500 species of higher vascular plants. In addition, the country is located along one of the major migratory flyways, and has several sites of great importance for migrating birds (Armenian Ecotourism Association, 2002).

Armenia has a developed system of protected territories: five State Reserves, 22 State reservations, 1 National Parks that occupy 10% of its total territory. Currently, two additional National Parks are in the process of establishment (Galyan, 2002). State Reserves in Armenia are established to provide high levels of protection for important habitants and species. State reserves are defined as strict nature reserves; human activities in the reserves are limited to conservation and scientific research (IUCN, 1994). State reservations are established to protect areas with unique natural habitats, ecosystems, and species. The difference between the reserves and the reservations concerns the objectives: a strictly regulated economic and sustainable use of natural resources is among the management objectives of state reservations" (Ministry of Nature Protection, 2002).

The existing system for protected territories in Armenia was established in 1958 and is mainly managed by the Ministry for Nature Protection. Despite the size and history of the
protected areas, there are a number of problems with the design and management of the protected areas (Ministry for Nature protection 2002).

- Many important ecosystems are not represented within the protected areas network.
- The borders of the protected areas have not been designed appropriately to take into account factors such as topography, altitudinal variation, and distribution patterns.
- The protection status of State Reserves and Conservation Areas is not generally enforced, the human activities such as farming and recreation occur in Reserves. The legal framework, regulating the management of the protected areas, was adopted in December 1991, and has not been revised since then, though the status and principles of operation of all the other structures related to them has changed. As a result of a new administrative-territorial division, the borders of the regions have been revised; and local governments have been established in each region. And, therefore there is an need to revise the preserve borders. Often they merge with the neighboring territories, and cannot be distinguished. Farmers often graze their cattle on these territories, beyond the permitted borders (Danielian, 2004).
- Protected areas lack effective administration and conservation management, and have insufficient staff and resources. Until 2002, the state reserves and the national parks were financed by the state budget. In 2002, the financing of the reserves was given to the protection agencies (non-governmental organizations), which means that the protected territories have to develop their resources through
business activities in order to sustain themselves. Due to these changes, the protected areas have insufficient funds (Danielian, 2004).

- The legal framework for protected areas is poor or totally lacking. Laws to protect biodiversity were first adopted in Armenia during the Soviet Era. However, no comprehensive legislative base existed for natural resource protection in Armenia, and government regulation was limited to a number of sectors such as forestry, fisheries and hunting. Following independence in 1991 environmental legislation was reviewed, in order to develop a comprehensive legal framework. The Law on Specially Protected Areas was adopted in December of 1991 (PGR in Central Asia and Caucasus, 2003). The Law on Protected Areas in Armenia outlines procedures for the establishment and management of protected areas and their relationships with other sectors. Under this law, State Reserves, State Conservation Areas, National Parks and Natural Monuments are considered as protected areas (The Ministry of Nature Protection of Republic of Armenia, 2002). However, this law does not address a number of essential issues, such as socio-economic benefits of biodiversity, land privatization, and the role and rights of the private sector. The Law on Protected Areas is based on the one developed during Soviet Union, and does not take into consideration the changed socio-economic and political situation, particularly with regard to land privatization and the establishment of the private sector (The Ministry of Nature Protection of Republic of Armenia, 2002). In addition, rights and responsibilities of public and private sectors, and the role and participation of local communities and NGOs in
protected areas are not clarified in the Law (The Ministry of Nature Protection of Republic of Armenia, 2002).

- Natural monuments have not yet been officially registered and an inventory of sites has not been completed.

In 1997 non-governmental non-profit organization, Armenian Ecotourism Association (ARMECAS) was founded to promote ecotourism as a means of sustainable development of the country. Members of Armenian Ecotourism Association are people of different professions; most of them are specialists in areas of natural and cultural heritage and the tourism business. The mission of this organization is “to provide support and assistance to revive and restore the natural and cultural-historical heritage of Armenia, as well as improving the welfare of the population through the development of ecotourism “(Armenian Ecotourism Association, 2002). In 1999 ARMECAS became a member of The International Ecotourism Society (TIES). The Association organized different tours and expeditions to study the opportunities of ecotourism development in Armenia, as well as the promotion of sustainable tourism principles in rural regions among businessmen, communities, non-governmental organizations and officials (Armenian Ecotourism Association, 2002).

The preliminary market survey, conducted by the Armenian Ecotourism Association has revealed a demand for the following types of eco-tours in Armenia:

- Bird-watching
- Botanical and zoological tours
- Geo-environmental tours
- Cave and mineralogical tours
- Historical and ethnographical tours
• And all kinds of adventure tourism (horse-back riding, hiking, mountaineering, skiing and water sports) (ARMECAS 2002).

Currently Armenian Ecotourism Association organizes all of the above—mentioned tours. If the tourists desire to go on an ecotour, the members of ARMECAS organize the tours for them. Eco-tours are all managed by local specialists, members of the scientific community and promoters of Armenia’s natural world (Tour Armenia, 2004).

Besides Armenian Ecotourism Association, currently, a number of eco-tours are conducted in Armenia by tour agencies. The tours can be taken for adventure (paragliding, climbing, hiking, water sports, camping horse-back riding) or to assist in species observations (birding, flower watching, tracking endangered species).

Ecotourism is a powerful mechanism to solve both ecological and social problems (Honey, 1999). As the president of Armenian Ecotourism Association, pointed out, protected natural areas have become the subject of increased discussion in Armenia. There is a need for the appropriate protection of these territories, and also a need for significant financial investment for the protection for those territories. Ecotourism is seen in Armenia as a tool for management of the protected natural areas and a way to provide funds for the environmental protection of those territories. Ecotourism is also seen as an economic tool, in rural areas of the country. As the president of Armenian Ecotourism Association pointed out, ecotourism is an efficient means for a country’s economic development, and it plays a significant role in people’s well being, especially those in rural areas: it provides the rural areas with jobs, income from the use of local transportation, rural inns and houses and local food. Ecotourism will also contribute to the tourism development in the country (Galyan, 2002)
Despite its natural, cultural potential Armenia is making the first steps for implementation of projects and programs towards ecotourism development. According to the data provided by Armenian Ecotourism Association the following projects are being implemented in Armenia (Armenian Ecotourism Association, 2002):

1. World Bank/Government of Armenia-“Natural resources management and Poverty reduction”. The project includes ecotourism development in province of Tavush and Gegharkunik, including two National Parks - Dilijan and Sevan. The preparation phase of the project has been completed, and the implementation of the project has started. The following activities will be financed under this project:

   - Tourism infrastructure development-visitor centers, campsites, tourism infrastructure connecting key historical, architectural and natural monuments on the territory of the parks.
   - Production of educational and promotional material.
   - Design of hiking trail system.
   - Training for the personnel of the protected areas and the tour guides.

2. Armenian Ecotourism Association initiated a project “Development of Eco/Agro-tourism in Southern Caucasus”. The project is financed by Synergy Program of Eurasia Foundation. The project includes:

   - Creation of common field for promotion of eco/agro-tourism in Southern Caucasus (website, electronic map, advertisement journal).
   - Provision on created tours to the tourist companies, as well as consulting, training, and information support for their implementation.
3. Project of community-based tourism in Tatev village. The project aims to make ecotourism a tool for collective use and management of resources. The project is based on active involvement of the community in every phase of ecotourism planning, development, management and implementation (Galyan, 2002).

Armenia has a great potential for ecotourism development, but like any country in transition the economy faces numerous problems (Galyan, 2002). “It is necessary to provide discussions to develop a national strategy of ecotourism in Armenia; all the interested parties should be involved in this process of planning, development and management of ecotourism at local, regional and national levels. Now it is time for establishing a National Council for Ecotourism Policy” (Galyan 2002). The government of Armenia understands the importance of ecotourism in the country, and considers the importance of detailed research and planning in this area. Currently, activities are implemented to create the national strategy for development of eco-tourism and agro-tourism in Armenia. The national strategy is called to regulate the problems connected with these types of tourism:

- Define natural zones, permitted for ecotourism development
- Define the types of activities for each natural zone
- Conduct necessary works for the preparation of these zones for tourist activity
- Determine income use mechanisms for environmental protection
- Involvement of the rural communities and other issues (Galyan 2002).

Ecotourism has all prerequisites to become an important factor in the sustainable development of Armenia.
2.5 Ecotourism Definitions

Any evaluation of ecotourism criteria in a given country requires a working definition that sets a clear distinction between ecotourism and other kinds of tourism. Defining ecotourism is not an easy task. Although much has been written about ecotourism, there is not a unified definition (Mader, 2004). Ecotourism is often referred to as “responsible”, “sustainable”, “conservation” or “low-impact” tourism and is often listed by the travel industry in the category of nature and adventure tourism (Hundloe, 2002). Ecotourism is not adventure tourism—one can bungy jump anywhere. Ecotourism includes activities in which visitors enjoy hands-on experiences, such as listening to the birds sing and smelling the flowers. A walk through a rainforest is not ecotourism, unless that particular walk benefits the local community and the environment (Untamed Path, 1999). A rafting trip is not ecotourism, unless it raises awareness and funds to help protect the watershed (Untamed Path, 1999). Good interpretation services, cultural sensitivity and involvement with local community are the three issues that differentiate ecotourism from its cousins-green and sustainable tourism” (Hundloe, 2002). The variety of definitions is based on the fact that people tend to define things in terms that are more beneficial to them (Untamed Path, 1999). Organizations such as International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), The Sierra Club and the American Society of Travel (ASTA), have created their own guidelines for defining ecotourism. “In a comparative study of ecotourism policy Americas for the Organization of American States (OAS), Edwards, McLaughlin and Ham found that of the 25 government tourism agencies that chose to define ecotourism, 21 chose to create their own definitions” (Mader, 2004).
The roots of ecotourism are deeply connected with conservation movement. “Ecotourism began as an untested idea that many hoped could contribute to the conservation of natural resources worldwide” (Wood, 2002). In early 1980s the rain forests, coral reefs became the main interest of biologists, scientists as well as nature film documentaries. This interest helped to launch small local businesses specializing in guiding scientists and filmmakers to the natural areas (Wood, 2002). These small businesses began to prosper in countries such as Ecuador and Costa Rica, and a more formal industry developed to meet the needs of these types of visitors (Wood, 2002). The concept of nature-based tourism started in early 1900s with the Sierra Club outings in the United States. Between the early 1970s and 1980s the concept of ecotourism developed (Honey, 1999). “Almost simultaneously the principles and practices of ecotourism began taking shape, and by the early 1990s, the concept had “coalesced in to the hottest new genre” of environmentally and socially responsible travel ”(Honey, 1999). Hundloe (2002) brings the following explanations for the rapid development of ecotourism: psychological and human relationships with the nature, the influence of the popular education (the natural history television shows), change in the attitude towards the environment, and economic well-being.

Ecotourism is a segment of tourism industry, which brings billions of dollars in annual sales. However, ecotourism operates differently than other segments of tourism industry, due to its sustainable development results: conserving natural areas, providing benefits to local residents and educating visitors about sustainability (Wood, 2002). Figure 2.4 shows how ecotourism fits into the tourism industry. Both ecotourism and adventure tourism are components of nature tourism, but ecotourism has stronger links with cultural and rural tourism (Wood, 2002).
According to Eagles (1997) ecotourism is one of the four submarkets of nature based tourism and involves travel for the discovery of and learning about wild natural environments (See Figure 2.5). The submarkets are differentiated based on the motives of the travelers.

According to, Western (1993), Valentine (1993) and Hawkes (1993), the main distinguishing characteristic of ecotourism from adventure, cultural and nature tourism, is the emphasis on its ethical values and principles. Stewart and Sekartjakrarini (1994) argue that
Ecotourism activities should integrate appropriate activities and behavioral norms and embrace a community behavior.

According to the Quebec Declaration on ecotourism, (2002) "ecotourism embraces ecotourism the principles of sustainable tourism... and the following principles which distinguish it from the wider concept of sustainable tourism;

- Contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage,
- Includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, contributing to their well-being,
- Interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitor,
- Lends itself better to independent travelers, as well as to organized tours for small size groups" (UNEP, 2004).

The International Ecotourism Society founded in 1990 gives the following definition of ecotourism: "ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people". According to the Australia’s National Ecotourism Strategy, ecotourism is defined as “nature-based tourism that involves interpretation and education of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable”. Overall, the key elements that distinguish ecotourism from other types of tourism are: a focus on natural environment, ecological sustainability, education and interpretation, and local benefits (Hundloe, 2002).

Ecotourism brings many benefits: for environmentalists, ecotourism provides an opportunity for long-term protection of the natural areas. For visitors, ecotourism provides an educational glimpse of the world of natural beauty and rich cultural heritage, as well as an opportunity for cross cultural exchange. For local community it offers a chance to improve
economy and well-being (Lindsey, 2003). However, not all ecotourism efforts are beneficial to the local community and ecosystems. Tourism writer Deborah McLaren notes, “At its worst, ecotravel is environmentally destructive, economically exploitive, culturally insensitive, ‘green washed’ travel (using environmentally friendly images but not following the principles of ecotourism)” (McLaren, 1998). If ecotourism is not organized properly, it can have very serious environmental consequences. The growing number of tourists can cause pollution in the area, and cause the degradation of the fragile ecosystems (Lindsey, 2003). Tourists who go on a nature hike can contribute to the soil erosion and damage the plant roots, even a harmless sounding activity such as watching the wildlife can be destructive; the tourists can scare animals away from their feeding, nesting or mating sites. For example, in the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal, the presence of 60,000 tourists annually has worn deep roots in the trail (McLaren, 1998). One of the primary benefits of ecotourism is considered the employment opportunities for the local community. However very often tourism operations are owned and run by foreign companies, providing little or no benefits for the locals (Lindsey, 2003). Tourists’ needs can be given a priority over those of wildlife and local people. For example, in Kenya a spring in Shaba national Reserve provided fresh water for wildlife and the local Samburu people. However, when the Sarova Shaba Hotel was built, its water needs took priority and the spring was blocked off from the local access (McLaren, 1998).

Many travel and tourism businesses have found it comfortable to use the term “ecotourism” to promote their destinations, without actually implementing any of the basic ecotourism principles (Honey, 1999). “Much of what is marketed today as ecotourism is simply conventional mass tourism wrapped in a thin veneer of green. Ecotourism is propelled
by travel agents, tour operators, airlines and cruise lines, large hotel and resort chains, which promote quick, superficially ‘green’ visits within conventional packages” (Honey, 1999). Many tour companies use ecotourism to draw attention to anything that they are selling. Due to these facts, many non-governmental organizations, such as Ecotourism Society, suggested development of certification and evaluation programs that help to reduce false marketing and encourage companies to consider improving their practices (Cecil, 1995). In the last decade ecotourism guidelines have been formulated by many different organizations worldwide. Professional associations have been formed which have developed codes of ecotourism ethics standards, and “voluntary guidelines, to help in the management of the ecotourism product. These standards and guidelines encourage the travelers, tour operators, and guides to strengthen their efforts in the conservation of the ecosystem (Wood, Norman, Frauman & Toepper, 1999). This has been an important step in setting standards within the field of ecotourism. Development of ecotourism guidelines has also been useful around the world in helping to address questions of how to develop ecotourism in local communities, provide training to the tour operators. (Wood, Norman, Frauman & Toepper, 1999).

Ecotourism criteria and indicators can provide significant benefits: help ensure sustainability and conservation, raise industry standards, provide a means of industry self-regulation, and deliver marketing advantages. Ecotourism criteria can be used as an important tool by visitors and other stakeholders such as the local community or protected area managers, to choose wisely. For example, the local community could use this tool to determine the activities that will help maximize the positive benefits and minimize the negative impacts of ecotourism (Crabtree, O'Reilly & Worboys, 2000). “Ecotourism criteria can also be used as a tool that provides best practice benchmarks – a blueprint for existing
and developing ecotourism product and a mechanism to ensure continual improvement” (Crabtree, O’Reilly & Worboys, 2000).

While the details may vary, the definitions of ecotourism contain the following concepts. Ecotourism is a part of larger tourism industry, and is a submarket of nature tourism. The main distinguishing characteristics of ecotourism, from “adventure”, “cultural”, “nature” and other types of tourism are the emphasis on its ethical and behavioral norms, values and principles, as well as the focus on natural environment, ecological sustainability, education, and well being of the local community. Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas, which involves interpretation and education of the natural environment, and is aimed to promote conservation, and provide benefits to the local community.

2.6 Ecotourism Criteria

Ecotourism has expanded over the last decades, and certain principles and criteria have been evolved for ecotourism evaluation. According to International Ecotourism Society responsible characteristics of ecotourism include:

- Minimizing the negative impacts on nature and culture that can damage a destination.
- Informing the traveler of local species and educating them on the importance of conservation.
- Stressing the importance of responsible business that works in cooperation with local people to meet local needs and deliver conservation benefits.
- Directing revenues to the conservation and management of natural and protected areas.
• Emphasizing the use of environmental and social-base studies, in conjunction with long term monitoring programs, to assess and minimize impacts.

• Maximizing economic benefits of the local business and communities, particularly people living in and adjacent to natural and protected areas.

• Supporting the economic empowerment of communities through training and hiring local people.

• Ensuring that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits of acceptable change as determined by researchers in cooperation with local residents.

• Relying on infrastructure that has been developed in harmony with the environment: minimizing use of fossil fuels, conserving local plant and wildlife and blending with the natural and cultural environment.

Erlet Cater, the co-editor of “People and Planet” (2001), stated that three criteria for ecotourism exist: First of all, ecotourism must be ecologically sound, requiring a two-way link between itself and environmental conservation. The second criterion is that ecotourism must be responsible, paying regard to local needs and improving welfare. The last criterion is that it is important to take into consideration not only the interests of tourism enterprises and organizations, but also visitor satisfaction and the needs of tourists (Cater, 2001). Erlet Cater also noted that “if ecotourism embodies these essential principles, symbiotic relationships between the varying interests should follow, with environmental protection resulting both from and in enhanced standards of living for local populations, continued profits for tourism industry, sustained visitor attraction, and revenue for conservation” (Cater, 2001).
The Institute for Ecological Tourism identifies the following eight characteristics of ecotourism (Institute for Ecological Tourism, 2004):

1. It promotes positive environmental ethics.
2. It does not degrade the natural resources.
3. It concentrates on intrinsic rather than extrinsic values-facilities and services do not distract from the natural attraction.
4. It is biocentric (nature centered) – ecotourists enter the environment accepting it on its terms, not expecting it to change for their convenience.
5. It must benefit the wildlife and environment.
6. It is a first-hand experience with the natural environment.
7. It has an “expectation of gratification”.
8. It has a high cognitive and effective experiential dimension.

According to the global journal of practical ecotourism (Planeta) “most definitions of ecotourism boils down to a special form of tourism that meets three criteria (Mader, 2004):

1. it provides for environmental conservation
2. it includes meaningful community participation
3. it is profitable and can sustain itself.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) joined forces in identifying the characteristics of ecotourism, and came up with the following criteria:

1. Ecotourism encompasses all nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.
2. It contains educational and interpretation features.

3. It is generally, but not exclusively organized for small groups by specialized and small, locally owned businesses. Foreign operators of varying sizes also organize, operate and/or market ecotourism tours, generally for small groups.

4. It minimizes negative impact upon the natural and socio-cultural environment.

5. It supports the protection of natural areas by (A brochure prepared by UNEP and WTO for the International Year of Ecotourism 2002):
   - Generating economic benefits for host communities, organizations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes
   - Providing alternative employment and income opportunities.
   - Increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists.

The Australian certification scheme (NEAP) suggests the following ecotourism criteria (Honey, 2003):

   - Ecotourism focuses on directly experiencing the nature, and provides an opportunity to experience nature in ways that lead to greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment.
   - It provides best practice for environmentally sustainable tourism.
   - Ecotourism positively contributes to the conservation of the natural areas.
   - Provides benefits to the community.
   - It is sensitive to different cultures.
   - It meets customer expectations.
   - It is marketed accurately and leads to realistic expectations.
Most of the criteria suggested by different organizations and researchers have many similarities. They all emphasize that ecotourism should have minimum affect on the nature, should provide economic benefits to the community and should educate the visitors. Martha Honey (1999), in her book “Ecotourism and Sustainable Development” discusses seven criteria for ecotourism. She built her criteria on Ecotourism Society’s definition of ecotourism, and also included the aspects of human rights and democracy. “Building on what has been learned and the ways in which ecotourism has developed, it is possible to expand The Ecotourism Society’s bare-bones definition” (Honey, 1999). Since the publication of her book “Ecotourism and Sustainable Development” Martha Honey’s definition of ecotourism is quickly becoming a standard. Many studies of ecotourism including several University programs now use this as criteria for ecotourism (Untamed Path, 2003).

According Martha Honey, “Real ecotourism has the following seven characteristics” (Honey, 1999):

1. Involves travel to natural destinations. These areas are under the environmental protection, at the national, international, or private level.

2. Minimize Impact. While tourism causes damage, ecotourism tends to minimize the damage caused by tourism infrastructure, by using renewable sources of energy, recycling, and environmentally sensitive architectural design.

3. Builds environmental awareness. Ecotourism educates both the tourists and the local community. The tourists should be provided with reading materials, before going on the tour, about the country, environment and local people. This information will prepare the tourists as The Ecotourism Societies guidelines state “to learn about the
places and peoples visited” and “to minimize their negative impacts while visiting sensitive environments and cultures”. Ecotourism projects should also concentrate on the education of the local community.

4. Provides direct financial benefits for conservation. Ecotourism enables to raise funds for education and research, environmental protection through a variety of mechanisms.

5. Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people: The local community must be involved and grasp benefits from ecotourism projects. The tours, restaurants, lodging should be run or in partnership with the members of the local community. This is the part that the foreign partners, usually leave out or follow partially.

6. Respects local culture. Ecotourism strives to be culturally respectful and have minimum harm on the environment and local community. It is very important to learn about the customs and traditions, the dress codes and other norms, before taking the tours.

7. Supports human rights and democratic movements: Mass tourism typically pays scant attention to the political system of the host country or struggles within it, unless civil unrest spills over into attacks on tourists. Ecotourism demands a more holistic approach to travel, one in which participants strive to respect, learn about, and benefit both the environment and local community. Showing cultural sensitivity to local communities cannot be separated from understanding their political circumstances. “Ecotourists therefore need to be sensitive to the host country’s political and social climate and need to consider the merits of international boycotts called for by those supporting democratic reforms, majority rule, and human rights”.

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2.7 Previous Studies in Ecotourism Evaluation

There are various methods that can be used to evaluate ecotourism operations in a certain country.

In 1993, The Ecotourism Society (TES) formulated and published “Ecotourism Guidelines for Nature Tour Operations”. The guidelines were based on five separate surveys and focus group discussions, and emphasized what state of the art ecotourism should be in the 1990s. The Recreation, Travel & Tourism Institute (RTTI) at Clemson University, USA, was contracted to design a method which could be used to measure compliance behavior of nature tour operators with TES’s guidelines (Wood, Norman, Frauman & Toepper, 1999). The site chosen for this study was Ecuador. A questioner was designed, which included the guidelines formulated by TES (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Ecotourism Guidelines for Nature Tour Operators**

- Prepare travelers to minimize their negative impact, while visiting sensitive environments and cultures before departure.
- Prepare travelers with each encounter with local cultures and native animals and plants.
- Minimize visitor impacts on the environment and local cultures by offering literature, briefings, leading by example.
- Use adequate leaderships, and remain small enough to ensure minimum group impact on destinations.
- Ensure that managers, staff and contract employees know and participate in all aspects of company policy to prevent negative impacts.
- Give managers, staff and contract employees access to programs that will upgrade their ability to communicate with and manage clients in sensitive natural and cultural settings.

- Be a contributor to the conservation of the regions visited.

- Provide competitive, local employment in all aspects of business.

- Offer site-sensitive accommodations.

The tour operators were required by the researchers to administer the questioners to the visitors in the beginning of the tour. The visitors were asked to evaluate the ecotourism product of Ecuador (Wood, Norman, Frauman & Toepper, 1999). The questioner was designed in such a manner, that travelers could complete it within approximately 10 minutes. It consisted of the following sections: Pre-Departure Information; Visitor Information and Education Provided During the Trip; Tour Operator Contributions to Conservation and Local Development Programs; Tour Operator Impact Management Program; Evaluation of Local Accommodations and Socio-Demographic Information about Ecotourists (Wood, Norman, Frauman & Toepper, 1999).

The evaluation of the survey revealed that nature tour operators appear to be practicing and generally following TES guidelines. However, the main areas of concern were the lack of reading materials regarding the proper behavior in the given area, and ways to minimize cultural impact. The results showed that the tour operators contributed a little to the local conservation projects, and that there was "a fair" amount of contact between the local community and tourists (Wood, Norman, Frauman & Toepper, 1999).

Lee and Snepenger (1992) conducted a study aimed to evaluate ecotourism in Tortuguero, Costa Rica. The researchers proposed that ecotourism can be evaluated, by
comparing ecotourism development with an ideal ecotourism strategy. Their ideal ecotourism strategy was viewed as sustainable development strategy, where the natural area, the visitors and the local community all benefit from ecotourism activities. They described the positive and negative elements of ecotourism activity to an ideal scenario, and used this criterion to evaluate ecotourism in Tortuguero.

In 1993, Wallace and Pierce conducted a study in order to evaluate the registered ecotourism lodges in Brazilian state of Amazonas. A set of six principles were chosen as the basis for evaluation. The researchers used site-specific indicators for each criterion in order to analyze surveys and interviews. Site-specific indicators such as architectural style/materials waste disposal, environmental impact, sensitivity of activities, group size and mode of transportation, attitudes of local people, guide training, opportunities to contribute, benefits to locals and many others were selected by researchers from a standardized list of indicators accompanying each principle. The study was based on the following ecotourism principles:

1. Ecotourism entails a type of use minimizes negative impact.
2. Ecotourism increases awareness and understanding of areas natural and cultural systems and the issues that affect them.
3. Ecotourism contributes to the conservation and management of legally protected and other natural areas.
4. Ecotourism maximizes participation of local people in the decision making process.
5. Ecotourism directs economic and other benefits to local people.
6. Ecotourism provides special opportunities for local people or nature tourism employees to also utilize the natural areas.

To do this study in Brazil, researchers used a hybrid case study approach with both qualitative and quantitative analysis. In the study, three different methods were used to gather the data. The methods used included (Wallace & Pierce, 1996):

- A survey with visitors, operators and employees, and local people. The sampling strategy was purposeful. Questioners were developed, peer reviewed, and piloted with staff from the sponsoring agencies.
- Interviews were conducted with visitors, operators and employees, and local people. The interviews were conducted in all eight registered "jungle lodges" and local communities. All responses were recorded by three researchers trained in interview techniques.
- Observations, were conducted within in all eight registered "jungle lodges" and local communities. The observations were systematically recorded and documented.

The evaluation of the results was done using site-specific indicators for Amazonas. These indicators were scaled using a four-point scaling system: satisfactory, mostly satisfactory, partially satisfactory and unsatisfactory. A matrix and a scoring system summarized the performance of the Ecolodges in Amazonas. The researchers came to the conclusion that the registered ecotourism loges in Amazonas bring many benefits to the local community: loges provide employment, improve access, stimulate new services (health utilities, etc.), and make valued but limited local purchases. The researchers also found that lodges do not satisfy some of the ecotourism criteria. They do not contribute to conservation education, resource protection, or the involvement and empowerment of local people.
Another study was conducted by Lincago and Wallace, and was aimed to evaluate the ecotour operations in Cuyabeno, Ecuador. The study included all visitors arriving at the Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve between November 1994 and January 1995, as well as tour operators, managers and local people (Lincago & Wallace, 1995). The following methodology was used for data collection in the study:

- Visitors were asked at the end of their tour to complete a survey. The questioners were designed to include different indicators for ecotourism principles.
- Focus groups were conducted in November of 1994. At least one person representing each local family was present.
- Interviews were conducted with the managers of the four ecotour operations in Cuyabeno.
- Researchers conducted observations for one week, in order to record behavior which was not accessible using other methods.

A study was conducted in 1992, by Pearce and Botrill (1995) in order to evaluate twenty-two nature based tourism ventures in British Columbia. The researchers described “key elements” which were the basis for evaluation. The researchers used interviews with tour operators, natural resource managers and local people for data collection.

In 1999 a study was conducted in West Virginia University, in order to identify sustainability criteria and indicators for evaluating ecotourism development in Taman Negara National Park (TNNP), Malaysia. Overall, the methodology involved the identification, selection, and evaluation of criteria and indicators of ecotourism sustainability. The Delphi method and public survey were used to solicit opinions of Malaysian experts and public groups regarding the criteria and indicators of ecotourism for TNNP. During the study 15
criteria and 58 indicators of sustainable ecotourism development for TNNP were identified. The following groups participated in the public survey: the local community, tourists, and the tour guides (Abidin, Zaaba Zainol, 1999).

In order to evaluate ecotourism operations in Sikkim, India researchers from Indian Institute of Forest management (2004), used criteria and indicators as tools for measuring the status of management of sustainable development. The following criteria and indicators were used by the researchers for the evaluation of ecotourism operations in India:

1. Maintenance of healthy ecosystem. The following indicators were assigned to this criterion: increased number of wildlife, occurrence of weeds in the area, availability of water and etc.

2. Conservation of cultural heritage. The following indicators were assigned to this criterion: popularity of local food and traditions, involvement of local community, number of ethnic festivals etc.

3. Enabling environment for ecotourism promotion. The indicators included: availability of ecotourism policy, involvement of local people in the decision making process, availability of tourism infrastructure, local funds for conservation, number of tourism and conservation projects and etc.

4. Livelihood generation and poverty alleviation. The indicators assigned to this criterion included: number of ecotourism providers, amount of income from ecotourism, equity benefit sharing, number of people brought above poverty line due to ecotourism etc.
5. Tourist satisfaction. The following indicators were assigned to this criterion: number of tourists per year, tourist safety, feedback from tourists, quality of products and etc.

6. Carrying capacity. The indicators included: Compliance of carrying capacity norms by the tour operators, availability of carrying capacity norms developed by the local community and etc.

7. People participation and awareness generation. The following indicators were assigned to this criterion by the researchers: number of home stays availability, number of people involved, number of workshops and etc.

The researchers used a mixed methods approach, comprised of questioner surveys and group discussions with different stakeholders of ecotourism in the study area. The surveys were conducted with tour guides, hotel and lodge operators, as well as with foreign and Indian tourists. The criteria were chosen based on the characteristics of the study area. The development of the criteria was followed by the development of indicators for each criterion. The results of the study showed that ecotourism brought benefits to the area such as employment opportunities, and enhancement of many services (such as police services and health services). But the researches mentioned that ecotourism had also a negative impact on the study area. The study showed that due to economic motive and less involvement of local community in the process of ecotourism, the area was leading towards environmental degradation and erosion of cultural values and was further prone to serious threat of migration of the local community. The growing numbers of tourists cause negative environmental impact on the area: such as damage to vegetation on tracking corridor, pollution of the sewage system, etc. (Bhattacharya & Kumari, 2004).
The following conclusions can be made from the literature review. Ecotourism has emerged as a development tool, which aims to protect the natural environment and cultural diversity, by attracting the ecotourists and generating benefits for the local community without harming the nature. However ecotourism can fail to fulfill its benefits. The negative impact of ecotourism was a distinct focus in the literature review. Very often the tour companies use ecotourism to attract the visitors, but in the reality the tours do not have anything in common with ecotourism. In order to minimize the negative impact of ecotourism, it has been suggested to create principles, guidelines and criteria, upon which ecotourism can be evaluated. Many studies have been conducted in order to evaluate ecotourism product in a given country. It was evident from the literature review that ecotour operations only partially satisfied ecotourism criteria in the study areas. Ecotourism criteria, that were mostly met in the studies were:

- Ecotourism minimizes negative impact on the environment and culture.
- Ecotourism directs benefits to local people.

In the study conducted by Wallace and Pierce (1993), those ecotourism criteria were mostly met in Brazilian Amazonas, due to indicators such as group size, waste disposal, architectural style/materials, attitudes of local people, purchase of local products and increase in local employment (Wallace & Pierce, 1996). The studies showed that there was an increase in local employment, due to ecotourism development in the area. The local community also received income from selling locally made products, crafts and souvenirs. The areas of concern were criteria such as contribution to conservation and management of the protected areas, participation and empowerment of local people, awareness and understanding of the area’s cultural and natural sensitivity. The studies in Brazilian
Amazonas (1993) and Ecuador (1999) showed that, these criteria weren’t met because of indicators such as guide training, opportunities to contribute, information about protected areas, pre-departure information and reading materials about travel ethics, and ways to minimize negative impact on the sensitive areas. For example in Brazilian Amazonas, information about protected areas was not given to the visitors prior arrival to the area. This can deter tourists from visiting these territories, and will bring no benefits to the protected areas (Wallace & Pierce, 1996). In Ecuador, tour operators did not provide enough information about travel ethics, and behavioral in the sensitive areas (Wood, Norman, Frauman & Toepper, 1999). The study in Sikkim, India (2004), showed that due to poor management and planning of ecotourism, it had negative impact on the area. Due to absence of community participation in the decision making process, and economic motive of ecotourism (tour companies only use ecotourism to attract visitors), the area was leading towards environmental degradation and erosion of cultural values (Bhattcharya & Kumari, 2004).

Overall, the researchers came to the conclusion that non of the study areas met all the assigned criteria. Criteria that were mostly satisfactory in the study areas were: ecotourism involves travel to natural areas; ecotourism provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people. These criteria were mostly met in the study areas due to indicators such as attitudes of the local people towards ecotourists; the variety of crafts and goods soled locally, the presence of protected areas, the location for the ecotours, presence of unique species and rich flora and fauna in the area. The following criteria were only partially met in the study areas: ecotourism minimizes the negative impacts on nature and local culture; ecotourism educates travelers on local culture, local species and the importance of conservation;
Ecotourism directs revenues to the conservation and management of natural and protected areas. The reason that these criteria were only partially satisfying in the study areas can be explained by the assigned indicators. Indicators such as information about protected areas and cultural heritage, trips to protected areas, type and amount of training given to the guides; type of information given to the visitors before and after the visit to the natural area did not exist in the study areas or needed improvement, while indicators regarding group size attitudes of local people towards visitors, mode of transportation and interaction between the locals and tourists were mostly met in the study areas.

The majority of the researchers used mixed methods approach for the study. Unstructured interviews and questioner surveys were used by the researchers for data collection. Certain criteria and indicators were chosen that were relevant to the location. The combination of criteria used in one country, might not be relevant in other locations, based on the cultural, local and many other differences. Based on the analysis of previous studies in ecotourism development, similar methodology will be used for ecotourism evaluation in Armenia.
Chapter 3. Methodology

Methods for conducting the evaluation of ecotourism in Armenia will be described in this chapter. The objective of the chapter is to discuss in detail the following segments of the performed study:

- Survey Design
- Data Collection Methods
- Data Analysis

3.1 Survey Design

In order to evaluate ecotourism operations in Armenia a survey was conducted with Armenian tour guides. Tour guides were chosen as the sample because they are the ones who conduct ecotours in Armenia, and their answers are important for evaluating ecotourism criteria. The criteria used in this study, include indicators that are connected with tour guides, such as information about their training, their education, information provided by them during and after the trips and many others. Only a survey with the tour guides could be used to evaluate those indicators. Due to the remoteness of the study, the visitors could not be interviewed, otherwise ecotourists could have been a sample too. The survey was constructed based on the literature review. The questions intended to find out socio-demographic information about the tour guides, were designed based on the study conducted by Wood, Norman, Frauman & Toepper (1999) in Ecuador. Questions aimed to evaluate criteria regarding education of the visitors, contribution to the conservation projects, minimizing impact on the environment and local people, were developed based on the survey sample of the study conducted by Wallace and Pierce (1993) in Brazilian Amazonas.
Questions 1 and 2 of the survey were designed to find out information about the tours offered by the Armenian tour agencies, and percentage of ecotours offered by those agencies.

**Question 1:** What percentage of your business is comprised of ecotourism based on the following definition? “Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” (The International ecotourism Society)

**Question 2:** What percentage of your answer above, is comprised of the following tours (please indicated the % in front of the options)?

- a) Bird watching
- b) Botanical tours
- c) Nature photography
- d) Camping
- e) Hiking/walking
- f) Mountaineering
- g) Historic and cultural tours
- h) Horseback riding
- i) Other (specify)

Total 100%

The basis for ecotourism evaluation in Armenia in the survey, were ecotourism criteria suggested by international ecotourism organizations and researchers. Based on each ecotourism criterion a set of site-specific indicators were developed to be included in the questioner. Site-specific indicators included environmental impact, sensitivity of activities, group size attitudes of local people, guide training, opportunities to contribute, benefits to locals and location of ecotours.

More specifically, survey questions 3 and 4 were designed to evaluate the following criterion: Ecotourism involves travel to natural areas.
Question 3: Do you take your tour members to the protected areas in Armenia?

Question 4: Do the visitors or your tour agency pay any fees to the protected areas in order to visit them?

These survey questions were designed to find out whether ecotours in Armenia take place in natural settings, since for the tour activity to be considered ecotourism, it has to take place in a natural destination. "These destinations are often remote areas, and are usually under some kind of environmental protection at the national, international, or private level" (Honey, 1999). The indicators assigned to this criterion include: the presence of protected areas, the location for the ecotours, presence of unique species and rich flora and fauna in the area.

Survey questions 5-10 and question 17, were developed to evaluate the following criterion: Ecotourism minimizes the negative impacts on nature and local culture.

Question 5: Before arrival to Armenia what kind of information are the visitors provided with?

Question 6: As a tour guide, what kind of education or training have you received to prepare you for conducting tours?

Question 7: What was the main focus of the training/education that you received?

Question 8: What percentage of your training was related to the environment?

Question 9: What percentage of your answer in Question 8 relates to the training in the following areas (please indicate the % in front of the choices)?

a) Lectures on how to interpret the ecological environment of Armenia.

b) Lectures on how to minimize the environmental impact.

c) Lectures on how to minimize the cultural impact.
d) Lectures on how to overcome the cultural barriers between tourists and locals.

e) Lectures about the importance of conservation.

f) Other (specify)

**Question 10:** What is the average visitor group size taken on a tour (for example on a botanical tour, bird watching tour etc) (circle one)?

- a) 1-5 people
- b) 5-10 people
- c) 10-20 people
- d) 20 and more

**Question 17:** What is the attitude of local residents towards the visitor groups?

- a) Negative
- b) Indifferent
- c) Positive
- d) Other

These questions were developed to uncover if Armenian tour companies make sure, that their ecotours minimize negative impact on the local community and natural areas. These questions were aimed to find out if Armenian tour guides receive proper training, if they give out literature to the visitors regarding ethical behavior in the visited areas, or whether the visiting group is small enough not to harm the environment. One of the distinguishing characteristics of ecotourism from other types of tourism is that it minimizes the impacts on wildlife, soil, vegetation, water, air quality, and emphasizes respect for local traditions and culture. “Minimization of impact also requires that the numbers and mode of behavior of tourists be regulated to ensure limited damage to the ecosystem” (Honey, 1999). Efforts are
made by ecotourism organizations to be less consumptive, travel lighter, produce less waste and be conscious of one's effect on the natural area and on the lives of local people (Wallace, 1996). The following indicators have been assigned to this criterion: group size; mode of transportation; type and amount of training given to the guides; type of information given to the visitors before and after the visit to the natural area; attitudes of local people towards the tourists; measures of ecotourism impact on the natural area.

In order to evaluate the following criterion- \textit{Ecotourism educates travelers on local culture, local species and the importance of conservation}, survey questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 16 and questions 19, 20, 21 were developed.

**Question 11:** During the tours, are any interpretive activities conducted with the tour members?

**Question 12:** What is the main focus of the interpretive activities?

**Question 13:** What percentage of the interpretive activities is related to the environment and culture?

**Question 14:** What percentage of your answer in Question 13 relates to the interpretive activities in the following areas:

a) The culture and traditions of the local community

b) Natural environment and species

c) Appropriate behavior in the given area

d) The importance of local conservation

e) Other
Question 16: Is there an interaction between the residents of the visited area and the tour members (example: participation in the local festivals, discussions with the local residents, exposure to the conditions in which the local residents live etc)?

Question 19: During the tours, are the tour members encouraged to contribute to the local initiatives (for example: donations to the schools, cultural monuments etc)?

Question 20: What percentage of the donations/contributions relate to the ecological initiatives?

Question 21: What percentage of your answer in Question 21 relates to the following areas:

a. The visitors are encouraged to support local ecological initiatives in Armenia.

b. The visitors are provided by information on the value and need for conservation.

c. The visitors are informed about the conservation projects in Armenia.

d. The visitors are provided with information about the protected areas in Armenia.

These questions were designed to evaluate whether Armenian tour agents educate tourists during the tours about local culture and traditions, natural environment and species, as well as the importance of conservation projects in the given areas. These questions were developed to find out if Armenian tour guides encourage interaction between the locals and tourists, if they encourage contributions to the local development programs, and inform the visitors about the need and value of conservation in Armenia. Learning about the nature, as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas is the main motivation of the ecotourists (UNEP&WTO). The visitors should experience the unique ecosystems, as well as the interaction with local residents. The visitors should also learn about the local species, the local traditions as well as conservation issues in the host country. Ecotourism can also play a vital role in raising awareness of the problems that the local community is facing. For
example ecotourism drew attention to the endangered Everglades ecosystem in Florida, motivated the preservation of Everglade National Park, and funded a program which was aimed to save the endangered Bahama parrot (Lindsay, 2003). This criterion is one of the bases of ecotourism concept. The main goal of ecotourism is to educate the visitors about the local area, and the importance of the conservation. If this indicator is not in place, the tourism activity is not ecotourism. This explains why this criterion has been chosen to be included in ecotourism evaluation in Armenia. The indicators chosen for this criterion include: degree of interaction between the local residents and visitors; support/donations for conservation projects; educational and interpretive experiences for visitors; availability of reading materials about the country, environment as well as local people.

Survey questions 3, 4, 22, and 23 were designed to evaluate the following criterion:

*Ecotourism directs revenues to the conservation and management of natural and protected areas.*

**Question 3:** Do you take your tour members to the protected areas in Armenia?

**Question 4:** Do the visitors or your tour agency pay any fees to the protected areas in order to visit them?

**Question 22:** Does your tour agency contribute to conservation and local development programs?

**Question 23:** What percentage of the local initiatives is related to the environment (for example, employ scientists, naturalist, or conserve the protected areas)?

These survey questions were developed to evaluate indicators such as existence of the entrance fees to the protected areas, contributions of the tour agencies to the natural areas local development projects. Ecotourism helps raise funds for environmental protection,
through various mechanisms, including park entrance fees, tour companies, airlines, and voluntary contributions (Honey, 1999). Armenia has a developed system of protected territories: 4 natural preserves, 22 State reservations, 2 National Parks that occupy 10% of its total territory. Currently 2 additional National Parks are in the process of establishment. This criterion is very important in the evaluation of ecotourism in Armenia, because it indicates if the benefits from ecotourism are directed to the conservation of the earlier mentioned protected territories. The indicators assigned to this criterion include: collaboration between the tour guides and protected area managers; payment of established entrance fees and donations; encouragement of interaction between visitors and protected area personnel, information about protected areas and cultural heritage, trips to protected areas.

Survey questions 15, 17 and 18, were aimed to evaluate the following criterion:

*Ecotourism provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people.*

**Question 15:** What role (for example service: transportation, accommodation, tour guides etc) do the local residents have in your tour operations?

**Question 17:** What is the attitude of local residents towards the visitor groups?

   a) Negative  
   b) Indifferent  
   c) Positive  
   d) Other

**Question 18:** Do the tour members purchase locally made goods/products?

These survey questions were developed to find out if ecotourism operations in Armenia bring any benefits to the local community. "The local community must be involved with and receive income and other tangible benefits (roads, health clinics etc.) from the conservation area and its tourist facilities" (Honey, 1999). Lodges, guide services, restaurants
and other services should be run or in partnership with local residents. The local community should also be encouraged to participate in the decision making process. This criterion is very important, especially for countries like Armenia, which view ecotourism as a tool for rural development, and it must help to shift the economic benefits to the local community. The following indicators have been chosen for this criterion: the number of local tour guides; attitude of the local people have towards ecotourists; the variety of crafts and goods produced locally, presence of community development projects.

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection method that was employed through the study was a questioner survey, and secondary data (documents, studies). The survey questions were translated into Armenian language. The questions were translated by a professional translator, and then was sent to be reviewed by 3 other translators. All the comments and suggestions were taken into consideration, and the final Armenian version of the survey was created. The survey included the following types of structure response formats:

- Open-ended questions
- Multiple choice questions
- Yes/No questions

The survey was conducted with tour guides of tour agencies in Armenia. The study population was Armenian tour guides, working in tour agencies. The contact information of the tour agencies was obtained from Armenian Information Center, where every tour agency and their tours, address, telephone number and e-mail address are listed. The procedure of data collection started with an introduction letter, which was electronically mailed prior to
the survey being conducted. Before sending the introduction letter, all tour agencies (110 in Armenia) were contacted via e-mail and asked if they would participate in the survey; 60 tour agencies agreed to fill out the survey. The introduction letter introduced the study, the researcher, the purpose of the study, and words of appreciation from the researcher. Within 3 days the questioners accompanied with a cover letter were electronically mailed to the participants. The questioner consisted of 25 questions. Besides questions about ecotourism, the questioner also included questions regarding age, sex, and education, in order to find out socio-demographic information about the respondents. The survey was sent to the tour guides in March, and they were given 20 days to complete the survey. One tour guide from each tour agency was asked to complete the survey. The response rate was low 3.33 %, only 2 surveys came back.

The second attempt was made in April; the tour agencies were contacted via e-mail and asked to fill out the survey. They were given a week to complete the survey. The response rate for this time was 33 %, 19 questioners were filled out and sent back. The final attempt was made, in order to collect as many questioners as possible. The survey together with a cover letter was electronically sent the tour agencies. The tour guides were given a week to send their responses. Two more questioners were completed during that week. Overall, out of 60 tour guides, 23 guides filled out the survey, which gave a response rate of 38.3 %.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis procedure started when all the questioners were collected. Since the survey included many open ended questions, it required a qualitative data analysis. Content
analysis was utilized to categorize all responses for open ended questions. The qualitative data was categorized based on each question and individual answer. The questions were analyzed, and the themes and answers that reoccurred in the text were used as the categories and then broken into sub categories. Based on the text analysis, categories such as pre-departure information, guide-training, tourism impact on Armenia, contribution of the tour agencies to local initiatives and others were created. For example, for question five (*Before arrival to Armenia what kind of information are the visitors provided with?*) the category pre-departure information included sub categories such as, information about local people, country natural areas, clothing and equipment, travel ethics, accommodations and infrastructure. Answers that did not match any category, and were unique were also used to explain different opinions. An Excel spreadsheet was created and the qualitative data was inputted. The frequencies were counted based on each category and theme, further calculations, such as percentages were made based on the frequency count.
Chapter 4. Results and Findings

The outcome of the study is discussed in this chapter. The reporting of the results begins with descriptive information about the surveyed population, and is followed by an analysis of the results using the list of criteria to evaluate ecotourism in Armenia.

4.1 Socio-Demographic Information

In an effort to develop a profile of the Armenian tour-guides a series of questions were developed of the socio-demographic characteristics of the survey respondents, as well as the activities of the tour agencies. It can be seen from the table that 57% of the respondents were in the 18-29 age group, and had a median age of 28. 52% of the respondents were men, all of had had at least college degree (See Table 4.1). Nearly 48% of the respondents had a graduate degree. The most common degree was in history and foreign languages. Respondents also indicated that had degrees in architecture, geology and culture.
Table 4.1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree in Tourism</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Study</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 and above</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience as a tour guide:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 1 year</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 years and more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years in this tour agency:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 1 year</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 years and more</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nearly 70% of the respondents indicated that they attended classes for tour guides and received tour guide license, while 13% of the respondents indicated that received no training (did not attend classes, lectures or seminars), instead they traveled around Armenia, read about history, nature, ecology and culture. The respondents also mentioned that they received training abroad in Japan, Greece, UK, USA, Russia, as well as attended classes for tours guides in Armenian organized by various international organizations, such as Eurasia Foundation, World Bank, and USAID.

Nearly 39% of the respondents have been working as a tour guide for 3-5 years, and only 9% of the respondents had more than 7 year experience. Two tour guides noted that have been working as a tour guide since the Soviet Union and had an experience of 20 years (See Table 4.1). Only two people have been working with the same tour agency for more that 7 years. This can be explained by the fact that many of the tour agencies are new and have been in tourism business for about 5 years. There are only a few agencies in Armenia that have been conducting tour operations since mid 1990s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country was in the transition from planned to market economy. The resources were allocated to other sectors of economy, and tourism sector was secondary. Tourism, is relatively new sector, therefore the tour agencies and tour guides have been in this business for a shorter period of time.

The tour guides were also asked to describe the activities of their tour agency, indicate the percentage of their business comprised of ecotourism, as well as list tours offered by their tour agency. The tour guides were asked to indicate what percentage of their business was comprised of ecotourism, based on the definition of the International Ecotourism Society "ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the
environment and improves the welfare of local people”. 13 % of the respondents indicated that their business is comprised very little of ecotours, only up to 5%, while 26% indicated that 15 %-20% of their business was comprised of ecotourism (Table 4.2). Only 2 people noted that 50% of their business was comprised of ecotourism.

It is important to mention that the tour guides might have indicated that bigger percentage of their tours was comprised of ecotourism, if they weren’t given the definition upon which real ecotourism was determined. This can be explained by the fact that ecotourism does not have a unified definition, and ecotourism is often referred to as “responsible”, “sustainable”, “conservation” or “low-impact” tourism and is often listed by the travel industry in the category of nature and adventure tourism (Hundloe, 2002). Tour agencies tend to define ecotourism they way, it is more convenient for them since they are interested in attracting many tourists. If the definition wasn’t given, a tour agency that offered only adventure or nature tours could have determined them as ecotours, and indicated that 100% of their business was comprised of ecotourism. The definition gives the exact characteristics of real ecotourism, which the study was aimed to evaluate in Armenia.

In the survey, the tour guides also indicated that tours such as bird watching, botanical tours, camping, hiking, mountaineering, nature photography, are currently organized in Armenian by their tour agencies.
Table 4.2: Activities of the tour agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of ecotourism</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0% to 5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% to 10%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% to 15%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15% to 20%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20% to 25%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25% to 30%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30% and more</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fifteen out of 23 people indicated that more than 50% of the tours organized by their tour agencies were historic and cultural tours (Figure 4.1). The tour guides included also geological, archeological, hunting, fishing, biking and scenic tours as part of their business. Nature tours such as nature photography, bird watching and botanical tours have smaller percentage in the number of tours organized by given tour agencies. Figure 4.2 shows that the majority of the ecotours 61% (14 people indicated) do not include bird watching tours, and only 6 tour guides indicated that 1-5% of their ecotours included bird watching tours. The bird watching tours in Armenian are guided by birding experts of the Yerevan State University, and provide an opportunity to spot various unique birds such as Caucasian Black Grouse, Armenian Gull, Radde’s Accentor, Persian Wheatear and Semi-collared Flycatcher,
Ferruginous and White-headed Ducks, Grey-necked Bunting, Pale Rock Sparrow and many others.

Figure 4.1: Cultural Tours

Figure 4.2: Bird Watching Tours
The results for botanical tours are almost the same as the bird watching tours: 65% of the ecotours do not include botanical tours (15 tour guides indicated) (Figure 4.4), though Armenia has very rich flora and fauna. It seems that nature photography is more popular, 6 people mentioned that 5-10% of their ecotours are comprised of nature photography (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3: Nature Photography**

![Nature Photography Chart](image)

**Figure 4.4: Botanical Tours**

![Botanical Tours Chart](image)
Those who desire to know more about Armenia's flora and vegetation structure may participate in the botanical tours to many sites and areas covered with different plant communities; semi-deserts, steppes, sub alpine and alpine meadows, broadleaf deciduous forests, petrophytous vegetation and aquatic ecosystems. The tours are supervised by staff of the Institute of Botany, National Academy of Sciences and include the gathering materials for morphological and genetic studies (Armenian Ecotourism Association, 2005). The tour guides mentioned the following botanical tours organized in Armenia: tours, including the visits to ranges which are prominent in botanic and geographic terms; scientific tours, including detailed research; special tours, including visits to rare and endangered plants formations and habitats which are of particular interest to the scientists.

**Figure 4.5: Camping**

Camping and hiking form a bigger percentage in the ecotours, 14 people responded that 10-20% ecotours organized by their tour agency are comprised of hiking, 7 people indicated that 10-20% of their ecotours are comprised of camping, and 5 people indicated that 10-20% of their tours are comprised of mountaineering (Figure 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7). The
mountains, hills and valleys of Armenia provide opportunities for hiking tours. The following hiking routes were mentioned by the respondents: Aragats, Amberd, Tsakhkadzor, Ashtarak, Azat River, Geghard and many others. All of these trails offer picturesque views, as well as include various historic, archeological, geological cultural sites and protected areas. There are many tour agencies in Armenia which organize hiking tours (Armenia Information, 2005).

Figure 4.6: Hiking

Figure 4.7: Mountaineering
The respondents also mentioned that many tour companies offer biking tours. The mountain paths, countryside and other roads, situated far from highways are being used for biking tours. Biking tours which are rich in cultural programs are also offered by Armenian tour agencies. During the tours tourists can get basic information about the history and culture of Armenia, visit historical and other monuments. The overnights can in tents since some of companies use well equipped camps that are situated in countryside (Armenia Information, 2005).

Armenian tour companies also offer opportunities for those who enjoy horseback riding, ranging from riding clubs to journeys on horseback through some of Armenia's most colorful scenery. Horseback riding offers travelers an opportunity to travel in the countryside viewing flora and fauna, as well as archaeological sites and monuments. During Armenia's spring season, tour agencies offer horseback riding tours in Mount Aragats, Armenia's tallest mountain, and several other destinations.

Figure 4.8: Horseback Riding
Many respondents mentioned Ayrudzi Riding Club, as one of the best riding clubs in Armenia. The club also organizes 7 day-long riding trips for small groups, as well as provides riding lessons, riding equipment and many other things (Armenian Information, 2005). Many of the surveyed tour guides (10 people) responded, that their ecotours did not include horseback riding, while 8 people noted that 10-20% of ecotours organized by their tour agency included horseback riding tours, and mentioned the contribution of Ayrudzi Riding Club to the tours (Figure 4.8).

The respondents (26%) mentioned that they also organize other tours such as hunting and fishing, geological and archeological, religious tours, as well as tours organized for youth, such as youth camps and others. The tour guides mentioned Lake Sevan, Edchmiadzin Lakes, Alagyaz Lake, and Mantash Reservoir for fishing in Armenia. Hunting has been a tradition throughout history in Armenia, and currently tour agencies offer hunting tours. Visitors can hunt a wide variety of game, particularly hare, ducks, quails and other birds (Armenia Information, 2005). Regions such as Ijevan, Meghri, Yeghegnadzor, and Lake Arpi were singled out by the respondents.

Many of the tour guides emphasized that most of their tours are mixed, for example the hiking tours also include visiting different historical and cultural sites, as well as come across various plans and species. This is based on the fact that almost all historic and cultural sites in Armenia are located in natural picturesque surroundings, and the hiking trails pass through those sites and surroundings.

The tour guides were also asked to describe what impact tourism had on Armenia, from their point of view. The majority of the tour guides (17 out of 23) said that tourism had great positive impact on Armenia (See table 4.3), they mentioned that tourism strengthened
the economy (65%) by creating new jobs (53%), currency inflow (29%), increasing retail sales revenue (47%), creating occupancy and sales taxes to the government (35%).

Table 4.3: Positive impact of tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your opinion what is the positive impact of tourism in Armenia?</th>
<th>% of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengthens economy</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates jobs</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases retail sales revenue</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps maintain natural and cultural monuments</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates occupancy and sales tax</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases currency inflow</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents also noted that tourism helps to maintain national crafts, cultural, historical monument, and natural environments (41%) in Armenia. One of the respondents said that, through tourism Armenia is becoming more recognized on the international level. Tourism is also seen as a regional development tool by the tour guides. 74% of the respondents said that do not see negative impact of tourism in Armenia. They explained that tourism has just started developing and there is no mass tourism in Armenia. 60% of the people who thought that tourism had negative impact in Armenia, singled out destruction of the natural and cultural environments (67%) as the major negative impact. The tour guides also thought that tourism causes increase in local prices, real estate prices, as well as impacts behavioral norms, values and traditions in Armenia. The respondents thought that careful and professional tourism planning will help to avoid negative impact in the future.
4.2 Analysis of ecotourism criteria

This part of the chapter, will analyze each ecotourism criteria separately, based on the answers of the Armenian tour guides.

**Criterion 1: Ecotourism involves travel to natural areas.** For the activity to be considered ecotourism it first has to take place in a natural setting, usually under some kind of environmental protection, otherwise the activity will not be ecotourism. For this purpose, the indicators included to evaluate ecotourism in Armenia were: the presence of protected areas, the location for the ecotours, presence of unique species, and rich flora and fauna in the area. In order to evaluate this criterion, the participants of the survey were asked whether they take the tourists to the protected areas of Armenia during ecotours. 52% of the respondents indicated that the tourists are taken to the protected areas in Armenia during the ecotours, and they singled out Khosrov Preserve, Sevan National Park and Dilijan State Reserve as the protected areas where the tourists are usually taken. The majority 91%, mentioned Khosrov Preserve as number one nature reserve to take the tourists (See Table 4.4). One person indicated that their tour agency takes the tourists also to the Shikahogh Reserve, which is considered the least of all touched by civilization (Armenia Information, 2005).
Table 4.4: Location of the ecotours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you take you tour members to the protected areas in Armenia?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If your answer is yes, specify the protected areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protected Area</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khosrov Preserve</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sevan National Park</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilijan State Reserve</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shikahogh Reserve</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dilijan State Reserve.** The respondents (55%) singled out Dilijan Reserve, as a protected area, where they take visitors on a tour (See Table 4.4). Dilijan State Reserve is a nature reserve in the wooded hilly region north of Armenia. The Reserve wraps around the town of Dilijan and extends along the Getik River. The reason for establishing this reserve in 1958 was to protect beech and oak, mountain and forest lakes, mineral water springs, natural and historical-architectural monuments (Armenian Ecotourism Association). The reason why tour agencies take tourists to Dilijan reserve, can be explained by the fact that this nature reserve is rich in evergreen forests, alpine meadows, natural mineral springs and beautiful landscapes. Beech and oak, pine and yew, as well as many lakes are the object of environmental protection in reserve. The State Reserve is the home to over 1000 species of plants and 107 species of birds, such as the Gushawk, Black Kite, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Honey Buzzard, and Eagle Owl. There are also a number of historical - architectural
monuments, and archeological sites on territory of the Reserve, which are in the interest of the visitors (Armenia Information, 2005).

The Khosrov Preserve. Ninety one percent of the respondents, mentioned Khosrov Preserve as number one nature reserve to take the tourists (See Table 4.4) This Preserve is situated south-east of Yerevan, at the foot of the Geghama volcanic mountain, in the basins of the Azat and Vedi rivers. For centuries the Khosrov Preserve was enjoyed as a hunting-ground for Armenian nobility. In 1958 the Khosrov forest, was officially declared a reserve. The preserve is situated 1400-2250 m above sea-level, and extends over an area of about 30,000 hectares, 9000 of which is forested. The fact that 91 % of the surveyed tour guides take tourists to Khosrov Preserve, can be explained by the fact that, this preserve includes numerous natural attractions and historical monuments: the huge "rock organs", mysterious caves, shady canyons and alpine meadows, ancient oaks and unique flowers. The reserve is also reach in flora and fauna; it includes more than 1800 species of plants, 156 of which are considered rare, endangered or disappearing. In the reserve, one can find amphibians, 7 types of fish, and over 30 varieties of reptiles such as the Levantine Viper, Montpellier snake, dotted and collared dwarf snakes, the Pleskes racerunner, and various lizards (Armenia Information, 2005). “Khosrov Preserve is the only Caucasian reserve with such diversity of climatic areas and plant types” (Armenian Ecotourism Association). The survey respondents also mentioned that tourists are taken on the botanical and animal watching tours in this preserve.

Sevan National Park. Sevan is currently the only National Park in Armenia, which might be the reason why it was singled out by 64% of the respondents as an area to take the tourists. The Park was established in 1981 to protect Lake Sevan and surrounding Areas. Sevan
National Park falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Nature Protection, and is managed as a research centre, which monitors the ecosystems, and undertakes various conservation measures (including regulation of use and tourism, and protection of historical and cultural monuments). Licensed fishing on the lake is also regulated by the Ministry of Nature Protection. Three main zones are identified in the park: reserve zone, recreation zone and zone for economic use. The reserve zone includes the watershed for the lake, as well as a number of small reserves (Armenia Information, 2005). One of the most important sites of the park is the Artanish peninsula (2243 ha), which, being very isolated, is relatively undisturbed. Around 1000 higher plant species (including 94 trees and shrubs) are found in this area, which also supports a range of endemic and rare animal species. Three main zones are identified within the Artanish peninsula, including the lakeshore habitats (planted forests containing pine, poplar, apricot-tree, and sea-buckthorn), a medium altitude zone (20-100m) where species such as juniper and rose are common, and an alpine zone (>100m) dominated by meadow habitats (Armenian Ecotourism Association).

The decline of water level in Lake Sevan had a major impact on the area; it affected aquatic, coastal swamp and marshland habitats, as well as some bird species of the park. Shikahogh Reserve is situated in distant southern region of Armenia, and is considered to be the least of all touched by civilization. The mountain chains of the reserve prevent the influx of hot air currents from the Iranian deserts while maintaining the humidity approaching from the Caspian Sea. Each mountain pass has its own unique micro-climatic region and this is the only preserve that conserves oak and hornbeam virgin forests and wide diversity of wildlife (Armenia Information, 2005). There are numerous historical monuments everywhere on the territory of the reserve - nearby the roads, at the rocky slopes, and in the deep canyon Iron
Age tombs, ancient fortresses, shrines, bridges, medieval churches and monasteries are situated (Armenian Ecotourism Association). Only 4% of the respondents mentioned Shikahogh Reserve, as a place to take tourists on a tour (See table 4.4). This can be explained by the fact that this Reserve is situated further from Yerevan, than the earlier mentioned protected areas. Besides, human activities in Shikahogh Reserve are very limited, and are strictly for scientific research only.

Indicators used to evaluate this criterion show that Armenian ecotour operations only partially meet this criterion. Indicators show, that Armenia has rich flora and fauna as well as, rich cultural heritage, and that tour agencies in Armenia take tourists to the natural and protected areas. However, indicators also show that the quality of the natural environment in Armenia, and the protected areas is not high, this can be the reason why this criterion is only partially met in Armenia.

**Criterion2: Ecotourism minimizes the negative impacts on nature and local culture.**

One of the most important characteristics that distinguish ecotourism from other types of tourism is that it minimizes the impacts on wildlife, soil, vegetation, water, air quality, and emphasizes respect for local traditions and culture. In order to evaluate ecotourism in Armenia the following indicators have been assigned to this criterion: group size; type and amount of training given to the guides; type of information given to the visitors before and after the visit to the natural area; attitudes of local people towards the tourists.

**Group size** – According to ecotourism guidelines, the groups taken on a tour should be small enough, in order to ensure minimum group impact on the destinations. Martha Honey (1998)
in her book mentioned that groups taken on an ecotour should not be bigger than 10 people, in order not to harm the environment.

Table 4.5: Group size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Size</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 and more</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey showed that the average group size taken on a tour in Armenia is not very big. 74% of the respondents said that groups taken on a tour by their tour agency do not exceed 10 people. 61% of the respondents indicated that the average group size taken on a tour was 5 to 10 people. Only two tour guides said that the average group size taken on a tour by their tour agency was more than 20 people.

Training given to the guides- In order to evaluate this indicator in Armenia, the tour guides were asked to describe the training or education, received by them to prepare for the tours. They were also asked to identify the percentage of the training related to the environment. The majority of the guides, 70% said that they attended tour guide courses organized by different organizations (See Table 4.6). The tour guides indicated that the main focus of their training was history and culture (83%), architecture (26%) and ecology (43%) of Armenia.
The respondents also mentioned geography, language as well as interaction with tourists and local people as part of their training.

Table 4.6: Tour Guide Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tour Guide Training courses</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University studies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-training</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What was the main focus of the training/education that you received?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecology</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with tourists</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tour guides were also asked to specify the percentage of their training related to the areas such as how to interpret ecological environment, how to minimize environmental and cultural impact and other areas.
Table 4.7: Training in certain areas

What percentage of your answer relates to the training in the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up to 5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) Lectures on how to minimize the environmental impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up to 5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c) Lectures on how to minimize the cultural impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up to 5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.7 shows that 10 people out of 19 (53 %) mentioned that have received lectures on how to interpret the ecological environment of Armenia, of which 3 people indicated that 20 % of their training which focused on the environment included lectures on how to interpret the ecological environments of Armenia. Nearly 68 % of the respondents emphasized that have received lectures on how to minimize the environmental impact, of which 6 people said that 10% of their training which focused on environmental issues in Armenia included lectures on the how to minimize environmental impact.

Table 4.7 shows that the number of people who received lectures on cultural impact was much higher that for the environmental impact. 16 people out of 19 (79 %) received lectures on how to minimize cultural impact, of which 4 people mentioned that 20 % of their training which focused on minimizing negative impact in Armenia included such kind of lectures. The respondents also noted that they have received lectures on how to overcome cultural barriers between the local community and the tourists, 6 people mentioned that 20 % of their training related to ecotourism included such kind of lectures.

The survey participants also singled out the importance of conservation in Armenia, and mentioned that Armenia has many environmental problems and conservation is a vital subject. 95 % of the respondents indicated that received lectures about conservation in Armenia. Some of the respondents (16 %) also mentioned other topics which were included in their environmental training program. There were also some people (4 people) who couldn’t give a definite answer to this question.
Table 4.7: Continuation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up to 5%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up to 5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, Table 10 shows that 53% of the respondents indicated that received lectures on how to interpret the ecological and 84% the cultural environment of Armenia. Nearly 68% of the respondents received lectures on how to minimize environmental impact and 79% on how to overcome cultural barriers between the visitors and local residents. The Table also depicts that respondents (95%) also received lectures about the importance of conservation.
Pre-departure information – Wight (1995) suggests that sustainable ecotourism should involve education among visitors before, during, and after the trip. Pre-departure literature can help the travelers to better understand the culture, traditions, environmental issues, and be prepared for the tour. All of the respondents indicated that they provide pre-departure information to the tourist.

**Table 4.8: Pre-Departure Information Supplied by Tour Guides**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country (money, geography, climate)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>73 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour Information</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>64 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about destinations to be visited</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>59 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local people and their culture, history, traditions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure and accommodations</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment, clothing, and personal supplies to bring to the tour</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local ecosystems</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel ethics about proper behavior in the visited areas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As table 4.8 shows, 73 % of the respondents provide information about Armenia, which includes information about geography, money, climate, and weather. 23 % of the tour guides said that they also provide information about the equipment, clothing and supplies, that the tourists should bring with them, which includes equipment for nature photography, bird watching, as well as sun screen, sunglasses and etc. Nearly 50 % of the respondents
provide information about local people, traditions, and culture, which is an important pre-departure information. Many tour guides (64%) mentioned that they also provide information about the tour in general, which includes information about visas, insurance, length of the tours, as well as information about guides and the company in general. Overall, there is not a strong support for the provision of information on behavioral norms and ethics, which aims to minimize cultural and environmental impact. Only 23% of the respondents provide information about local ecosystems, and 14% about travel ethics and proper behavior in the area.

Attitudes of local people – Attitudes of local people towards the visitors is an important indicator, because it shows if ecotourism has negative impact on the local people. Local community, has all the rights to participate in the decision making process, and if the community does not like the presence of tourists, this means that ecotourism is not bringing the benefits to the local community and has a negative impact. The tour guides were asked to rate the attitudes of the local communities towards the visiting tourist groups. 20 people out of 22 (91%) responded that local people have positive attitude towards the visiting groups, only two people thought that the local community might be indifferent towards the tourist (See Table 4.9). The tour guides explained the positive attitude, based on the Armenian culture. Armenians are well known for their hospitality, and guests are always welcome in their home.
Table 4.9: Attitude of local people towards the visitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the attitude of local residents towards the visitor groups?</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, ecotourism in Armenia partially meets this criterion, some of the indicators show areas of concern. Indicators such as group size and attitudes of local community are probably the most satisfactory from all the indicators. Mostly satisfactory means that more than 75% of the respondents indicated that the following indicator was met in Armenia. Regarding the attitudes of local people; based on the opinions of surveyed tour guides, local community has positive attitude towards the visitors. The results for this indicator could have been different, if the local residents were also surveyed since sometimes tour guides and local residents see thinks differently, besides tour companies can also be bias. Armenian tour guides said that they received training for conducting tours, and they also mentioned that their training focused on history, architecture, culture, and geology which is an important part of tour guide training, but in order to meet this criterion and minimize negative impact of ecotourism, lectures on how to interpret ecological environment, ways to minimize environmental and cultural impact, as well as lectures about conservation are vital. Pre-departure information about local ecosystems and behavioral norms is also significant for minimizing negative impact on the sensitive areas and local community. Armenian tour agencies supply the visitors with pre-departure information about geography, climate infrastructure and accommodations in Armenia, as well as equipment, clothing and personal supplies needed for the tours. This information is useful for tourists, since it gives them an
idea what to expect, and what to bring with them. But in order to minimize the negative impact on nature and local people, information about local people, their culture, history and traditions, local ecosystems, and proper behavior in the visited areas should be provided to the visitors before arrival to Armenia. While 50% of the tour guides said that they provide pre-departure information about local people, customs and traditions, only 23% provides information about local ecosystems and only 14% provides information about behavioral norms in the visited area. These two indicators (guide training and pre-departure information) can be the reason why ecotourism operations in Armenia only partially meet this criterion.

**Criterion 3: Ecotourism educates travelers on local culture, local species and the importance of conservation.** It is important to educate the visitors and provide them with literature, briefings, and examples to enhance their understanding of fragility of the area, to avoid negative environmental impacts and to minimize their impact on local culture.

The indicators that were selected for this criterion included the degree of interaction between the local residents and visitors; support/donations for conservation projects; educational and interpretive experiences for visitors; availability of reading materials about the country, environment as well as local people.

Interaction between the local residents and visitors- gives both the tourists and local community an opportunity to learn from each other, share their views on many aspects such as environmental issues, importance of conservation and many others. For this purpose, the tour guides were asked to describe what kind of interaction exists between the visitors and tourists during the tours.
Table 4.10: Interaction between the locals and tourists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10 depicts that 96% of the respondents indicated that there is an interaction between the local residents and the visitors during the tours. The tour guides said that tourists participate in local festivals, observe the way local community lives, talk to local people about environmental and socio-economic issues, politics and many other subjects. Local residents usually invite tourists for a meal to their homes, give them fresh fruit and vegetables from their gardens, as well as present them with national souvenirs.

Educational and interpretive experiences for visitors – Interpretive activities such as oral presentations, videos, reading materials are an important part of a tour. Interpretive activities are part of the learning process of the tourists about the local ecology, flora and fauna, history and culture. The tour guides were asked to describe interpretive activities during tours organized by their tour agency. 22% of the respondents said that no interpretive activities are conducted during their tours. As table 4.11 shows 83% of the tour guides conduct oral presentations, and 39% give out reading materials during tours.
Table 4.11: Interpretive Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the respondents who answered yes (78%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral presentations</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading materials</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the main focus of the interpretive activities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History/Monuments</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/Traditions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental issues/ecoity</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways to involve the community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly 94% of the respondents said that the main focus of their interpretive activities is history and historical monuments of Armenia, while 50% said that they also focus on the natural environment, as well as environmental issues in Armenia. Many tour guides mentioned discussing environmental issues of Lake Sevan, and its surroundings as the most important topic of the interpretive activities focusing on the ecology of Armenia. One of the tour guides said that during the tours they also discuss the local community and its role in the conservation of the natural environment, and ways to motivate and involve the community in the conservation projects.

The respondents also said that their interpretive activities focused on local culture and traditions, natural environment and species, as well as appropriate behavior in the given area.
and importance of conservation. Figure 4.9 illustrates that 6 people out of 18 said that 50% of their interpretive activities focused on the culture and traditions of the local community, while 8 respondents indicated that only 20% of their interpretive activities focused on the natural area and species, and only 10% of their interpretive activities focused on the appropriate behavior in the given area. The importance of local conservation had less focus during the tours than the culture and traditions of the local community. Four tour guides out of 18 said that 30% of their interpretive activities during the tours included this topic. Some of the respondents (17%) mentioned other areas such as social and economic issues, socio political system of the local community as part of the interpretive activities.

Figure 4.9: Interpretive activities in certain areas

What percentage of your answer relates to the interpretive activities in the following areas?

(a) The culture and traditions of the local community
(b) Natural environment and species

(c) Appropriate behavior in the given area
d) The importance of local conservation

![Graph showing interpretive activities]

**Availability of reading materials** – Reading materials given to the visitors before and during the tour about local customs, behavioral norms, sensitive resources, or how to minimize impact is an important indicator. Table 4.11 shows that, only 39% of the tour guides provide the tourists with reading materials during the tours, while 83% conduct oral presentations as part of interpretive activities during the tours.

**Opportunities to contribute** - Another area considered fundamental to the sustainability of ecotourism is contribution of the visitors to the natural area and local development programs. In order to evaluate this indicator tour guides were asked whether the visitors are encouraged to contribute to the local area, and to indicate the main focus of the contribution. Table 4.12 illustrates that 74% of the respondents encourage tourists to contribute to the local initiatives during the tours, the respondents described that most of the local initiatives are social initiatives which are also essential for local development, and there are very little
environmental projects in Armenia. The tour guides said that the tourists contribute to the local schools, museums, natural and cultural monuments, as well as orphanages and different individuals. One of the tour guides brought an example of German tourists that visited German schools in Armenia, and made donations to the schools. Only 12 % of the respondents mentioned that tourists also contribute to the environmental initiatives.

Table 4.12: Opportunities to contribute

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During the tours, are the tour members encouraged to contribute to the local initiatives?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>74 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the respondents who answered yes (74%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of the respondents who answered yes (74%)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donations to schools</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>65 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural/natural monuments</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local museums</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orphanages</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental programs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tour guides were also asked to indicate if the visitors are provided with information about value and need for conservation in Armenia, the protected areas in Armenia, as well as local conservation projects and programs. Four people out of 17 indicated that 10 % of the discussions with the visitors relate to encouraging them to support
local ecological initiatives in Armenia, while 47% (8 people out of 17) did not discuss this topic (See Figure 4.10).

**Figure 4.10:** The visitors are encouraged to support local ecological initiatives

![Bar chart showing the percentage of local initiatives discussed among visitors](image)

**Figure 4.11:** The visitors are provided with information about need for conservation.

![Bar chart showing the number of respondents](image)

Figure 4.11 shows that 4 respondents said that 30% of the discussions about local initiatives relate to informing the visitors about the value and need for conservation in Armenia, and 20% relates to informing the visitors about conservation projects and
programs in Armenia (See Figure 4.12). Four out of 17 tour guides said that 20 % of the discussions with tourists about local initiatives focus on the protected area, by providing the tourists with information about protected areas of Armenia, and need for their conservation. Nearly 41 % (5 out of 17 respondents) of the tour guides said that tourists are not encouraged to contribute to the protected areas of Armenia (See Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.12: The visitors are informed about the conservation projects in Armenia.

Figure 4.13: The visitors are provided with information about the protected areas
Based on the answers of the surveyed tour guides, a conclusion can be made that ecotourism in Armenia only partially satisfies this criterion. The reason that ecotourism operations only partially meet this criterion, can be considered indicators such as interpretive activities, opportunities to contribute to local projects and availability of the reading materials during and after the tours. The study shows that the main focus of the interpretive activities in Armenia, as it was in case of pre-departure information is history, architecture, monuments and culture. All this information is important and useful during the trip, but interpretive activities focusing on ecology, sensitivity of the area, ways to minimize negative impact are essential in ecotourism. During the tours, only 39% of the tour guides in Armenia provide reading materials, while oral presentations and video materials have an impact on the visitors during the tours, reading materials will remind the visitors about the local; area, also after the visit. The study shows that Armenian tour guides (74%) encourage tourists to contribute to local initiatives, but very often tourists are only informed about socio-economic programs, and not local development and conservation projects.
**Criterion 4: Directing revenues to the conservation and management of natural and protected areas.** The indicators assigned to this criterion include: payment of established entrance fees and donations; information about protected areas and cultural heritage, trips to protected areas.

Figure 4.13 shows that little information is provided to the visitors about protected areas in Armenia, and need of their conservation. Nearly 41% of the respondents indicated that they don't provide information about protected areas of Armenia during the tours. In order to find out if the entrance fees contribute to the protected areas the tour guides were asked to response if their tour agency or the visitors pay any established fees in order to visit protected areas in Armenia. Nearly 52% of the respondents said that they take tourists to the protected areas of Armenia, and organize bird watching tours, botanical tours in the protected areas. 75% of the respondents said that their tour agency or the tourists pay entrance fees in order to visit the protected areas in Armenia, many of then noted that the entrance fees are included in the tour packages, and many of the fees of the protected are in form of state taxes (See Table 4.13). Only 35% of the respondents indicated that their tour agency contributes to the local initiatives. They explained that their tour agency organizes projects to clean the natural areas, to plant trees and many others. The respondents singled out the cleaning of the areas surrounding Lake Sevan, as part of their contribution. Many tour agencies mentioned that they also contribute to the regional development projects, and regional environmental programs. 22% of the respondents indicated that 25% of the contributions to the local initiatives relate to the environment, they also mentioned other programs such as socio-economic development programs.
Table 4.13: Contribution to the protected areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you take your tour members to the protected areas in Armenia?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do the visitors or your tour agency pay any fees to the protected areas in order to visit them? N=12</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your tour agency contribute to conservation and local development programs?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| What percentage of the local initiatives is related to the environment? |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 15 %                                                                    | 3          | 33 %       |
| 20 %                                                                    | 3          | 33 %       |
| 25 %                                                                    | 2          | 22 %       |
| 35 %                                                                    | 1          | 11 %       |

A conclusion can be made, that ecotourism in Armenia, only partially meets this criterion. Little awareness about protected areas in Armenia is created by the tour agencies prior the trips (41% indicated that do not provide information to the tourists about protected areas), which might deter the visitors from visiting those areas. With no visitors and revenues flowing to the protected areas, and lack of funds in the parks, the infrastructure and management of those areas will be on a very low level of development. Contribution of the
tour agencies to the local projects is an important indicator for this criterion. The survey revealed that overall, Armenian tour companies contribute to local initiatives, but they mainly contribute to socio-economic projects, while conservation and environmental projects also need attention.

**Criterion 5: Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people.** One of the main goals of ecotourism is to improve well being of local community, by providing them with jobs, hiring local guides, buying local crafts, staying at local hotels. Desires and wishes of the local residents should be taken into consideration when deciding to conduct tours in that area, and their attitude towards tourists should be taken into consideration. The following indicators have been chosen to evaluate this criterion: local employment; attitude of the local people towards ecotourists; the variety crafts and goods produced and soled locally.

As it was discussed during the evaluation of criterion 3, the tour guides were asked to rate the attitudes of the local communities towards the visiting tourist groups. 20 people out of 22 (91%) responded that local people have positive attitude towards the visiting groups, only two people thought that the local community might be indifferent towards the tourist. As it was mentioned previously, the positive attitude of local people was explained by the hospitable nature of Armenians.

**Table 4.14: Attitude of local people towards the visitors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the attitude of local residents towards the visitor groups?</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The tour guides were also asked if they cooperate with local residents of the areas where the tours take place. 22% of the respondents said that local residents play no role in their tour operations, they organize everything themselves, while others said that locals provide accommodations and meals, tour guides, transportation, as well as they host the tourists in their houses in order for the tourists to better understand the culture, traditions and lifestyle of local community (Table 4.15). Many tour guides said that locals assist them by providing accommodations, and guides as a favor.

Table 4.15: Role of the local residents in tour operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What role do the local residents have in your tour operations?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No role</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 78% who answered significant:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guides</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The tour guides were also asked to respond if the visitors bought any locally made products, during the tours and identify the average amount in US dollars spend daily on the locally made products. All of the respondents indicated that the visitors buy locally made goods and products, of which 30% indicated that the visitors spend US $20-$40, and US $40-$60 dollars, while 13% couldn’t give a definite answer to this question (See Figure 4.14).

**Figure 4.14: Local purchases**

**Approximately how much money do the tour members spend (a day) during the tour on locally produced or made purchases?**

![Graph showing local purchases](image)

From all other criterion mentioned earlier, ecotourism in Armenia satisfies this criterion the most (more than 75% of the respondents indicated that local residents play a significant role in their tour operations). This can be due to indicators such as local employment and variety of local crafts and goods produced and sold locally. Based on the answers of the Armenian tour guides, it can be concluded that local community plays a role in ecotour operations: they provide accommodations, meals and guide services. Overall ecotourism brings benefits to local community. It provides additional income to the families.
from selling, locally produced goods and crafts, or providing their houses to the visitors as overnight accommodations. Based on the literature review other studies had similar results: the researchers reported that due to ecotourism development the study areas experienced increase in financial benefits.
Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

In the following chapter the conclusions of the study based on the results and findings is discussed. Possible recommendations on how to meet ecotourism criteria in Armenia are offered.

5.1 Conclusion

This study suggests that tour agencies that conduct ecotours in Armenia only partially satisfy the set of ecotourism criteria utilized for this evaluation, though some individual tour agencies meet ecotourism criteria more than the others. For some indicators, the operations of the tour agencies are mostly satisfactory, such as group size, interaction between the residents and tourists, attitudes of local people, while indicators such as pre-departure information about ecosystems, and behavioral norms, efficiency of the guide training are only partially satisfactory. For the criterion to be mostly met more that 75 % of the respondents should indicate that indicators used to evaluate the given criterion exist. The results suggest that Armenian tour agencies, that conduct ecotours, do not represent ecotourism in full sense; most of the ecotours include elements of adventure, religious and cultural tourism.

Indicators used to evaluate the following criterion-ecotourism involves travel to natural areas, show that Armenian ecotour operations only partially meet this criterion. For example, the number of the endangered species and plants is growing in Armenia. Nearly 12 % of the flora in Armenia is considered highly threatened (The Ministry of Nature protection of RA, 1999). The protected areas, in Armenia are also facing many problems. Protected areas lack effective administration and conservation management, and have insufficient staff
and resources (Armenian Ecotourism Association, 2002). Indicators such as existence of natural environments and unique species, availability of ecotours in the protected areas, show that Armenia has rich flora and fauna as well as, rich cultural heritage, and that tour agencies in Armenia take tourists to the natural and protected areas. While ecotourism has to take place in a natural setting, the quality of ecotourism product offered to the tourists should be satisfying. The indicators show that the quality of the natural environment in Armenia, and the protected areas is not high this can be the reason why this criterion is only partially met in Armenia.

The study shows that, little awareness about protected areas in Armenia is created by the tour agencies prior the trips. This can deter the visitors from visiting those areas. With no visitors and revenues flowing to the protected areas, and lack of funds in the parks, the infrastructure and management of those areas will be on a low level of development. If the visitors received pre-departure information about the sensitive areas of Armenia, endangered species, they will be more careful in those territories, and will know that their contribution will be important for the country.

Another criterion considered fundamental to the sustainability of ecotourism, is contribution of the tour agencies and visitors to the natural and areas and local development projects. Indicators assigned to this criterion depict that Armenia only partially meets this criterion. The reason why this criterion is only partially satisfying in the country, can be the fact that the importance of conservation, behavioral norms, and ecosystems are not being addressed during the tours by the guides, as well as during the training programs for the tour guides. The study suggests that by addressing these issues during the tours, by providing reading materials before and after the tours about these topics, will increase the awareness of
the visitors about the sensitivity of the area, as well as will increase the contribution to those areas in Armenia. Local community can also play a vital role in the conservation of the natural areas. The local community should be explained about the importance of those territories, and participate in the management of the protected areas. This might help to reduce the use of those territories by the locals. Since it is required from the local residents, that they reduce their use of public recourses, for the benefit of others who live elsewhere, there is a clear moral obligation for the protected area managers to involve locals in planning and decision making process, and to provide them with alternative benefits, which will win long-term support of local people. The earlier discussed indicators, such as information about protected areas, contribution of the tour agencies to the protected territories, payment of the entrance fees to the protected territories show that criterion number four (Directing revenues to the conservation and management of natural and protected areas) is only partially met in Armenia. On the contrary to Armenia and Brazilian Amazonas, the study conducted in Ecuador showed that tour operators contribute to profit and non profit conservation and development programs in Ecuador, facilitate visitor contributions, and encourage visitors to contribute too (Wood, Norman, Frauman & Toepper, 1999).

The following criterion – ecotourism minimizes negative impact on local ecosystems and culture, is also partially met in Armenia. Partially satisfying means that some of the indicators are in place in Armenia, while others are not, or need improvement. Some of the indicators used to evaluate this criterion, show areas of concern. Indicators such as group size and attitudes of local community (this is based on the opinion of surveyed tour guides) are probably the most satisfactory from all the indicators. More than 74% of the respondents indicated on the existence of this indicators in Armenia. Ample research shows that group
size is one of the most important factors affecting biophysical and social impacts in the sensitive sites, which are not designed for large groups (Hendee, Stankey and Lucas, 1990). As the study shows this indicator in Armenia is mostly satisfactory (74 % of the respondents said that their groups did not exceed 10 people), while indicators such as tour guide training, pre-departure information are only partially met in the country. These indicators are important for raising awareness, and minimizing negative impact on the ecosystems and culture. Armenian tour guides said that they received training for conducting tours, and they also mentioned that their training focused on history, architecture, culture, and geology which is an important part of tour guide training, but in order to meet this criterion and minimize negative impact of ecotourism, lectures on how to interpret ecological environment, ways to minimize environmental and cultural impact, as well as lectures about conservation are vital.

Another indicator (pre-departure information about local ecosystems and travel ethics) used to evaluate the earlier mentioned criterion in Armenia is essential for minimizing negative impact on the sensitive areas and local community. Armenian tour agencies supply the visitors with pre-departure information about geography, climate infrastructure and accommodations in Armenia, as well as equipment, clothing and personal supplies needed for the tours. This information is useful for tourists, since it gives them an idea what to expect, and what to bring for the tour. But in order to minimize the negative impact on nature and local people, information about local people, their culture, history and traditions, local ecosystems, and proper behavior in the visited areas should be provided to the visitors before arrival to Armenia. While 50 % of the tour guides said that they provide pre-departure information about local people, customs and traditions, only 23% provides information about
local ecosystems and only 14% provides information about behavioral norms in the visited area. These two indicators (guide training and pre-departure information) can be the reason why ecotourism operations in Armenia only partially meets this criterion. The results for this criterion are similar to the ones of Brazilian Amazonas. The study conducted by Wallace and Pierce (1993) showed that there was a lack of literature given to the visitors about local customs, behavioral norms, sensitive resources, or how to reduce impacts. The researchers also concluded that, though tour guides in Brazilian Amazonas had received some training that included exposure to concepts dealing with biophysical and social impacts, most guides did not convey these ideas to visitors (Wallace & Pierce, 1993). On the other hand, the results for this criterion were better in Ecuador, than in Armenia and Brazilian Amazonas. The study conducted in Ecuador, showed that tour operators were providing information and education regarding the fragility of natural environments during the tours. The only area of concern was lack of pre-departure information about travel ethics in natural areas and proper behavior when interacting with local residents (Wood, Norman, Frauman & Toepper, 1999).

Indicators chosen to evaluate the following criterion – ecotourism educates travelers on local culture, local species and the importance of conservation, show that Armenia only partially meets this criterion. Based on the opinions of the surveyed tour guides, there is an interaction between the visitors and local community during the trips in Armenia. This is a vital indicator for educating travelers on local culture. Community visits are significant part of the Armenian rural experience, and have a great potential for increasing awareness of the problems associated with protecting the natural environment and monuments, and generating support for local development projects. Though there is a great amount of interaction between the local residents and the visitors (based on the survey results), the amount, type,
location and duration of contacts with local people, needs to be discussed with local residents upon arrival of the visitors, rather than decided by the tour operators. In the contrary to Armenia, the study conducted in Brazilian Amazonas showed that, this indicator needed improvement. The absence of the translator, made it difficult for the tourists in Brazilian Amazonas to interact with the visitors. On the other hand, indicators such as opportunities to contribute, and interpretive activities focusing on the importance of conservation, could be improved both in Armenia and Brazilian Amazonas. Armenian tour companies should use the cultural and environmental sensitivity, involvement with local people, and opportunities to see, understand and contribute to the local projects, as part of visitor experience in Armenia and marketing program. Related to this, a portion of the income from the entrance fees to the protected areas could be distributed to the local development projects, via non-profit organizations affiliated with a given protected area. This contribution can also motivate the local community to be involved in the local conservation projects, and protection of the natural areas. Development of ecotourism in the protected areas cannot succeed without the support of the local communities surrounding them. Therefore community participation in ecotourism and development of rural tourism is very important, because the local community is affected by the decision-making and planning process, and local residents have to benefit from theses projects (Drake 1991).

Another indicator, interpretive activities during the tours focusing on the importance of conservation, behavioral norms and ethics, point to inadequate guide training in the areas such as minimizing negative cultural and environmental impact, importance of conservation, proper behavior in a sensitive area, as an obstacle of raising awareness in Armenia.
From all other criterion mentioned earlier, ecotourism in Armenia satisfies criterion regarding financial benefits and empowerment of local community the most, since more tour guides pointed out that indications used to evaluate this criterion were present in Armenia (more than 75% of the respondents pointed out that 3 out of 4 indicators used to evaluate this criterion met the standards). This can be due to indicators such as local employment and variety of local crafts and goods produced and sold locally in Armenia. Nearly 78% of the respondents indicated that local people play a significant role in their tours, for example provide accommodations, transportation food, work as local guides. If compared to other indicators this is a much bigger percentage. For example, only 14% of the respondents provide pre-departure information to the travelers about sensitivity of the area, proper behavior and ethics, and 39% provides reading materials regarding this topics, that is why these criteria are only partially met in Armenia.

The same conclusion can be made about similar studies regarding this criterion: the researchers reported that due to ecotourism development the study areas experienced increase in financial benefits and this criterion compared to others was mostly met. In the study conducted by Wallace and Pierce (1993), in Brazilian Amazonas, the results showed that there was an increase in local employment, due to ecotourism development in the area. The local community also received income from selling locally made products, crafts and souvenirs. The researchers came to a conclusion that this criterion was mostly satisfying in the study area, based on their evaluation methodology. They assigned scores (from 1=not satisfying (>0%), 2= partially satisfying, (>25%) 3=mostly satisfying (>50%), 4= satisfying (>75%)) to each criterion based on the percentages of answers of the tour guides, and based on the score received by each criterion the evaluation was made. The researchers had agreed
that if 50% had responded that indicators used to evaluate this criterion existed in the study area, they would have given a three (mostly satisfactory) to this criterion. Given the agreed standard, the criterion “ecotourism provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people” was given a score of three or “mostly satisfactory”.

The results for this criterion were also similar in the study conducted by Bhattcharya and Kumari in India. The results of the study showed that ecotourism brought benefits to the area such as employment opportunities, and enhancement of many services (such as police services and health services). The researchers came to this conclusion by comparing the percentages of the answers of the survey participants. By assigning indicators to each criterion, they found out that that bigger percentage of indicators which comprised criterion regarding financial benefits of the local community, existed in the study area. For example, the majority (more than 50%) of the respondents pointed out that indicators such as number of ecotourism providers, amount of income from ecotourism, equity benefit sharing, number of people brought above poverty line due to ecotourism, which comprised this criterion were present in the country. Overall, the situation is similar in Armenia- ecotourism brings benefits to local community. It provides additional income to the families from selling, locally produced goods and crafts, or providing their houses to the visitors as overnight accommodations. Based on the answers of the Armenian tour guides, it can be concluded that local community plays a role in ecotour operations: they provide accommodations, meals and guide services during the tours.

Indicator, such as empowerment of local people, plays a vital role in ecotourism. As it was mentioned before, many indicators depend on the empowerment of local community, if the local residents are not trained, explained about the importance of conservation projects
and their role in those projects, ecotourism will not bring the desired benefits. The study suggests that involving local people is in the best interest of the tour agencies, since visitors see this as an element of ecotourism. There are many community-based ecotourism models that suggest that local people even with limited education can be successful participants (Haysmith and Harvey, 1995). In the future training will be needed for local people, which will enable them to become tour guides, park rangers, and to realize the potential benefits of ecotourism. Tour agencies, together with non-profit organizations can conduct the trainings for the local residents, and contribute to the local area.

Overall, four out of five ecotourism criteria used to evaluate ecotourism operations Armenia were partially met. Table 5.1 summarizes ecotourism criteria and indicators used in the study, and shows whether Armenia met those criteria.
Table 5.1 Evaluation of Ecotourism Criteria In Armenia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria and Indicators</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism involves travel to natural areas.</td>
<td>The criterion is partially met in Armenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indicators:</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The presence of protected areas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- The location for the ecotours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presence of unique species</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- and rich flora and fauna in the area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism minimizes the negative impacts on nature and local culture.</td>
<td>The criterion is partially met in Armenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indicators:</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Group size</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Information given to the visitors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Customs/traditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ecosystems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Behavioral norms</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Guide training/efficiency</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Attitudes of local people</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism educates travelers on local culture, local species and the importance of conservation.</td>
<td>The criterion is partially met in Armenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indicators:</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Interaction between the local residents and visitors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Interpretive experiences for visitors</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Availability of reading materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Opportunities to contribute</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing revenues to the conservation and management of natural and protected areas.</td>
<td>The criterion is partially met in Armenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indicators:</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Information about protected areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Percentage of income used to contribute to the area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Payment of established entrance fees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people.</td>
<td>The criterion is mostly met in Armenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indicators:</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Attitudes of local people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Local employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Variety of crafts and goods produced and sold locally</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Recommendations

Based on the conducted analysis of ecotourism criteria in Armenia the following recommendations were designed.

One of the main reasons that ecotourism criteria in Armenia are partially met, is that Armenian tour guides receive very little training regarding importance of conservation, ecosystems, and the benefits that ecotourism can bring not only to the natural areas but also to the local community. The tour guides do not pass this information to the travelers, and do not provide them with the reading materials about conservation issues in Armenia. The study recommends that tour companies that organize ecotours in Armenia, should organize training programs, and lectures about this topics, and only after intensive training let the tour operators participate in the ecotours. A certification program should be organized by the Government, and only the tour companies that pass the certification program should be granted a permission to organize those tour.

Armenian tour operators, should address issues such as sensitivity of the area, conservation issues, endangered species and benefits of ecotourism during the tours. Reading materials before and after the tours about these topics, should be provided to the visitors. This will increase the awareness of the visitors about the sensitivity of the area, as well as will increase the contribution to those areas in Armenia. Local community can also play a vital role in the conservation of the natural areas.

Local community of the visited areas should not be neglected by the tour companies. The local community should participate in the tours, they also have to take part in the decision making process. The local community should be explained about the importance of
those territories, and participate in the management of the protected areas. This might help to reduce the use of those territories by the locals. Since it is required from the local residents, that they reduce their use of public recourses, for the benefit of others who live elsewhere, there is a clear moral obligation for the protected area managers to involve locals in planning and decision making process, and to provide them with alternative benefits, which will win long-term support of local people.

Tour companies should participate in the conservation projects, which will show the local community and the visitors and this companies really care about the natural environment of Armenia, and will set an example by this. The protected areas should also receive benefits from the ecotours, a portion of the income from the entrance fees to the protected areas could be distributed to the local development projects, via non-profit organizations affiliated with a given protected area. This contribution can also motivate the local community to be involved in the local conservation projects, and protection of the natural areas. Development of ecotourism in the protected areas cannot succeed without the support of the local communities surrounding them. Therefore community participation in ecotourism and development of rural tourism is very important, because the local community is affected by the decision-making and planning process, and local residents have to benefit from these projects (Drake 1991).

Overall, the study recommends that Government should play a vital role in ecotourism in Armenia, since Armenian Government does not participate in ecotourism development projects. Together with Armenian Ecotourism Society training programs should be created for ecotour operators, and based on the ecotourism guidelines and criteria certification program should be designed. Only tour companies that passed the certification
program, and tour operators that received license should be allowed to organize ecotours. Private and public sectors, and the government should all participate in the decision making process, and as the example of countries such as Australia, Canada and others, shows country will benefit from ecotourism.

It is also important to mention that the study had several limitations. Based on the fact that the study was conducted in the United States, the sample size was small. If the situation was different more that 23 agencies could have responded, and the data could have been different. The tour agencies were contacted by e-mail, while direct contact could have given different results. The study suggests this topic to be further researched in Armenia. This study can be the basis for a larger study. A similar survey should be conducted in Armenia, and the survey should be conducted not only with Armenian tour agencies, but should also include tourists and local community. On site observations will also be useful for the study.
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Appendix A: Survey Sample English Version

My name is Narine Yeghoyan, and I am a graduate student at Rochester Institute of Technology (NY, USA) in the department of Hospitality-Tourism management. Currently I am working on my Masters Thesis; which is aimed to evaluate ecotourism operations in Armenia. This survey will give me an opportunity to understand the state of ecotourism in Armenia, from the professionals involved in the tourism sector. Please fill out the survey, and send it back by March 20th, to the following e-mail address , or this fax number .

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Survey

Name ____________________________________________

Sex: _______ Male _________ Female  Age: __________

Name of the tour agency ____________________________

Profession/Title ________________________________

Education ______________________________________

How many years have you worked as a tour guide? ________________

How many years have you worked in this tour agency? ______________

1. What percentage of your business is comprised of ecotourism based on the following definition? “Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” (The International ecotourism Society)
2. What percentage of your answer above, is comprised of the following tours (please indicated the % in front of the options)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tour</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>j) Bird watching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Botanical tours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) Nature photography</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m) Camping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n) Hiking/walking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o) Mountaineering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p) Historic and cultural tours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q) Horseback riding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r) Other (specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Do you take your tour members to the protected areas in Armenia?
   Yes____ No____

   If yes, specify which ones, if no, go to Question 5.

4. Please answer the following question if your answer to Question 3 is Yes.

   Do the visitors or your tour agency pay any fees to the protected areas in order to visit them?
   Yes____ No____
   Please explain.

5. Before arrival to Armenia what kind of information are the visitors provided with?
6. As a tour guide, what kind of education or training have you received to prepare you for conducting tours (explain)?

7. What was the main focus of the training/education that you received (explain)?

8. What percentage of your training was related to the environment?

9. What percentage of your answer in Question 8 relates to the training in the following areas (please indicate the % in front of the choices)?
   
   g) Lectures on how to interpret the ecological environment of Armenia. 
   
   ___ %

   h) Lectures on how to minimize the environmental impact. 
   
   ___ %

   i) Lectures on how to minimize the cultural impact. 
   
   ___ %

   j) Lectures on how to overcome the cultural barriers between the locals and tourists. 
   
   ___ %

   k) Lectures about the importance of conservation. 
   
   ___ %

   l) Other (specify) ________________________________ 
   
   ___ %
10. What is the average visitor group size taken on a tour (for example on a botanical tour, bird watching tour etc) (circle one)?
   e) 1-5 people
   f) 5-10 people
   g) 10-20 people
   h) 20- more people

11. During the tours, are any interpretive activities conducted with the tour members
   Yes_____         No_____

If your answer to Question 11 is No, please skip Questions 12, 13, and 14 and continue from Question 15. If yes, what interpretive activities are conducted (for example: oral presentations, watching videos, giving out reading materials etc.)?

12. What is the main focus of the interpretive activities?

13. What percentage of the interpretive activities is related to the environment and culture?

14. What percentage of your answer in Question 13 relates to the interpretive activities in the following areas:

   f) The culture and traditions of the local community   ___% 
   g) Natural environment and species                   ___% 
   h) Appropriate behavior in the given area             ___% 
   i) The importance of local conservation              ___% 
   j) Other (specify)                                    ___%
15. What role (for example service: transportation, accommodation, tour guides etc) do the local residents (people from the community where the tours take place/ethnic area) have in your tour operations?

16. Is there an interaction between the residents of the visited area and the tour members (example: participation in the local festivals, discussions with the local residents, exposure to the conditions in which the local residents live etc)?

Yes ____ No ____

If yes, please explain the kind of interaction.

17. What is the attitude of local residents towards the visitor groups (circle one)?

f) Negative
g) Indifferent
h) Positive
i) Other ___________________________________________________________________

Explain:
18. Do the tour members purchase locally made goods/products?
   Yes_____  No_____ 

If yes, approximately how much money do the tour members spend (a day) during the tour on locally produced or made purchases: *ex. souvenirs, local crafts, food, services, etc* (circle one).
   a) US $5-$20 
   b) US $20-$40 
   c) US $40-$60 
   d) US $60-$80 
   e) US $80 and more 
   f) No definite answer 

19. During the tours, are the tour members encouraged to contribute to the local initiatives *(for example: donations to the schools, cultural monuments etc)*?
   Yes_____  No_____ 

If yes please specify what kind of initiatives:

If no, please explain why:

20. What percentage of the donations/contributions relate to the ecological initiatives?
21. What percentage of your answer in Question 21 relates to the following areas:

1. The visitors are encouraged to support local ecological initiatives in Armenia. _____ %

2. The visitors are provided by information on the value and need for conservation. _____ %

3. The visitors are informed about the conservation projects and programs in Armenia. _____ %

4. The visitors are provided with information about the protected areas in Armenia. _____ %

22. Does your tour agency contribute to conservation and local development programs? If your answer to the following Question is No, please continue from Question 25.

Yes_____ No_____

If yes which initiatives does it contribute to?

23. What percentage of the local initiatives is related to the environment (*for example, employ scientists, naturalist, or conserve the protected areas*)?

24. In your opinion what positive impact does tourism have on Armenia?

25. In your opinion what negative impact does tourism have on Armenia?
Appendix B: Survey Sample Armenian Version

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Ν3»n»U3i»nar Y3UU Y3na6A03Y 3Y3nC (585) 475-5099
(Attention: Rick Lagiewski):

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3n3a6A66A0/33bi3A6Y3

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3n3a6A66A0/33bi3A6Y3

1. O»n 3n3i3a6OY»a6A3Y a3n i3l3aeY 13n3U3a6O Y3i3a6OY»3n3a6OY 13
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e) T3a3Na3Ya3AG3Y (μYa3a3A3Ü3y - a3iU3a3Ü33a3Ü3CY Na3b3n3o32YY»n3C A32Na3Ya3oU) ín»an3a3oA3Ü3y ín»μ»n3É 13e2a3a3a3A3a3oYY»n3 100%  

f) 2Ü3 (Y3b»3ù)  

10. a3n32Y » ù«3e3a3oC3A3Y »n3C (un3CY3i, μá3e3μ3a313p3Y »«3e3a3oC3A3Y, A3a3a3oYY»n3C 'Ci3Y » «3e3a3oC3A3Y 23Ú3Y) Ü3ë3Y3f3á3D í3n3e3í3i3Y »n3C Ú3C3 â3í3ü3Y Ú3i3ü3A3 (ÁY3í3ù ín»μ»n3q3Y»n3C ò3ù3(A)  
   a) 1-5 3Ý3O  
   b) 5-10 3Ý3O  
   c) 10-20 3Ý3O  
   d) 20-30 3Ý3O  

11. 3«3e3a3oC3A3Y »n3C A33Ý3i313n3Y3U3a33n3a3Y an3» ù»Í3Y3μ3a313p3Y μya3oú3c  
   an3í3a3oY»á3a3ú3a3oY Ý33Ý3o3í3a3O3ù » í3á3n3C3é3í3i3Y »n3C N33ù3n3  
   2Ú3a3  

0A » D3n313-13-3Ý3 a33p3e3Y3»É »ù a3«ù, ÉY3í3n3á3O »Yú μ3ó â3á3OY»É D3n3ó»n3 12-Á 13-Á" 
14-Á " B3n3á3O3i3»É D3n313-13-3Ý3 a33p3e3Y3»É »ù 2Ú3a3, 3á3 ù»Í3Y3μ3a313p3Y μya3oú3c 
C3yla3 an3í3a3oY»á3a3ú3a3oY Ý33Ý3o3í3a3O3ù (un3CY3i, μ33ý3í3n3 Ý»n3í3Ý3í3a3O3ù »n3, 
ì»e33ý3í3a3D»n3C 'Ci3á3U, í3á3»n3í3Ý3ú3á3a3O3A»n3C ín3Ý33n3á3O3ù 23Ú3Y) 

12. â3n3Y » ù»Í3Y3μ3a313p3Y μya3oú3c  
13. B3n3á3oY»á3a3ú3a3oY Ý33Ý3o3í3a3O3ù ìn3í3á3e3Y » ín»μ»n3á3O3ù Ý3c3î3ý3C3A3Y » Ù3í3á3oú3c3A3Y
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2. 100% of the population is from China, i.e., 王家、王氏 families.

3. The population is 3% from Japan, i.e., 日本、日本 Families.

4. The population is 3% from the United States, i.e., 美国、美国 Families.

22. The population is 3% from the United States, i.e., 美国、美国 Families.

23. The population is 3% from the United States, i.e., 美国、美国 Families.

24. The population is 3% from the United States, i.e., 美国、美国 Families.

25. The population is 3% from the United States, i.e., 美国、美国 Families.