Ecotourism: potentials and pitfalls

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Ecotourism is currently the world’s largest industry. According to the latest statistics released by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) at the turn of the 21st Century, the total international tourist arrivals are estimated at 630 million and income generated from the industry reached an all time high at US$ 55 billion.

Tourism is a powerful engine of economic growth and poverty reduction. It has the potential to create jobs and reduce poverty, especially in rural and remote areas. However, the growth of tourism can also lead to environmental degradation and social conflicts. The challenge, therefore, is to balance economic development with environmental conservation and social equity.

Ecotourism, which combines travel and tourism with nature conservation, is a way to achieve this balance. It promotes sustainable tourism practices and helps to protect and conserve natural and cultural heritage.

In Sri Lanka, ecotourism has the potential to contribute significantly to the nation’s economy. The country has a rich biodiversity, including 15 national parks, 16 nature reserves, and 4 wildlife sanctuaries. These natural resources attract millions of visitors each year.

Sri Lanka, “the gem of the Indian Ocean,” is renowned for its beautiful beaches, lush green forests, and diverse wildlife. The country has a long coastline, with white sandy beaches stretching along the island’s eastern and southern coasts. The country is also home to the world’s largest living statue, the Sigirya rock, and the iconic Temple of the Tooth.

However, the growth of tourism in Sri Lanka has not been without its challenges. The country has faced issues related to environmental degradation, cultural erosion, and social conflicts. The government has taken steps to address these issues, including the establishment of a National Tourism Council and a National Park and Wildlife Authority.

The future of ecotourism in Sri Lanka depends on the government’s commitment to sustainable tourism practices and the protection of the country’s natural and cultural heritage. The country has a unique opportunity to harness the power of tourism to drive economic growth while preserving the beauty of its landscapes.

In conclusion, ecotourism has the potential to be a powerful force for economic growth and environmental conservation in Sri Lanka. The key to success lies in balancing economic development with environmental protection and social equity. With the right policies and practices, Sri Lanka can become a model for sustainable tourism development.