

Abstract

Ecotourism is widely accepted as one strategy to provide environmental, socio-economic and cultural benefits at both local and national levels. The major underlying assumption of ecotourism is that visitors can provide the necessary economic incentives to achieve local conservation and development.

How could ecotourism be promoted to enhance the cultural landscape conservation? This study seeks to assess the ecotourism opportunities in the Palestinian context and contribute to the fundamental knowledge about ecotourism and cultural landscapes conservation.

Bani Na'im Wilderness (BNW) in Hebron Governorate in the West Bank was chosen as a case study. A qualitative method, which included primary and secondary data, was utilized. Various tourism stakeholders including tour operators; governmental institutions officers; non-governmental organizations members and local residents were interviewed to determine the ecotourism potential of the study area through applying the Ecotourism Opportunity Spectrum (ECOS) framework.

Results indicate that there is a potential to develop ecotourism in BNW. Natural and cultural resources and abundant human resources in the area will strengthen the development.

However, In order for the ecotourism development to be successful, a set of key issues were identified and a number of useful recommendations were offered to enable managers to further develop ecotourism opportunities within BNW. Among these are the management and conservation of BNW cultural landscape as an ecotourism resource, management of tourism impact, interpretation and education, promotion and marketing, in addition to declare the site as a protected national park.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Cultural Landscape, ECOS, Bani Na'im Wilderness.