

Sustainable Tourist Development in the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica: a Random Utility Model exercise

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Abstract:

Costa Rica has consolidated a tourist sector based on its natural assets, and characterized by a constant search for sustainability. The Huétar-Atlántico region of the country, along the Caribbean Coast, shows a remarkable tourist potential: from Tortuguero National Park, near the Nicaraguan border, to the Gandoca-Manzanillo Reserve of the Biosphere, close to Panamá. Yet, this region is the poorest of the country. The Costa Rica Government is decided to improve the socio-economic situation of the region, and the tourist sector is meant to be one of the key variables within this strategy. However, due to the fragility of the ecosystems present in the area, the Costa Rica government is decided to promote a tourist development model that will not entail any danger for ecological sustainability. Therefore, a tourist strategy that selects and attracts the required type of visitors is required. To help finding the characteristics of the natural destiny more relevant to enhance sustainable tourist demand, a Random Utility Model exercise was performed, based on 2.400 interviews made in San José Airport and Puerto Viejo, in the Caribbean Coast. The utility of this model, under different specifications, in analysing the determinants of low-density tourism demand, offered mixed results that need further elaboration. On the other hand, local sustainability may be achieved, but this does not guarantee global environmental sustainability: the ecological footprint of eco-tourists, despite their own wishes, might be simply too high.

Key words: random utility model, sustainable tourism, ecological footprint

JEL classification: