



Nothing easy about ecotourism

If done correctly, ecotourism can be an important contributor to conservation of a protected area. It can be very beneficial for local communities and generate financial support for management of the park. What are the findings of African Parks, in the ecotourism business for over ten years? "It's not easy."

Ecotourism plays a significant role as an economic multiplier in marginal areas. It also provides an important way for people to experience the natural world and emotionally connect to it. If done correctly, it has a positive effect flowing to many areas.

Nothing easy about it

However, there is definitely nothing easy about ecotourism. Every dollar needs to be earned with hard work, both from the tourism operators and the protected area management.

Currently, in Africa it is a saturated and competitive market in which tourism operators are constantly seeking new opportunities. Destination and access are the most predominant factors of the success of an ecotourism investment. Furthermore, each location is unique and requires a specific approach – ecotourism can easily become a threat to a protected area! There needs to be a balance between promotion and conservation, between numbers of visitors and their impact. At the same time, ecotourism needs to provide the local communities with a sustainable socio-economic environment.

Prerequisites for success

As stated above, the ecotourism business is not an easy one. African Parks defines the following prerequisites for success.

Access

In such a competitive market, one needs to be able to develop a unique product that is perceived to outweigh the cost and effort for a tourist to get there. It also helps if a tourist can experience different wildlife experiences and environments in one country, which is the case in countries such as Rwanda, Malawi and Zambia.

Finances

African Parks works in two different ways: either lease out a concession to others within the framework of the African Parks' Tourism Development Plan or develop the tourism product themselves. The latter may be preferred from a long-term financial sustainability standpoint. However, developing a tourism product from scratch requires risk capital and free reserves that AP, like many NGOs, doesn't have. Developing and offering tourism services themselves is only possible with dedicated donor funding. Since African Parks evaluates any ecotourism project on more than just its financial merits a quick return on investment is less required.

Wildlife density

Compared to established, thriving protected areas across Africa, the parks of African Parks are more challenging. African Parks typically takes on protected areas whilst they are in a state of degradation or decline. Wildlife density isn't always at a level compared to established safari destinations. Therefore, the story of conservation behind each project is an integral part of the product and the tourists' experience needs to be carefully focused on the most unique areas of the park.

The availability of hospitality staff, logistics and procurement

In countries with existing tourism infrastructure, finding suitable staff and suppliers tends to be easier than in less developed regions. And exactly the latter are the ones African Parks is operating in. African Parks offers training programs in areas where

Political stability and safety

Tourists want to be sure that their trip will not be dangerous, and staff should be safe at all times. This means that sometimes tourism development is not possible. In

Program

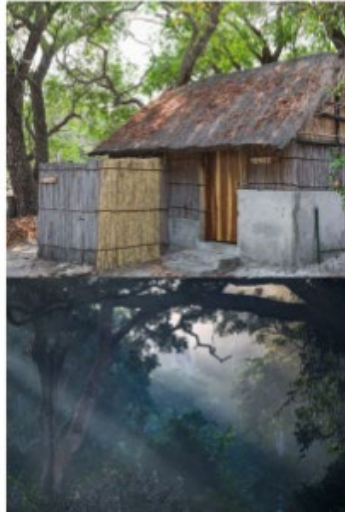
Odzala-Kokoua National Park

Goal

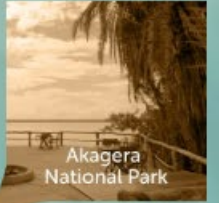
The development and protection of Odzala-Kokoua National Park and a fundamental innovation in park management and nature conservation: the Conservation Performance Cycle.

Partner

African Parks



Imbalanga Camp



Akagera National Park



Liuwa plains



Thawale lodge

Liuwa plains

Zambia

The Liuwa plains is a very remote area of Western Zambia where there is little to no economy. Liuwa is 'off the beaten track', attracting mainly adventurous travellers who are interested in experiencing the remote wilderness of the open plains. Alongside a 5-star lodge and self-catering chalets (all with local staff), the park has four basic but well equipped campsites and one wilderness campsite. For this project, African Parks had to build airstrips, engage and help fund local authorities, suppliers and aviation companies on basic infrastructure, repair river pontoons, train hospitality staff, create marketing linkages as well as conduct the core conservation business. The campsites are community run, with attendants who grew up in villages within the park. The ecotourism options here, albeit small and difficult, are vital for the economic development of the local community.



[Watch Liuwa plains video here](#)

Imbalanga Camp

Congo-Brazzaville

The Imbalanga Camp is an ecotourism camp in Odzala-Kokoua National Park. Surrounded by the deep vegetation of the world's second biggest rainforest, the four-tent camp aims to promote conservation whilst contributing to the development and empowerment of local communities.

Diversifying tourism options and promoting visits of local nationals to Odzala-Kokoua is the cornerstone of the tourism development. A plan, offering visit and accommodation packages to a wide array of budgets, was implemented from 2021. The project provides several job opportunities. Local people with a deep and wide knowledge of the historic and environmental aspects of the park, can be employed as tour guide or host. Through a local fund 5% of all tourist revenues from the park is returned to the community in projects of their choosing.



Towards self-sustainability of Akagera National Park

Rwanda

Akagera NP in Rwanda is close to become African Parks' first fully self-financing park. Akagera is situated in a favorable context, with Rwanda attracting significant volumes of high-end international tourists as well as having a growing local middle-class. In addition to a broad tourism packages, a sustainable fishing cooperative was set up that provides community benefits as well over \$150,000 of income to the park. This diversification of income streams is crucial to de-risking the financial sustainability of the park, and many parks are now exploring carbon credits as an add-on to the more traditional ecotourism model.



[Click here to watch video](#)