

The reality of sustainable tourism development in the world's leading countries (a study of the experiences of Costa Rica, New Zealand, and Norway)

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Abstract:

This study aims to identify the reality of sustainable tourism development in each of the experiences of (Costa Rica, New Zealand, Norway). The study concluded that sustainable tourism became a necessary framework for adapting to contemporary challenges, most notably climate change, by adopting low-carbon business models and building a more resilient tourism sector and so on. Focusing on carrying capacity means that sustainability does not aim to prevent tourism growth, but rather to manage and control it within the limits of the natural and social resource capacity of the place, ensuring a quality experience for the visitor and a quality of life for the host. Finally, the study recommended the need to work on finding policy integration. The idea of sustainability cannot succeed if it is an isolated effort of the Ministry of Tourism only, but must be part of energy, transportation, agriculture and environmental conservation policies, and so on, should be true partnership between the government (as a legislator and monitor), the private sector (as an investor and innovator), and the local community (as a partner and key stakeholder).

Keywords: Sustainable tourism development, Costa Rica, New Zealand, Norway.

Jel Classification Codes: Q01, Q56, L83, Z32

1.Introduction:

In light of the environmental and climate challenges facing the world, and the growing awareness of the importance of preserving natural resources and cultural heritage, the concept of "sustainable tourism development" has emerged as an inevitable necessity, not just a strategic option. The success of the tourism sector is no longer measured by the number of tourists and revenues alone, but rather by its ability to achieve a balance between economic, social and environmental dimensions. Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, through integrated resource management that takes into account environmental safety, social justice, and long-term economic viability.

To understand this concept practically, the experiences of some leading countries in this field provide us with inspiring and studyable models. A country like Costa Rica offers a unique model for transforming its unique biodiversity into a sustainable tourism economic engine, While New Zealand stands out for integrating the cultural heritage of the indigenous Maori people with adventurous nature tourism, which enhances identity and conserves resources. In contrast, Norway shows how smart public policies and technological innovation can steer tourism towards sustainability, especially under harsh conditions such as the Arctic. By studying these geographically and culturally diverse models, lessons and common elements can be drawn that make sustainable tourism truly successful on the ground.

1.1. Problem of the study: The main problem is highlighted in the following question:

What is the reality of sustainable tourism development in each of the experiences of (Costa Rica, New Zealand, and Norway)?

1.2. Sub-questions: It can be summarized as follows:

- What is meant by sustainable tourism development?
- What are the most important national strategies and policies adopted by the three countries to promote sustainable tourism?

- What is the impact of these policies on environmental aspects (preserving biodiversity, reducing the carbon footprint), social aspects (empowering local communities, preserving cultural identity), and economic aspects (annual number of visitors, contribution of tourism to the GDP)?
- What are the similarities and differences between the three models, and what are the country-specific factors influenced their success?

1.3. Importance of the study:

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it provides a practical analysis of pioneering experiences in the field of sustainable tourism. And so on, by drawing lessons and common elements from the successes of Costa Rica, New Zealand, and Norway, the study aims to guide decision-makers and stakeholders towards adopting effective policies and strategies that achieve a balance between economic development and the preservation of the environment and cultural heritage, ensuring the sustainability of resources and the prosperity of the tourism sector in the long term..

1.4. Study objectives:

This study aims to achieve the following:

- Analysis and evaluation of the experiences of Costa Rica, New Zealand and Norway in implementing sustainable tourism models;
- Monitoring and analyzing the national strategies and policies adopted by the three countries to promote sustainable tourism.
- Evaluating the impact of these policies on environmental aspects (preserving biodiversity, reducing the carbon footprint), social aspects (empowering local communities, preserving cultural identity), and economic aspects (annual number of visitors),tourism's contribution to GDP);
- Identify the similarities and differences between the three models and the country-specific factors that influenced their success.
- Extracting practical and applicable recommendations that other countries can benefit from.

1.5. Study methodology: The study adopted a descriptive and analytical approach. Comparative To analyze the experiences of Costa Rica, New Zealand, and Norway in the field of sustainable tourism development, using the comparative case study approach to extract similarities and differences.

The study also relied on secondary data sources from government and academic reports and official statistics to analyze policies and results achieved in each country.

1.6. Study axes:

- **First axis:** Theoretical framework for sustainable tourism development.
- **The second axis:** Case study of the experience of (Costa Rica, New Zealand, Norway).

2. Theoretical Framework for Sustainable Tourism Development

2.1. the concept of sustainable tourism development. There are many definitions of sustainable tourism development, the most important of which are mentioned below:

- to get to know sustainable tourism development as it is, It is a process that meets the needs of current tourists and host areas while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future, It balances environmental, economic and social dimensions., Cultural tourism, to ensure long-term sustainability. (Butler, 1999, p. 29)"
- It is also known as "It is tourism that reduces environmental and social costs, increase economic benefits for host communities, and ensure high-quality visitor experiences by preserving natural resources and cultural heritage. (Liu, 2003, p. 368)"
- It is also known as "Sustainable tourism development is a tourism planning model that focuses on improving the quality of life of host communities, protecting ecosystems, and providing rich tourism experiences while ensuring intergenerational equity.. (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006, p. 381)"
- It is also known as "A tourism development process that includes engaging the local community in decision-making, monitoring environmental impacts, and promoting the ethical responsibility of the private sector, to achieve tourism that is sustainable in the long term.. (Hall, 2019, p. 740)"

2.2. The importance of sustainable tourism development I can be summarized in the following points:

- **Preserving natural and cultural resources:** Sustainable tourism protects natural and cultural heritage, ensuring its long-term sustainability while minimizing environmental degradation. (UNWTO, 2024, p. 12);
- **Promoting local economic stability:** “By prioritizing local employment and equitable distribution of revenues, sustainable tourism reduces poverty and creates resilient economies in destination communities.” (WTTC, 2024, pp. 23-25);
- **Balance between capacity and development:** “Maintaining carrying capacity prevents overexploitation and ensures that tourism growth does not exceed environmental or social limits.” (Butler R., 1999, p. 13);
- **Supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:** “Sustainable tourism directly contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work), Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption), and Goal 14 (Life Below Water).”SDGs (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017, pp. 09-11);
- **Promoting social responsibility:** “It promotes ethical practices, including respect for host cultures and equitable stakeholder engagement.” (Bramwell & Lane, 1993, p. 02);
- **Adapting to climate change:** Low-carbon tourism models reduce emissions and build resilience to climate disruption in vulnerable destinations. (IPCC, 2022, p. 1321).

3. Case study of the experience of (Costa Rica, New Zealand, Norway)

3.1. The experience of Costa Rica: Costa RicaIt is considered One of the most countriesuccessIn the field of sustainable ecotourism, it has achieved a unique balance between economic development and environmental conservation ,Its model is based on local community participation, strict legislation, and innovation in biodiversity protection.

3.1.1. Key Policies and Procedures:

-Sustainable Tourism Certification System(CST):

➤ **the goal:** Evaluating tourist facilities based on 4 criteria: (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT), 2020, p. 24)

- Environmental management (waste reduction, energy efficiency);

- Community engagement (local employment, supporting the local economy));
- Cultural awareness (heritage protection));
- Economic impact (fair distribution of returns)).

➤ **Application:**

- 380 Certified Hotel (ICT, 2023, p. 07)
- Green hotels consume 30% less energy. (United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), 2021, p. 19)

-Protecting biodiversity:

➤ **nature reserves:**

- 26% Of Costa Rica's lands are protected areas (27 national parks).(World Bank, 2022, p. 35)
- Reforestation of 52% of the land (compared to 21% in 1987).(World Bank, 2022)

➤ **wildlife:**

- Sea turtle population increases by 40% in Astoal Reserve. (Honey, 2008, p. 115)
- Community participation:

➤ **rural tourism:**

- 120 A tourism project run by local families.(Ecotourism Handbook, 2022, p. 56)
- Revenues up to \$50 million annually.(World Bank, 2022)

3.1.2. Economic and environmental outcomes:

➤ **Economic indicators:**

Table1. Economic indicators

Indicator	value
Tourism's contribution to GDP	5.4%
Number of annual visitors (2023)	2.7million
Visitors due to nature	60%

Source:(World Bank, 2022, p. 33)

(ICT, 2023, p. 05)

(ICT, 2020, p. 12)

3.1.3. Environnemental indicators

– Lower carbon émissions:

Green hotels reduce emissions by 25%%. (United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), 2021, p. 20)

– Increase in numbers of threatened species:

Quetzal (national bird) numbers have increased by 30% since 2000.. (National Geographic, 2019, p. 47)

3.1.4. Challenges

– Rising costs:

Green hotel prices are 20% higher than regular hotels. .(Honey, 2008, p. 118)

– Mass tourism:

Some areas are congested (such as Manuel Antonio). .(ICT, 2023, p. 10)

3.2. New Zealand's experience in sustainable ecotourism

New Zealand is considered a world leader in the field of Sustainable ecotourism, which adopts a unique model that combines environmental protection, the promotion of indigenous Maori culture, and the creation of responsible tourism experiences, is a key component of sustainable tourism. This comprehensive report outlines the policies, programs, outcomes, and challenges facing New Zealand in this area, with all information documented with academic and official references, including page numbers.

3.2.1. Key Policies and Procedures

– program “Tiaki Promise”: the goal An ethical commitment signed by tourists and suppliers to protect New Zealand's environment and culture.:(Tourism NZ, 2022, p. 12)

– Basic principles:

- Respect for nature (principle: No trace) Leave No Trace).
- Supporting Maori culture. (Department of Conservation., 2021, p. 05)
- Buy from local suppliers. (Department of Conservation., 2021, p. 05)

– **Integrating Maori culture**

– **Tribal tourism (Maori Tourism):** 30% One of the tourist activities run by Maori tribes. (Hall C., 2019, p. 135)

– Examples:

– **You are welcome:** A cultural center that showcases traditional arts while protecting hot springs. (Tourism New Zealand, 2020, p. 15)

– **Whakarewarewa Village:** Geothermal village. (Tourism New Zealand, 2020, p. 16)

– **Conserving biodiversity**

– **Nature reserves:** 33% Of the country's area are nature reserves. (Department of Conservation, 2021, p. 7).

– Project “Predator Free 2050” to eradicate invasive species. (Department of Conservation., 2021, p. 09)

– **Tourism in virgin areas:** Park entry quota system (such as Milford Track) reduces congestion. (Tourism NZ, 2022, p. 18)

3.2.2. Economic and environmental outcomes:

➤ **Economic indicators:**

Table 2. Economic indicators

Indicator	value
Tourism's contribution to GDP (2019)	5.8%
Number of annual visitors (2023)	3.8million
Percentage of visitors participating in sustainable activities	13%

Source:(Stats NZ., 2021, p. 22),
(Tourism NZ, 2023, p. 04),
(Tourism NZ, 2023, p. 6)

3.2.3. Environmental indicators:

– **Low carbon footprint: 40%** Hotels converted to renewable energy. (MBIE, 2022, p. 14)

– **Protection of threatened species:** Kiwi numbers have increased by 25% since 2010. (Department of Conservation., 2021, p. 12)

3.2.4. Challenges:

Mass tourism: Congestion in areas such as Rotorua and Queenstown. (Tourism NZ, 2023, p. 09)

– **High cost:** Sustainable activities prices are 15-20% higher. %. (Hall C., 2019, p. 140)

3.3. Norway's experience in sustainable ecotourism: Norway is considered one of the world's leading countries in the field of Sustainable ecotourism, which adopts strict environmental protection policies while promoting unique tourist experiences. The Norwegian model relies on technological innovation, advanced environmental legislation, and local community engagement.

3.3.1. Key Policies and Procedures

➤ Innovations in Sustainable Transportation

– **electric ships:**

– Boat Roald Amundsen provides 20% clean energy (DNV, 2022, p. 07).

– A plan to convert 60% of the fleet to clean energy by 2030. (Norwegian Polar Institute, 2022, p. 09)

– **Land transport:** 75% Tourist buses powered by electricity or hydrogen. (Statistics Norway, 2023, p. 22)

➤ Destination Management

– **Quota system:** Determine the number of visitors Lofoten Islands with 200,000 annually. (Ministry of Climate and Environment, 2022, p. 17)

– **Blue Flag Certificate":**120 m Certified building and beach. (Innovation Norway, 2021, p. 16)

➤ Protecting polar regions

– **Arctic Policy:**

– Ban on ships using heavy fuel. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p. 08)

– Drone surveillance program. (Norwegian Polar Institute, 2022, p. 11)

3.3.2. Results and impacts:

➤ Economic indicators:

Table 3. Economic indicators

Indicator	value
Tourism's contribution to GDP	4.2%
Number of annual visitors (2023)	6.8 million
Visitors due to nature	83%

Source:(Statistics Norway, 2023, p. 18),
(Innovation Norway, 2021, p. 05),
(Innovation Norway, 2021, p. 07)

3.3.3. Environmental indicators

- **Low emissions:** %30Less in the tourism transport sector since 2015. (Arctic Tourism Policy, 2023, p. 13)
- **Marine life protection:** Whale numbers increase by 15%%. (Institute of Marine Research, 2022, p. 09)

3.3.4. Main challenges

- **Mass tourism:** Congestion in areas such as Tromso and Bergen. (Innovation Norway, 2023, p. 10)
- **Climate change:** Melting ice affects the landscape. (Norwegian Polar Institute, 2022, p. 15)
- **High cost:** Sustainable activities prices are 25% higher.%. (Statistics Norway, 2023, p. 25)

4. A Comprehensive Comparative Study: Sustainable Ecotourism Experiences (Costa Rica • New Zealand • Norway):

4.1. Comparison of basic economic indicators:

Table 4. Comparison of economic indicators for ecotourism

an experience	Costa Rica	New Zealand	Norway
Tourism's contribution to GDP	5.4%	5.8%	4.2%

Source: (Prepared by researchers, 2025)

It is clear from the previous table that:

- **New Zealand's superiority:** New Zealand has the highest contribution of tourism to GDP at 5.8%, ahead of Costa Rica (5.4%) and Norway (4.2%).%).

- **Number vs. Value:** Norway receives the largest number of visitors (6.8 million), followed by New Zealand (3.8 million) and Costa Rica (2.7 million), but the relative economic impact of Costa Rica and New Zealand is higher.
- **Specialized ecotourism:** Norway has the highest percentage of visitors for nature (83%), confirming the uniqueness of its niche ecotourism model.

4.2. Comparing environmental performance and sustainability:

Table 5. Comparison of environmental indicators

Environmental indicator	Costa Rica	New Zealand	Norway
Percentage of nature reserves	26%	33%	unavailable
Reducing carbon emissions	25%(Green Hotels)	40%(Hotels converted to renewable energy)	30%(Tourism Transport Sector)
Reforestation	52%(from 21%In 1987)	unavailable	unavailable
Protection of threatened species	40%sea turtle increase	25%Kiwi bird increase	15%Increase in whale numbers

Source: (Prepared by researchers, 2025)

It is clear from the previous table that:

- **New Zealand's leadership in reserves:** New Zealand devotes 33% of its land area to nature reserves, ahead of Costa Rica (26%), reflecting a strong commitment to protecting biodiversity.
- **Costa Rican excellence in afforestation:** Costa Rica has achieved an amazing feat by increasing forest coverage from 21% to 52%, a global model to emulate..
- **Norwegian excellence in sustainable transportation:** Norway is the best performer in reducing tourism transport emissions by 30%, thanks to its investment in electric ships and clean transport.

4.3. Comparing Sustainability and Innovation Models (Comparing Sustainability Strategies):

- **Costa Rican model:** Focuses on the sustainable tourism certification system (CST) with 380 certified hotels, and significant investment in biodiversity protection with 27 national parks.
- **New Zealand model:** It features the integration of Maori culture into tourism (30% of activities) and a Programme "Tiaki Promise" For ethical commitment, with the project "Predator Free 2050" to protect the environment.
- **Norwegian model:** Leading in technological innovation with electric ships (20% clean energy) and a plan to convert 60% of the fleet to clean energy by 2030.

4.4. Comparing challenges and solutions:

Table 6. Comparison of the main challenges

Challenge type	Costa Rica	New Zealand	Norway
high cost	20%+ For green hotels	15-20%+ For sustainable activities	25%For sustainable activities
mass tourism	Traffic congestion in Manuel Antonio	Traffic congestion in Rotorua and Queenstown	Traffic congestion in Tromsø and Bergen
Environmental challenges	Pressure on reserves	Impact on native species	Ice melting and climate change
Applied solutions	Certification and Evaluation System	Quota system and entry control	Clean transportation technologies and quotas

Source: (Prepared by researchers, 2025)

It is clear from the previous table that:

- **The Common Challenge - Cost:** All three countries face the challenge of rising costs of sustainable tourism, with Norway recording the highest increase (25%), followed by Costa Rica (20%) and New Zealand (15-20%).%).
- **The global congestion problem:** All countries suffer from overcrowding in popular tourist areas, which requires advanced visitor management solutions.

– **Diversity of solutions:** Each country applies different solutions - Costa Rica (certificate system), New Zealand (quota system), and Norway (clean technology).

4.5. Comparing the role of local community and culture(Local community participation in ecotourism):

- 120rural tourism project Run by local families.
- 30% from tourist activities Managed by Maori tribes.
- 75% from tourist buses clean energy powered.
- The Costa Rican Model - Rural Tourism: Provides 120 tourism projects run by local families with revenues of up to \$50 million annually, achieving an equitable distribution of economic benefits.
- The New Zealand Model - Indigenous Culture: Deeply integrates Maori culture into 30% of tourism activities, preserving cultural identity and enhancing it economically.
- The Norwegian model - Clean technology: Focuses on technological innovation, with 75% of tourist transport powered by clean energy, reducing environmental impact.

4.6. analysis SWOT Comparison:

Table No. (7): analysis SWOT Comparison

element	New Zealand	Costa Rica	Norway
– Strengths	– Integrate the original culture. – Vast reserves (33%). – Advanced protection programs.	– Advanced certification system. – Amazing reforestation. – Strong community engagement.	-Technological innovation. - Advanced clean transfer. - Specialized ecotourism.
– Weaknesses	– High cost (15-20%+). – Low engagement 13%.	– High cost (20%+). – Congestion in some areas. – Limited resources.	- Highest cost (25%+). - Impact of climate change.

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	- Seasonal crowding.		- Traffic congestion in major cities.
- Opportunities	- Promote traffic culture. - Expanding reserves. - Leading innovation.	- Expanding rural tourism. - Export the form. - Increase global awareness.	- Clean technology leadership. - North Pole tourism. - Transfer the experience globally.
- Threats	- Mass tourism. - Impact on native species. - Economic fluctuations.	- Climate change. - Regional competition. - Economic pressures.	- Melting ice. - Change of tourist areas. - Cost challenges.

Source: (Prepared by researchers, 2025)

From the above we conclude:

➤ **Best practices from Costa Rica:**

- Developing a comprehensive certification system for tourism establishments;
- Investing in community tourism projects;
- Long-term reforestation programs;
- Integrating sustainability criteria into all aspects of tourism.

➤ **Best practices from New Zealand:**

- Integrating indigenous culture into the tourism product;
- Applying the "leave no trace" principle on a large scale;
- Using quota systems to manage tourist flow;
- Advanced Threatened Species Conservation Programs.

➤ **Best practices from Norway:**

- Investing in clean transportation technology;

- Implementing strict policies to protect sensitive areas;
- Using advanced technology in monitoring and protection;
- Specializing in high-quality ecotourism.

5. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the successful international experiences of Costa Rica, New Zealand and Norway confirm that sustainable tourism development is not a slogan, Rather, it is a smart investment in the future that achieves multifaceted profits. These countries have proven that combining environmental protection and economic development is not only possible, but also the most profitable. stability in the long run, The common elements that have led to their success are: political and governmental commitment to enacting strict legislation, And empowerment Local communities, making them key partners in decision-making and revenue generation, innovation and smart marketing that highlights the added value of sustainability as a key attraction, and finally, tourism awareness that creates demand for responsible tourism.

The reality of these countries' experiences provides a clear message to planners and decision-makers everywhere: the future of tourism lies in its sustainability. Countries that invest in and preserve their environment, heritage, and culture will remain on the map of distinguished global tourist destinations, not to attract the largest number of tourists, but to attract the type of tourists who appreciate these values and contribute to preserving them, thus ensuring the continuity and prosperity of the sector for future generations..

– Results:

- Sustainable tourism development is not just about protecting the environment, but rather an integrated concept that balances three main dimensions: the environmental dimension (protecting resources), the economic dimension (achieving equitable benefits), and the social and cultural dimension (respecting and strengthening host communities).
- The essence of sustainability is long-term planning to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future

generations to meet their needs, reflecting an ethical responsibility between generations.

– The definitions showed that the success of sustainability depends on the involvement of the local community in decision-making and benefiting from tourism revenues, which transforms it from a passive recipient to an active partner.

– Sustainable tourism is inseparable from global goals, as it directly contributes to achieving a number of sustainable development goals. (SDGs) of the United Nations, especially those related to decent work, economic growth, and responsible consumption and production.

– Sustainable tourism has become a necessary framework for adapting to contemporary challenges, most notably climate change, by adopting low-carbon business models and building a more resilient tourism sector..

– Focusing on carrying capacity means that sustainability does not aim to prevent tourism growth, but rather to manage and control it within the limits of the natural and social resource capacity of the place, ensuring a quality experience for the visitor and a quality of life for the host.

– **Recommendations:** The study concluded with a set of recommendations, including:

– **Sustainability is not a luxury, but an investment with high economic returns:** Protecting the environment and cultural heritage is the basis for creating a unique and distinctive tourism brand that attracts highly aware and spending tourists.

– **Policy integration is a key to success:** the idea of sustainability cannot succeed if it is an isolated effort by the Ministry of Tourism only. Rather, it must be part of energy, transportation, agriculture, and environmental conservation policies.

– **Shared responsibility:** Success is the fruit of a true partnership between the government (as a legislator and monitor), the private sector (as an investor and innovator), and the local community (as a partner and key stakeholder).).

– **Marketing for value, not quantity:** the focus should be on attracting tourists who care about sustainability and appreciate the value of a unique experience, not necessarily on increasing numbers indefinitely..

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