

Evaluating Ecotourism: Principles, challenges and achievements from Tambopata, Peru

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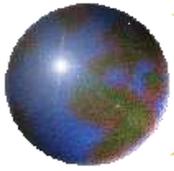


Presentation outline



- What is the nature of tropical rainforest?
- What are the threats to the biome?
- Can we conserve the biome through ecotourism?
 - case study from Tambopata in Peru (South America)
- Conclusions





Nature of tropical rainforest



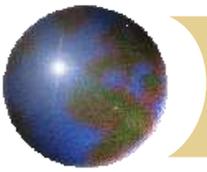
Tropical rainforest

- evergreen and water-loving in character, at least 30m high, rich in thick-stemmed lianes and epiphytes

Schimper (1903)







High diversity

- TRF harbours over 50% world's species on 7% land area
- Western Ecuador : 1030 woody plant species on 80 ha
- British Isles : 1380 woody plants in total





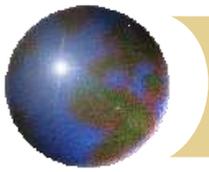
Threats to the biome



'The hands of people are inflicting more damage on the rainforests in a matter of years than the entire forces of nature have done over geological time scales'

- agents of destruction are:
 - commercial logging
 - animal pasture
 - re-settlement schemes
 - development projects
 - indigenous agriculture
 - commercial agriculture

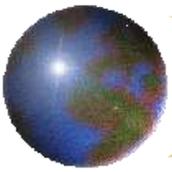




- ecological understanding at the landscape level can inform conservation management within the tropics

But ...

- we need to progress from polarised debates concerning
 - protection *versus* use
 - nature *versus* people
- biodiversity protection occurs in social space
- we need to promote sustainable use of biodiversity as a competitive form of land use

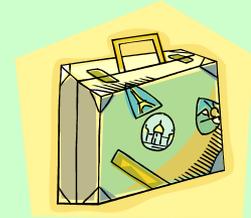


Conservation through ecotourism?

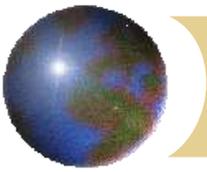


Characteristics of ecotourism

- 1) Travel to a natural area
- 2) Minimize visitor impact
- 3) Involve local populations
- 4) Promote conservation through environmental and cultural education of tourists
- 5) Feed economic profit into local environmental protection
- 6) Maintain financial benefits in the local community to ensure social and economic improvement



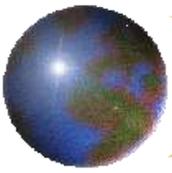
envisages **direct** + **positive** links between conservation and local cultures/incomes

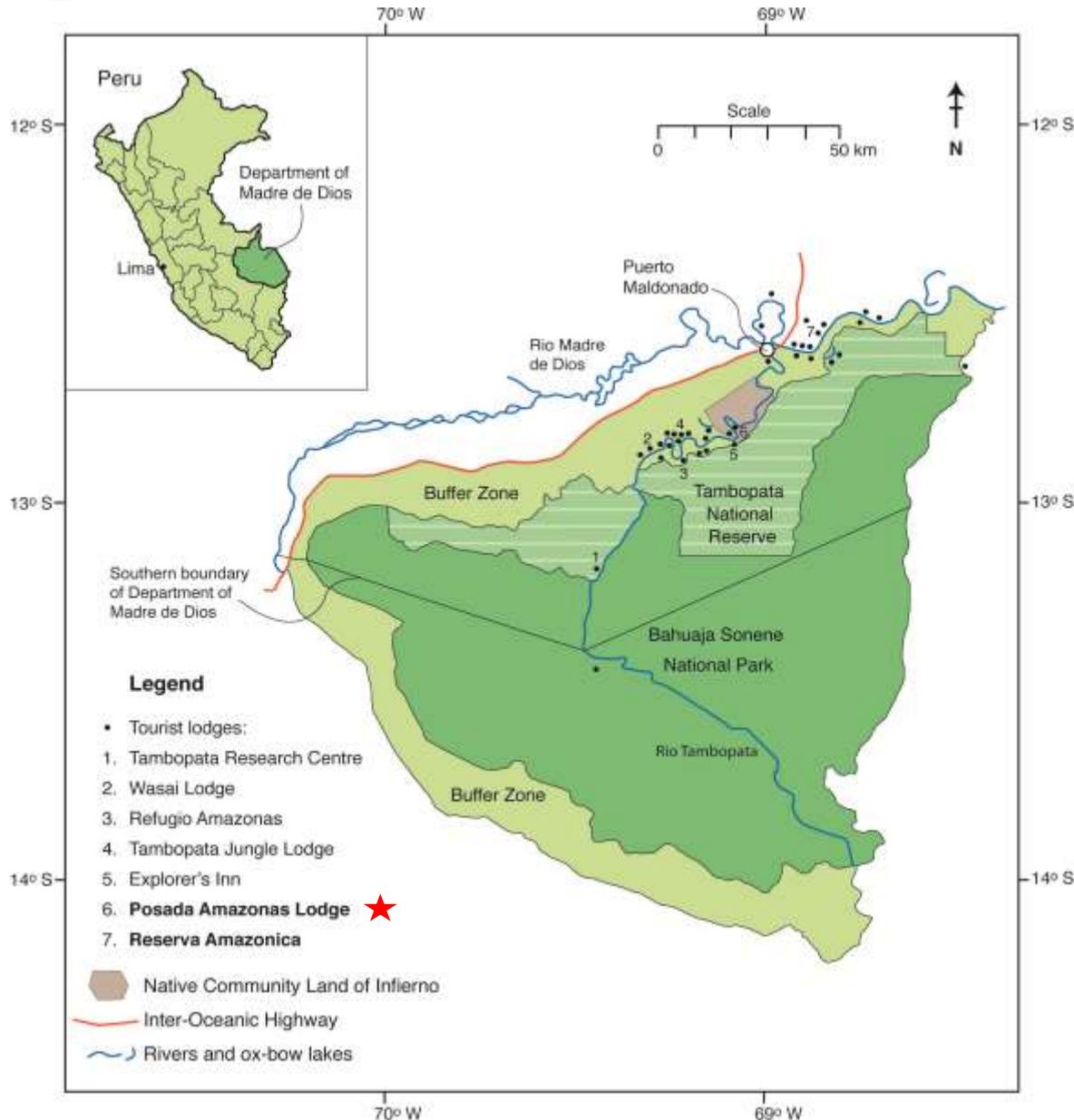


Case study

- in SE Peru the Andes foothills meet the W Amazon creating a hotspot of biodiversity
- protected area dating back to 1990, but since 2000:
 - Bahuaja-Sonene National Park (BSNP): 1.1 mill ha
 - Tambopata National Reserve (TNR): 274,690 ha
- these shelter 1300 species birds, 200 species mammals and ~10,000 species plants



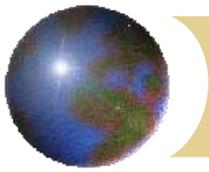




• increasing visitors prompted rise in no. of eco-lodges along the Madre de Dios & Tambopata Rivers :

- 1990: 3 lodges

- 2007: 37 lodges

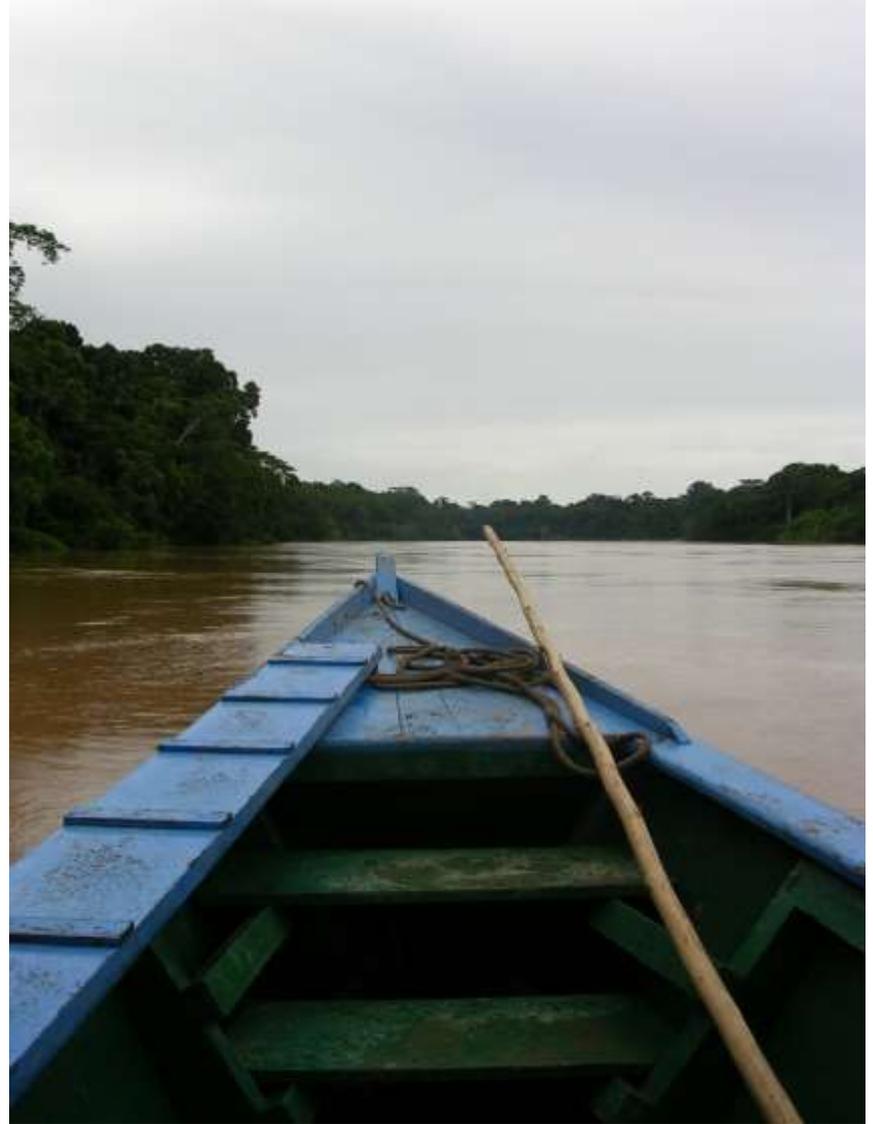
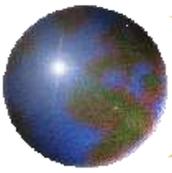


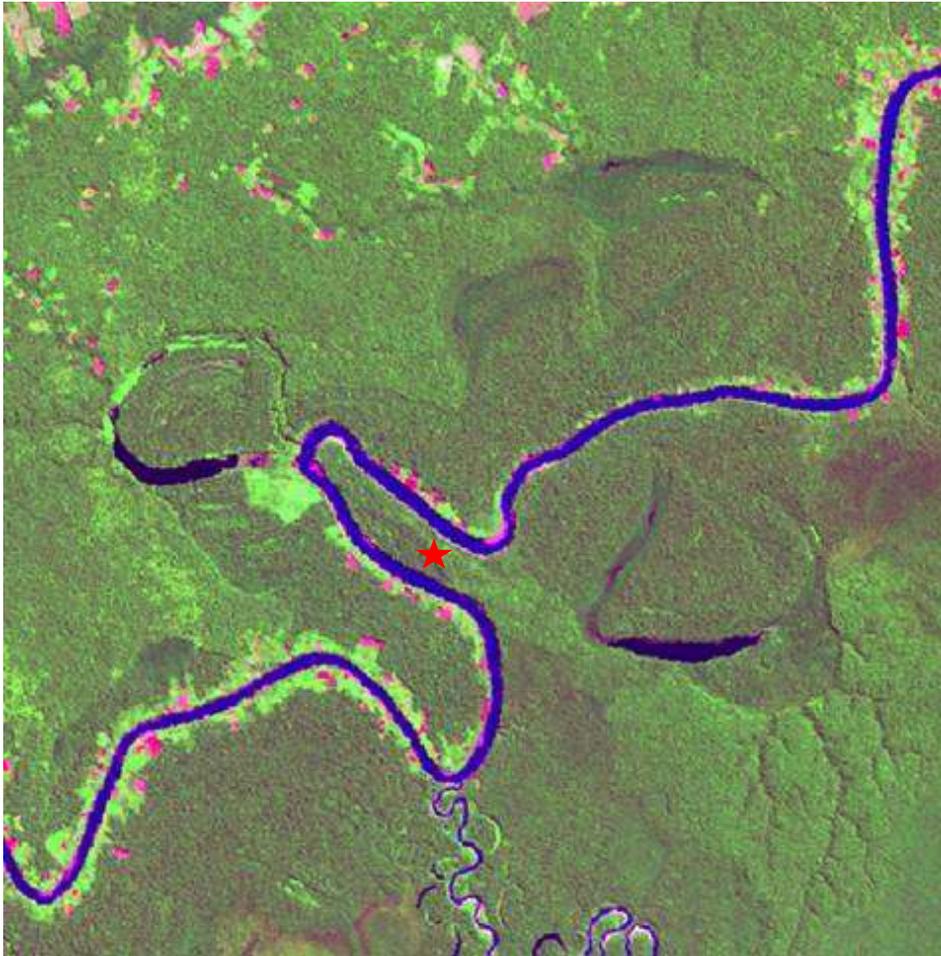
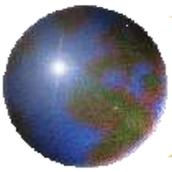
- Rainforest Expeditions (RFE) is a private ecotourism company established in 1992

- established by two Peruvian conservationists

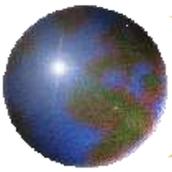
- aims:

‘to combine tourism with environmental education, research and local sustainable development to support the conservation of the areas in which the company operates’





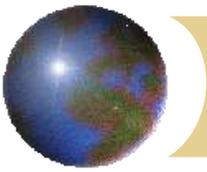
★ Approximate location of Posada Amazonas Lodge:
on the Tambopata River, 25km SSW of Puerto Maldonado



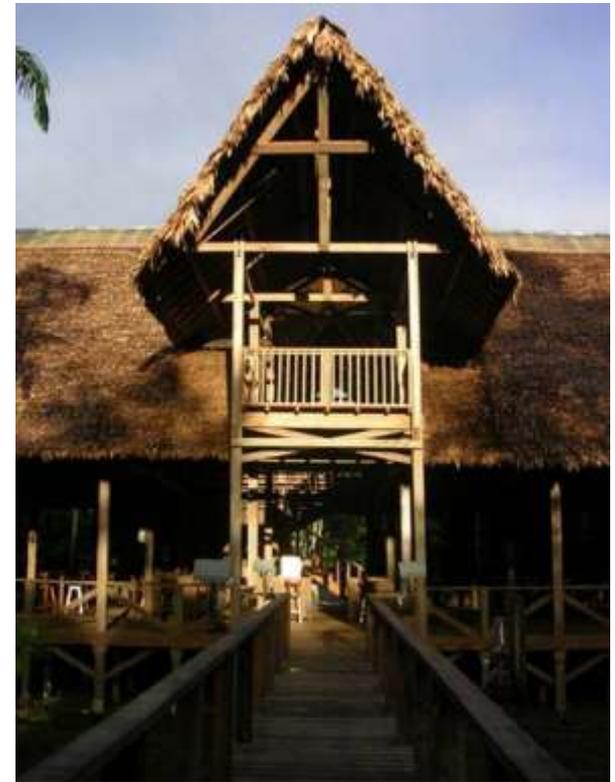
30 room lodge with minimal ecological footprint (1.5 ha)



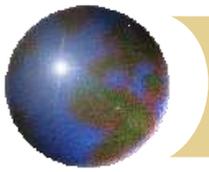
- constructed from local materials (selectively felled timber, palm fronds)



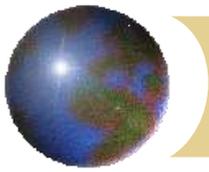
- number of visitors to the lodge each year is around 7,500 amassing almost 16,000 overnight stays
- visitors from:
 - North America (40%)
 - UK (15%)
 - Germany (15%)
 - Canada (10%)
 - Australia (10%)
 - Holland (5%)
 - Other (5%)
- activities nature based but some expansion into adventure and health



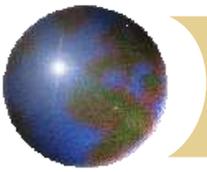
(Kurt Holle pers. comm. 2011)



- lodge owned by Ese'eja Native Community of Infierno and operated in partnership with RFE
- a legal contract was signed by RFE and the community in 1996 producing a democratically elected 10 member Ecotourism Committee
- this 20 year contract guarantees:
 - 60% profits from lodge go to local community
 - decision-making split equally amongst the two partners
- in 2016 the lodge will be passed in its entirety to the local community



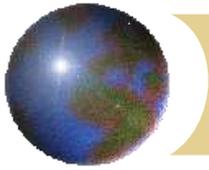
- community residents trained to occupy all lodge positions
- nearly all staff working in the lodge are from the Native Community
- apart from guides, each employee works at the lodge for 2 years before passing on the position to another community member
- today around 60 of approx. 180 families of the community are involved in the venture: guides, lodge workers and managers, suppliers



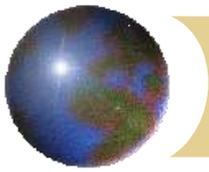
- low impact educational tours are conducted
- tourist-to-guide ratio is 10:1 to minimize impact on environment and wildlife
- guides are a mix of Peruvian naturalists and locals from the Ese'ejá community, having taken up apprenticeships





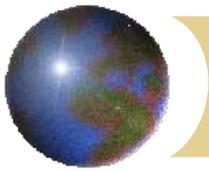


- contract between RFE and the Ese'ejá Community involves community responsibility for conservation
- prohibits hunting of wildlife considered a tourism resource: jaguar, otters, harpy eagles, macaws
- community committed not to hunt or cut forest in areas designated for ecotourism
- community project to manage populations of blue and yellow, green-winged and scarlet macaws on their land

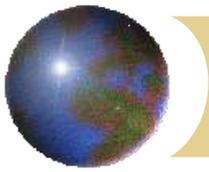


Evaluating ecotourism

- profits from lodge operation, wages from lodge employment are invested in the community
- in 2007, profits paid from lodge to community were approx. US\$148,000
- 3/4 divided among community members and remainder used for school construction and investment in education
- to 2010 average annual growth of the economic impact of the lodge in the community was 17%

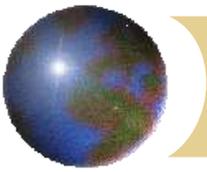


- local community empowered in tourism venture from the beginning
- community expresses and accepts responsibility in the venture: educated to make informed decisions
- investment made in formation of human and institutional capital through community capacity building
- conscientious community environmental protection: passing of authority to local community: fusion knowledge
- interpretive programmes to develop visitor awareness of environment and conservation



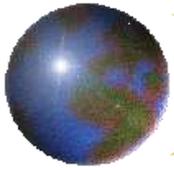
but

- there needs to be community consensus in terms of desired evolution (what of heterogeneous communities?)
 - some internal conflicts due to ethnic differences
 - women more limited than men in terms of economic opportunities
- need to minimise economic leakage from community and income disparities between families
- need to avoid commodification of culture



Overall ...

- how does ecotourism rate against ecological protection?
- how does ecotourism cope in a recession?
- what of ecotourism's global carbon footprint?
- what is the potential for ecotourism to prepare communities to plan a sustainable future *for themselves*?
- what are the possible knock-on effects of ecotourism in encouraging other anthropogenic land use changes?
 - road construction
 - colonization
 - selective logging
 - agriculture
 - hunting
 - gold mining



Conclusions



- cautiously optimistic that ecotourism at Posada Amazonas is helping to **protect** local rainforest, while meeting the **socio-economic needs** of the Ese' eja Comm.
- need to progress from the 'standard' model of ecotourism
- ecotourism must act as a springboard for critical thinking, local decision-making and sustainability

