1. Introduction

The development of ecotourism in different topographical landscapes results in quite different types of ecotourism activities and attracts different tourist markets. Particularly, its development can be distinguished into terrestrial and coastal/marine areas. Do the two regions have distinct characteristics in the process of ecotourism development? How could they affect the success of ecotourism? And can ecotourism managers have done with these differences to steward their ecotourism projects towards a responsible and sustainable form? They are tough questions that the authors would like to answer in part by doing a comparative study on ecotourism between Japan and Vietnam.

In this paper, the authors focus on marine ecotourism by doing two case studies in Japan and Vietnam. Based on two case studies in Akkeshi Town (Hokkaido, Japan) and Van Don (Quang Ninh Province, Vietnam), the authors discuss patterns of ecotourism development in coastal regions, and suggest a solution to make use of fishermen's lifestyle to diversify ecotours and improve the participation rate among local fishermen.

2. Methodology

As tourism studies need a multi-disciplinary approach, the authors apply several approaches at the same time, including the supply-demand approach in economics, tourism system approach in tourism geography, tourist behaviour approach in sociology, etc. Particularly, the authors regard ecotourism as "philosophy of sustainability in tourism industry". In other words, to be ecotourism, it must satisfy three key criteria (Fig. 1.).

Moreover, to develop "genuine ecotourism", a community-based approach is highly recommended in ecotourism projects. In coastal and marine areas, fishermen's participation is indispensable for the success of local tourism industry. As a result, a solution will emphasize the co-existence between fishermen and their environment.

3. Marine ecotourism and its development in Japan and Vietnam

3.1. Marine ecotourism

Few academic papers mention marine ecotourism as a separate topic from various schools of thought in ecotourism. In fact, marine ecotourism concept refers to geographical classification of ecotourism development in coastal and marine areas in comparison with that of terrestrial areas. It covers ecotourism development in foreshore, offshore and coastal zones (Garrod & Wilson 2003).

Main marine ecotourism activities are sea-based (particularly focusing on mega fauna and "opportunistic sightings" or opportunities to observe typical animals). Nevertheless, land-based activities are also acceptable and are considered as a substitute for sea-based activities in case of unfavourable conditions of local weather. Furthermore, non wildlife-based activities (e.g. those focus on unique cultural and heritage characteristics of coastal regions and communities) are also considered a form of ecotourism.

In comparison with terrestrial ecotourism, marine ecotourism is more dynamic, open and sensitive as marine wildlife is "highly mobile", "remote and diffuse". Pollutions and bad impacts are more serious and widespread due to "interconnectivity" by water environment, almost non-spatially compartmentalized (Garrod & Wilson 2003). Tourism resources are more likely to be in modified condition.

Fishermen are the main component of villagers living in marine ecotourism destinations. In comparison with people in remote mountainous areas, they are more open and more sensitive to tourism business. However, their income is less stable in terms of seasonality, endangered by the increasing impacts of global issues such as global warming.

3.2. Marine ecotourism development in Japan and Vietnam

Based on analyses of ecotourism in Japan and Vietnam, it is clear that ecotourism in practice have been widespread in space and have more combinations in products. Ecotourism, particularly marine ecotourism, started in protected areas in the early phase and then to well-known tourist destinations to lesser well-known ones (Fig. 2.).

In this process, marine ecotourism is more likely to develop into Type 2 if its natural resources satisfy mass tourism by nature with the improvement of accessibility. That explains for an increasing model of eco-resorts in quite geographically-
isolated islands. This will be illustrated by the example of Van Don (Quang Ninh Province, Vietnam). Otherwise, marine ecotourism will develop into Type 3 with an emphasis on village revitalization. It will be discussed in the case study of Akkeshi Town (Hokkaido, Japan).

![Diagram of Types of Ecotourism]

**Fig.2. Typology of ecotourism**

4. Case studies

4.1. Akkeshi Town (East Hokkaido, Japan)

Akkeshi Town has the total area of 739 km², with the population of 11,164 people (2008) (population density is 15 people/km²), is the habitat for 4,441 households. Most of them are fishermen. 31.8% of the labor force work in agriculture, forestry and fishery (23.8% of which work in fishery), 23% in industry and construction, 45.2% in service sector (2005). 60% of fishermen are males. The main product is seaweed/kelp.

The figures of tourist arrivals have showed a downward tendency in the last 15 years (e.g., over 600,000 visitors in 1997 to around 350,000 visitors in 2007). About 90% of visitors come from places within Hokkaido. Inbound tourists are rare, from Russia, China, Korea, etc.

Three main tours offering are Seal watching tour, River touring by canoe, Experience of shellfish digging. However, the demand is low, and the tours are rarely implemented. Economic benefit, as a result, is too small to revitalize the economy, though only minor environmental effects are being observed. Other mass tourism activities are spring festivals, summer festivals. Main tourism revenue is obtained through Akkeshi Mikaku Taminara Konkirke.

4.2. Van Don District (Quang Ninh Province, Vietnam)

Van Don is made of over 600 islands and small islets in the northeast of the Tonkin. It has the total area of 553.2 km², with the population of 41,447 people (2008) (population density 75 people/km²). Most of them are fishermen. 76.8% of the labor force work in agriculture, forestry and fishery (25.7% of which work in fishery), 6% in industry and construction, and 17.2% in service sector (2005). The main product is "sa sung". Their income is unstable.

The figures of tourist arrivals have showed an upward tendency in the last 10 years. For example, in 2001 the district host only 30,000 visitors, but in 2007 the number of visitors rocketed to around 276,000. About 90% of visitors are domestic. Inbound tourists are rare, from Europe, China, etc.

Ecotours have often appeared in papers but not really been implemented in practice. Only researchers and students of universities are their eco-tourists. Other favorable activities for mass markets are beach-related activities (e.g. sun-bathing, swimming), festivals, and religious and historical places visiting.

Economic benefit flows into the hands of a few households who open accommodations for tourists and supply basic demand like food and beverage, transportation in offshore islands. Though their profit tends to increase, they have to compete unfairly with outsiders, and consequently, there seem to be a big room for "economic leakage". Environmental impacts are to be increasing in accordance with the growth of new infrastructure and tourism facilities.

4.3. Suggestions

The two case studies, in spite of differences in terms of tourism development, share a same problem in ecotourism. That is a low rate of local participation in tourism development (Kobayashi 2002). One reason is a lack of models of ecotours that normal villagers can possibly take part in.

The authors suggest a model by making best use of the fishermen's lifestyle, which is a high degree of seasonality of their jobs, and the leisure time of labours, particularly female labour, to encourage them to get involve in ecotourism activities. Experience tours on "sa sung" digging skills or jelly-fish processing skills seem to be highly applicable in the case of Van Don.

5. Conclusion

Marine areas are one of the main foci for the development of ecotourism. With the widespread tendency of ecotourism by nature, marine and coastal zones have become more important destinations in order to attract foreign exchange in both developing and developed countries. However, to steward the development of ecotourism toward a sustainable form, the involvement of fishermen - the main component of local communities in marine and coastal zones - is a key to success. Focusing on the two case studies, the authors emphasize the patterns of marine ecotourism development in Japan and Vietnam, and suggest a solution based on the co-existent relationship between fishermen and their habitat.

Main references


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