



# TRAIT AND IMAGE INTERACTION In Ecotourism Preference

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**Abstract:** Understanding the complex interactions between ecotourists and ecodesinations is important to ecotourism decision making, including regulatory, operating, and marketing decisions. We introduce a methodology and statistical model designed to separate cleanly the complex relations between the ecotourist traits of attitude towards the environment and involvement with ecotourism, and the ecodesination images defined by the degree to which nature, learning, sustainability, and infrastructure development are perceived to be part of a destination. The model allows the sensitivities of preferences to ecotourist traits to depend on their image of destinations, and allows a random component, rather than modeling and estimating sensitivities as fixed parameters. The conceptual framework, model formulation, and a guide for interpreting the calibrated model are presented. **Keywords:** ecotourism, destination image, traits, random coefficient model, interaction. © 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

Dominant areas of ecotourism research involve the nature of ecodesinations, and the characteristics of ecotourists, which Weaver and Lawton (2007) refer to as the supply and demand dichotomy. The supply and demand sides are deeply intertwined, as evidenced by the fact that ecotourists are typically described not only by traits that are enduring and independent of destinations, but also by their preferences for specific kinds of destinations. Similarly, destinations are often characterized by their image, and image is subjective and therefore varies with individual tourists (Gallarza, Saura, & García, 2002; Mazanec, 1994).

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