



Mr. Jones wants to take his family on a socially and environmentally responsible trip but does not know where to start. Where can he research different destinations? Where can he book his trip? The type of trip that Mr. Jones has in mind is called ecotourism, but there is currently no online resource where he can both research and reserve an ecotourism vacation. Mr. Jones needs a site that compiles comprehensive reviews and ratings of ecotourism opportunities and also includes direct booking opportunities. In other words, he needs Ecoviator. Ecoviator, a website whose name comes from the Greek prefix “eco” and the Latin word for travel, has ratings, reviews, and direct booking, making it every Internet user’s passport to ecotourism.

So what exactly is ecotourism? It is an emergent and quickly growing sector of the travel market that promotes “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.”¹ The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), the leading organization for the promotion of ecotourism, has identified six criteria for ecotourism¹:

1. Minimizes impacts.
2. Builds environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
3. Provides positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
4. Provides direct financial benefits for conservation.
5. Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people,
6. Raises sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate.

Ecotourism, in places like Dubai, Kenya, and Belize, gives travelers the opportunity to visit places of stunning beauty and have exciting adventures in a socially and environmentally responsible way. Studies in Britain have shown that many travelers would pay up to \$150 more for this kind of experience². As previously stated, this is a growing sector of an already large market, the travel market. As the popularity of ecotourism continues to rise, travelers will be even more in need of a place to research and book their ecotourism adventures.

Ecoviator offers three main services to its users. First, it educates travelers about what kinds of ecotourism opportunities exist, providing them a place to browse through their options. Searches allow users to focus their research on geographic areas, price ranges, or specific activities in order to make finding the right trip easier. Second, Ecoviator provides evaluations of ecotourism trips and segmented ratings based on TIES criteria. These “eco-ratings” allow users to decide for themselves how much they value certain aspects of the ecotourism model, and they provide additional information about the ecotourism offerings. Third, Ecoviator provides a direct booking option that lets users immediately book their trip on-site as soon as they have identified their preference. These three key services allow users to find their ideal environmentally friendly vacation while also avoiding “green washing” (false or misleading claims about eco-friendliness). Also, Ecoviator helps develop practical, consumer-driven support for sustainable travel.

Ecoviator is split into four branches: Ratings, Web Services, Sales and Marketing, and Financial. The Ratings division identifies new ecotourism opportunities, reviews the services, and rates them to provide an “eco-score.” The Web Services sector designs and maintains the website.

¹Source: TIES, 1990

²Source: Travelbiz, 2002

The Sales and Marketing team publicizes the company and makes sure the prices for all ecotours are current. The Financial team manages budgets and accounting.

Ecoviator is committed to environmental sustainability, and promises to provide several environmental benefits. First, Ecoviator will be carbon negative within five years. Users are encouraged to buy carbon offsets for their travel, and as an added incentive, Ecoviator matches their offset purchases. These purchases, as well as heightening public appeal, will eventually lead to carbon negativity. Also, Ecoviator creates business for institutions that use fewer resources than traditional resorts and hotels, thus putting less strain on the surrounding environment. Finally, Ecoviator preserves forests by providing money to people who might otherwise make a living from deforestation.

Ecoviator faces competition from several sources, but none of them are as effective as resources for travelers interested in ecotourism. Other online travel sites, like Orbitz.com and Expedia.com, offer users that ability to book travel online while comparing prices, but they provide little to no information on the travel being booked. Travel advice and review sites offer information, but they do not allow for direct booking. There are a few ecotourism-specific sites, but these are often regional and limited in scope. Traditional travel agents often have the capability to compare and book ecotours, but there is a far greater demand for online travel information, which is easier and more convenient. Along with competition, Ecoviator also faces various risks, including the risk that a company with which we contract will fail. To counteract this risk, Ecoviator thoroughly examines all companies with whom we allow users to book tours, ensuring that they are solvent and that they implement safe business practices.

Ecoviator earns revenue from three main sources. First, we put a 7-10% premium on tours sold through our site. We are able to charge this kind of premium due to the lack of market efficiency and competition. Second, we earn revenue through online advertising. This revenue will increase as the website gains popularity and garners more hits. Third, once Ecoviator establishes a rapport with tour providers, we start to charge a commission for each customer we direct to them. In these three ways, Ecoviator generates enough revenue to cover operational costs and to earn profit. Ecoviator's costs come from four sources: SG&A, technology, marketing, and labor.

Ecoviator will begin with relatively few tours on our site (around 50) with team members traveling to review and rate each one. As the company grows, more tours and ecotourism activities will be added to the website, increasing Ecoviator's appeal and utility over time. Within five years, users will be able to book their entire trip, from doorstep to doorstep, on the Ecoviator site. Eventually, we intend for Ecoviator to be acquired by a larger online travel company.

Ecoviator fills an unoccupied yet promising role as the only comprehensive website for ecotourism, the fastest-growing segment in an already large, expanding market. Ecoviator is the only site on the Internet to provide ratings, reviews, and direct booking for ecotourism. Such services are in high demand, and they will continue to be in demand for a long time to come. With the proper start-up funds, Ecoviator can fully take advantage of this demand and profit from it.