

# Why Tour Guiding is Important for Ecotourism: Enhancing Guiding Quality with the Ecotourism Promotion Policy in Japan

Naoko Yamada\*

Department of Tourism, Conventions and Event Management, Indiana University–Purdue  
University Indianapolis, 901 West New York Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202, USA

*The Ecotourism Promotion Policy in Japan requires tour guiding to be employed, although it provides little rationale for it. This paper reviews the literature to illustrate why tour guiding is important for achieving policy and ecotourism goals in order to support this requirement. An overview of ecotourism policy in Japan is provided, contributions of tour guiding to achieving the policy and ecotourism goals are described, and approaches to strengthening current practices along with the policy are discussed. It is suggested that non-profit organizations offer training to impart knowledge about guiding roles and interpretation at a national level and that ecotourism promotion councils teach knowledge about ecotour products and tourists at a regional level.*

**Key words:** ecotourism, tour guiding, interpretation, Ecotourism Promotion Policy, Japan

## Introduction

Many authors have argued over the definition of “ecotourism”; however, what is apparent is that a central pillar of ecotourism is sustainable resource use on site. Ecotourism involves a wide range of resources, such as natural and cultural artifacts, events/festivals, and natural environment, and strives to achieve ecologically and socially sustainable development.

As the International Ecotourism Society (1990) states, ecotourism “conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”. As ecotours involve seeing or experiencing resources on which local people typically depend for their lives, sociological and cultural aspects of the community as well as the natural environment must be taken into consideration. The World Tourism Organization (2008) claims sustainable

---

\*Email: katura3@hotmail.com. Now affiliated to the Division of Sport Science, Pusan University, Korea.

tourism must be managed in "a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems". Ecotourism supports the growth of the tourism industry and human societies in a sustainable manner while maintaining healthy ecosystems.

These goals of ecotourism may well be attained through tour guiding with the use of interpretation. Interpretation is an approach to communicating a message and typically takes place at protected areas where natural and cultural resources are predominant, such as national parks, national forests, museums, zoos, aquariums and botanical gardens (Ham, 1992). Interpretation does not merely provide information but can develop an understanding and appreciation of resources and help manage tourists' impact on resources (Eagles, McCool, & Haynes, 2002). It is often viewed as a management tool, because it can help increase public support for management, appreciation of the environment, and careful behavior on sites (Alcock, 1991; Jelinek, 1990). The World Tourism Organization (2008) suggests that "interpretation of the natural surroundings, local culture, and cultural heritage should be provided to customers, as well as explaining appropriate behavior while visiting natural areas, living cultures, and cultural heritage sites" to contribute to effective management. The United Nations Environment Program (1995) emphasizes the need for guidance, education and information for both the visitors and the residents working in ecotourism. According to many authors (Beck & Cable, 1998; Knudson, Cable, & Beck, 1995; Lewis, 1980; Regnier, Gross, & Zimmerman, 1994; Sharpe, 1982), interpretation is typically capable of protecting resources at the site, enhancing audiences' recreational experience, increasing public

support of the management policy and agency, raising audiences' levels of concern about their environment, and adding to or broadening audiences' perspectives about a place or idea. Interpretation can often contribute to the promotion of the proper usage of the resource and area that visitors are experiencing, especially at those locations where the improper behavior of visitors has been known to cause problems (Ham & Krumpal, 1996; Kuo, 2002; Lackey & Ham, 2003). Black and Weiler (2005) reviewed a number of studies and identified interpreter as the most predominant role that tour guides play. It is widely acknowledged that tour guides should offer interpretive experiences. Tour guiding, therefore, embraces interpretation hereafter in this paper, unless mentioned otherwise.

The Ecotourism Promotion Policy, which requires employing tour guiding, recently took effect in Japan. This paper reviews literature that explains why and how tour guiding can play an important role in achieving ecotourism goals in order to support the policy's view. An overview of the ecotourism policy is provided, the roles of tour guiding expected by the policy are presented, and the contributions of tour guiding to achieving the policy and ecotourism goals are discussed. The paper recommends avenues to enhance current policy practices and guiding quality.

To review the relevant literature, publicly available documents were collected through Internet searches and thorough exploration of library databases with regard to ecotourism policies in Japan and research findings about impacts of tour guiding and interpretation. The policy documents, which include the Ecotourism Promotion Law, the Ecotourism Promotion Policy and the Manual for Promoting Ecotourism, were analyzed with a content analysis technique to understand

how tour guiding was viewed in the policy. Research articles were reviewed to uncover what impacts tour guiding had made in association with ecotourism goals. After reviewing these documents, a gap was determined between what had been addressed and what should be included in the Japanese ecotourism policy to increase appreciation and effectiveness of guiding. A desirable approach that fills this gap and fits the current Japanese situation was sought. Documents on tour guide training were also reviewed to identify areas that should be included in a future training program in Japan because of training's high potential for enhancing guiding quality.

### **Ecotourism Policy in Japan**

The Ministry of Environment is one of the leading governmental sections responsible for promoting ecotourism in Japan and established the Ecotourism Promotion Policy in 2008 to provide a holistic framework of ecotourism development (Ministry of the Environment, 2008). The Ministry actively promotes ecotourism as an alternative use of national parks (Hiwasaki, 2003). It conducted ecotourism feasibility studies in some national parks in 1990 and selected an area in Iriomote Ishigaki National Park as a model ecotourism development site in 1991. The Ministry has extended support for ecotourism development since 2004 and determined five approaches to promote ecotourism: developing a charter, establishing a website on ecotours, giving best practice awards, developing a manual and supporting model ecotourism projects. The website on ecotours has expanded since then, and, as of December 2009, it contains 343 ecotours, 479 operators and 115 accommodations (Japan Ecotourism Society, 2009a). Ecotourism awards have been

annually given to approximately 10 tour operators, organizations, or communities that take care of the environment and contribute to community development. A Manual for Promoting Ecotourism was produced in collaboration with the Japan Ecotourism Society in 2004 (Ministry of the Environment, 2004a). Thirteen model ecotourism projects were supported between 2004 and 2006. In addition, the Ecotourism Promoting Policy defined four governmental institutions that take responsibility for developing ecotourism: the Ministry of Environment; the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport; the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Prior to the policy establishment, the Ecotourism Promotion Law was passed in 2007 (Ministry of the Environment, 2007). The law provides that "the government must establish a basic policy on promoting ecotourism based on ecotourism principles" and it "must listen to wide public opinions" in the process of developing a basic policy. The policy was developed based on these determinants.

The policy suggests creating an ecotourism promotion council that consists of a wide variety of stakeholders in a community. The council is to develop an overall ecotourism plan, implement it, periodically check its progress, assess it, and revise it if needed. An overall ecotourism plan may be accredited by one of the governmental agencies, and accreditation enables a municipality to designate a "natural tourism resource" in the ecotour area to protect it legally. The plan must identify an area in which ecotours will occur, major natural tourism resources, ways to implement ecotourism, techniques to protect and manage resources, stakeholders included in the council, and a guide training program. In

September 2009, an ecotourism overall framework developed by Hanno City was first accredited by the Ministry of the Environment based on the Ecotourism Promotion Law.

### *Interpretation Development in Japan*

Earlier than ecotourism development, environmental interpretation started extending its practice mainly at natural parks in Japan. Natural parks include 29 national parks, 56 quasi-national parks, 308 prefectural natural parks and five marine park zones in Japan. Although the parks were set aside to protect the scenic beauty, they are also managed for multiple uses, such as public health, recreation and cultural development of the people (Ministry of Environment, 2002). The Ministry of the Environment introduced a nature instructor program in the parks in 1974 after 20 years of a temporary volunteer instructor program (Office of Communication with Nature, 2008). Non-governmental organizations started offering nature instruction or guiding, and they have been a driving force in advancing interpretation in Japan (Hiramatsu & Horie, 2009; Hiwasaki, 2006; Nishimura, 2006). For example, the Nature Conservation Society of Japan (2009) started offering training for nature observation instructors in 1978, and the Association for Interpretation Japan (2009) started offering interpreter training courses in 1992. Fujita (2004) pointed out that the expansion of visitor centers across the nation in 1995 contributed to the growth of interpretive guided walks, which are conducted by park officers in the parks. In addition, ecotourism development has facilitated the growth of interpretation and tour guiding in Japan. The Whole Earth Nature School (2009), one of the primary private

organizations of ecotourism, began ecotour guide training in 1998, and the Japan Ecotourism Society (2009b) started ecotour guide training in 2005. To date, progress has been made in offering a range of interpretive programs and services in the natural parks and protected areas (Iwanaga, 2004; Takahashi & Hirota, 2006; Yui, Katsunori, & Kiso, 1996).

In accordance with the expansion of interpretation in Japan, increased attention has been paid to advocating and experiencing interpretation by the public. The Ministry of the Environment (2004b) has viewed interpretation as an avenue of conservation management and public nature experience in the natural parks. A survey conducted by the Ministry of the Environment (2009) revealed that 36% of randomly selected public respondents sought more information on interpretive programs in national parks. In a 2-day survey with visitors at a natural park on Mt Fuji, Yamamoto and Hongo (2006) observed that some types of visitor, such as repeat visitors, older visitors and visitors in a group with three or more members, expressed the need for a guide during hiking. Interpretation and guiding have been gaining wide interest.

### *The Role of Tour Guiding in Ecotourism Policy in Japan*

Introducing and training tour guides is one of the major foci among governmental efforts to promote ecotourism in Japan. The majority of the Manual for Promoting Ecotourism focuses on tour guiding, outlining how to design and present tour guiding and introducing non-personal interpretation techniques, such as brochures, signage and self-guided trails (Ministry of the Environment, 2004a). Presentation skills are highly valued because

“the way to conduct guidance and the content to be spoken during guidance influence how tourists feel, and therefore, directly impact the success of ecotourism” (p. 8).

Offering information about and experience of local nature and culture is called “guidance” in the manual. Guides offer guidance and may be called nature instructors, nature guides, or interpreters. The outcomes of guidance are described in the manual as follows:

Through guidance, tourists can deeply understand the local nature and culture, explore new aspects, and experience enjoyable time. Deeply understanding nature and culture means not only gaining knowledge or information but also recognizing local beauty and a relationship between nature and people through experience. (p. 8)

According to the manual, major differences between ecotours and other tours include exploring or feeling local beauty as well as enjoying what tourists are experiencing through a guide or other information tool, which cannot be accomplished by merely seeing. The manual states that determining rules and conducting guidance are the keys for successful ecotourism promotion. It further explains that the most important tasks for guides include meeting the needs of tourists and increasing their satisfaction, while avoiding accident risks and reducing impacts on the natural environment. Guides also should increase tourists’ interests in nature and local culture and prompt them eventually to develop environmentally responsible behaviors. The manual defines four major roles that guides must play: guide, instructor, facilitator and coordinator.

In addition, the Ecotourism Promotion Law defines ecotourism as “an activity to experience natural tourism resources and enhance knowledge and understanding about them as

well as to consider their protection through guidance and advice given by tour conductors who are knowledgeable about the resources”. It requires the inclusion of guidance in ecotourism. Also, in order to obtain an accreditation for an overall plan developed by an ecotourism promotion council, it must address who conducts what types of guidance where as well as how to provide guide training. Furthermore, the purpose of the law states “ecotourism has an important role in the conservation of natural environment, development of creative tourism in communities, and promotion of environmental education that increases environmental conservation awareness”.

The need for and importance of tour guiding is clearly described in the policy. Guiding is viewed as facilitation of conservation and environmental education. Few explanations, however, are provided about ways in which tour guiding can achieve ecotourism goals. The focus is rather placed on general techniques of designing and implementing interpretation. This is similar to Black and Weiler’s (2008) findings that showed low use of research in policy-making and planning undertaken by Australian protected area management agencies, despite the research’s power to enhance greatly the contributions of interpretation to management practice. To increase appreciation of guides’ roles and help convince tour operators of why limited resources should be allocated to hire quality tour guides, evidence of guides’ accomplishments should be provided. The following section reviews the literature to serve as a basis for identifying guides’ roles in ecotourism goal achievement. It also illustrates how tour guides can maximize their capabilities. With such information, strong support will be added to using tour guiding as required by the Ecotourism Promotion Policy in Japan.

## Roles of Tour Guiding in Ecotourism

Tour guiding has a variety of potential benefits to ecotourism, such as promotion, recreation, education, management, conservation and economy (Wearing & Neil, 1999). According to Eagles, Browman, and Tao (2001), interpretive facilities and publications are designed with at least one of four purposes: (1) to increase visitors' awareness about a resource or attraction; (2) to alter the behavior patterns of visitors and residents; (3) to explain community, organization, or agency goals and objectives to visitors and residents; and (4) to orient visitors to the area. Several authors have reported the accomplishment of these purposes through interpretation or educational programs in ecotourism (Beckmann, 1988; Black & Ham, 2005; Eagles et al., 2002; Zeppel, 2008). Weiler and Ham (2002) further argue that guides play a role in creating a balance between their employers and land managers and meeting the needs of tourists, operators, host communities and protected area managers. "Interpretive guiding is the application of the principles of ecotourism and interpretation to leading tour groups and managing the visitor's experience" (p. 54). The authors contend that tour guiding plays a vital role in establishing a link between people and places in ecotourism because it "strives to engender an intellectual, emotional and even spiritual connection between people and places" (p. 54). Through tour guiding, ecotourism becomes value-added tourism for multiple stakeholders, which makes ecotours stand out among other types of tour.

One of the main roles of guiding is to add new value to ecotour resources and foster appreciation of them, which will lead to site conservation. The ultimate goal, then, is probably to facilitate tourists' exhibition of environ-

mentally considerate behaviors both on site and at home. As the Ecotourism Promotion Law in Japan describes a role of ecotourism as promotion of environmental education, accomplishing the goals of environmental education is a primary task for tour guiding.

### *Achieving Goals of Environmental Education in Ecotourism*

Environmental education in ecotourism settings enables tourists and local people to be environmentally aware (Periera, 2005; Skanavis, Matsinos, & Petreniti, 2004). At the world's first Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education in 1977, the Tbilisi Declaration was agreed on to identify goals of environmental education (UNESCO, 1977). The Tbilisi Declaration also recommended five categories of objectives in environmental education: awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills and participation. These objectives ought to be achieved in ecotourism, and tour guides are capable of performing such a role.

1. *Increasing awareness.* Ecotourism aims to create a climate in which tourists are aware of and sensitive to the natural environment in the local community. For example, Matsushima (2007) examined the effects of interpretation on visitors' awareness of environmental problems at the public beach in Ishikari, Japan, and found that the visitors who received interpretation on the conservation of the beach were more aware of the problem caused by visitors' depreciative behaviors. He recommended the use of interpretation as a beach management tool. In another study about visitor experience at 12

ecotour sites in New Zealand, Higham and Carr (2003) observed that the interpretation of environmental issues contributed to raising visitors' awareness about the issues.

2. *Gaining knowledge.* Tourists gain understanding of the local environment and its associated problems through tour guiding. For example, Orams (1997) found knowledge gain by tourists who had participated in a structured educational program at a nature resort in Australia. Also, Armstrong and Weiler (2002) conducted a study about message deliveries by guides during nature-based tours in Victoria, Australia, and reported that conservation messages were recalled by tour participants. In addition, knowledge gain can link to attitude change, which is described next.
3. *Changing attitudes.* Attitude change can be accomplished through positively changing tourists' values, producing positive feelings towards the environment, and/or increasing knowledge. An example is given in Wiles and Hall's (2005) study in Mesa Verde National Park in the USA. They demonstrated that tourists' attitudes towards wildfire were positively changed after experiencing interpretation tours. Other studies (Novey & Hall, 2007; Wiles & Hall, 2005) have also reported positive changes in visitors' knowledge and attitudes through interpretation.
4. *Acquiring skills.* Through explaining or demonstrating environmentally considerate actions during a tour, guides can help tourists to acquire skills for identifying or solving problems. For example, Lackey and Ham (2004) studied the effects of strategic interpretation in Yosemite National Park in the USA to inform visitors about proper behavior to prevent human-bear conflicts. Visitors were able to recall the

recommended behaviors, such as storing food in a particular manner, after being exposed to the interpretation. Imparting the conservation skills to tourists can also lead to the following objective.

5. *Facilitating participation.* Participating in solving an environmental problem is the ultimate goal of both environmental education and ecotourism. Tour guides can provide tourists with an opportunity to take part in improving a problem on site. In a study conducted by Powell and Ham (2008) at Galapagos National Park, tourists showed increased intention to donate to conservation programs after experiencing interpretation on a cruise tour. This donation behavior was an example action suggested by tour guides. Another example was demonstrated by Ham et al. (2008), who utilized strategically developed interpretive messages to reduce wildlife feeding, keep dogs on leashes, and pick up litter by visitors in three national parks in Australia. Moreover, engaging in an action is conducive to awareness. Lee and Moscardo (2005) examined the impacts of ecotourism resort experiences on tourists and showed that the respondents who were more involved in environmentally considerate actions at the resort were more aware of the negative environmental impacts of not taking the actions. Facilitating tourists to take such an action on site also results in producing empowerment among tourists, allowing them to see that they are making a difference.

As the final goal of environmental education suggests, tourists should be encouraged to perform an environmentally considerate behavior during an ecotour. The International Ecotourism Society (1990) also advocates taking a particular action on site as a goal of

ecotourism in order to minimize impact, build environmental and cultural awareness and respect, and provide positive experiences for both tourists and hosts. Also, taking a particular action can increase tourists' satisfaction because most tourists on ecotours intend to be environmentally responsible (Orams, 1995).

Contrary to these positive influences, a study conducted by Ballantyne and Hughes (2001) showed that tour guides regarded their role as delivering accurate information more than viewing it as taking environmentally conscious action on site by monitoring, protecting and conserving the natural environment. In a study about tourists' satisfaction with ecotours in Australia, Weiler (1999) reported that tourists' dissatisfaction was owing to the poor performance by guides with regard to the discussion or encouragement of sustainable practices, appropriate off-site behaviors and minimal impacts. She explained that the tourists preferred to hear the discussion or encouragement of those topics. Furthermore, Higham and Carr (2003) conducted a study about visitor experiences at wildlife tours in New Zealand and found that visitors appreciated interpretation that advocated conservation, raised awareness of environmental issues, and encouraged low-impact visitor behaviors on site. The visitors also believed the presence of guides helped manage visitors' inappropriate behaviors. Moreover, in Peake, Innes, and Dyer's (2009) study of whale-watching tours in Australia, it was found that conservation-related information and actions provided by guides contributed significantly to tourists' understanding of conservation messages and their overall satisfaction. These studies suggest that tour guides should recognize the invaluable roles they are playing in conservation, acting as role models on site, to enhance

tourists' experiences and ecotour effectiveness. Peake et al. proposed dual dimensions of tourists' satisfaction in ecotours: satisfaction may derive from a sense of empowerment, and satisfaction with ecotour experience may empower ecotourists to take some responsibility for and contribute to conservation. They consider locus of responsibility, which is a concept of responsible action derived from a perceived locus of control whereby individuals perceive that their actions can make a difference, a potential outcome of ecotourism experience. Enabling tourists to feel locus of control and empowerment on site, therefore, may be the key to ecotourism goal accomplishment. For example, tourists may be introduced to participating in beach clean-ups, choosing environmentally considerate products, data collection for field research activities, or membership application to conservation organizations. Tourists may be encouraged not to take a counterproductive action, such as having close contact with wildlife, littering, or collecting natural or cultural resources to take back home. The five objectives of environmental education should be recognized as goals of tour guiding through documents and training, so that guides will be able to know what they are accomplishing and for what purposes. This will also make clear what should be offered during guiding experiences.

### **Enhancing Guiding Quality**

As comprehensive guiding contributes to the success of ecotours, the quality of guiding can be an issue. For example, Baba and Morimoto (2006) conducted a visitor survey at Yakushima Island in a Japanese natural park and reported that visitors had failed to understand the basic information about the

site, safety information on the site, and awareness of the overuse of the site even if an ecotour guide accompanied the visitors. The authors argued the lower understanding and awareness may have been due to the insufficient skill of guides. Hiwasaki (2006) analyzed four ecotourism cases in Japan and listed nine challenges of nature tourism in protected areas, one of which pointed out the issue of poor guiding quality. In her studies, visitors were dissatisfied with ecotour guides “who have been criticized for not making efforts to offer high-quality interpretation although they charge high fees” (p. 683). She pointed out that guides may lack knowledge about the local culture and environmental practices or lack skills to engage tourists. Guides may need to be trained to enhance or maintain their guiding quality.

### *Approaches to Enhancing Guiding Quality*

According to Black and Weiler (2005), there exist six mechanisms that may improve guiding performance: professional associations, awards of excellence, training, professional certification, licensing and codes of conduct. Of these six mechanisms, the first three have already been conducted in Japan: professional associations, awards of excellence and training. First, two nationwide non-profit organizations, the Japan Ecotourism Society and the National Ecotour Center, were established to provide professional support, such as raising awareness of ecotourism, uniting the guiding industry and elevating its image. Second, these two organizations have offered ecotour guide training since 2005 and 2007, respectively. A private organization, the Whole Earth Nature School, has also offered ecotour guide training since

1998. Third, the Ministry of the Environment has given awards of excellence, which recognize and reward excellence in guiding, to tour operators, organizations, or communities since 2005.

This in turn suggests that the other three mechanisms that have not been implemented yet in Japan may be a future focus in facilitating tour guiding through policy: professional certification, licensing and codes of conduct. Professional associations can be instrumental in introducing or supporting other mechanisms (Black & Weiler, 2005). Hence, it is suggested for a nationwide non-profit organization, such as the Japan Ecotourism Society or the National Ecotour Center, to take an initiative to develop professional certification and codes of conduct. According to Black and Weiler, seeking certification is generally voluntary and includes a process of assessment, but providing certification requires organization-defined skills and knowledge. By contrast, creating codes of conduct requires low investment in time and money because codes of conduct are generally considered as a tool to raise awareness rather than a means to control quality, resulting in less effective quality enhancement. The two non-profit organizations have involved a wide variety of individuals, from practitioners, to operators, researchers and public supporters. They have higher potential than other organizations to gather skillful and knowledgeable individuals and collect their opinions with regard to rules and principles of ecotourism in a balanced manner. They would also be helpful in developing codes of conduct because outside expert advice is almost always required to do so (META-project, n.d.). Moreover, it is suggested that the Ministry of the Environment develop a licensing system; because licensing is generally a mandatory legal requirement for professionals to

practice, a governmental institute should be involved in this process.

### *Training of Tour Guides*

Although executing all six mechanisms maximizes the potential to enhance guiding quality, considering the time and cost required for launching one mechanism, advancing an already existing one will be more efficient. As Black and Weiler (2005) concluded that training, professional certification and licensing have the greatest effects on improving guiding performance, current training practices can be extended in Japan. The Ecotourism Promotion Policy also requires an ecotourism promotion council to plan how to train tour guides to be accredited. Several studies have argued for the need to train tour guides for successful ecotours (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2001; Black & Ham, 2005; El-Sharkawy, 2007; Peake et al., 2009; Periera, 2005; Weiler, 1999). Lackey (2008) collected the information from 58 academic institutions that offer interpretation courses in North America and analyzed the skills taught in the courses to identify how future heritage interpreters are being trained. She listed 14 skills and knowledge types that should be gained by students in interpretation courses. The first four skills, along with their frequencies of response, include the following: interpretation concepts, principles, methods, philosophy and history (24 institutions); development/presentation of interpretive talks, walks and illustrated talks (24 institutions); evaluations of interpretive presentations and products (21 institutions); and non-personal interpretive products such as exhibits, brochures, signs and interpretive planning (19 institutions). Weiler and Black (2003) listed the seven areas of knowledge

and skills that are relevant for ecotour guides: the ability to meet tourists' needs and expectation; the ability to guide according to legal, ethical and safety requirements; general knowledge about the destination; the ability to deliver accurate and relevant commentary; sensitivity to cross-cultural needs and differences; the ability to deliver enjoyable yet educational messages; and the ability to manage a group. They argued that these competencies should be acquired through training. Moreover, Weiler and Ham (2002) claimed that an ideal curriculum for training should incorporate at least three categories: expansion and refinement of product knowledge; language training where required; and interpretive guiding skills for managing tourist experiences and delivering high-quality interpretation.

Based on these authors' assertions, guides can be trained in three aspects: guiding, products or resources, and tourists. First, tour guides must be trained to become interpreters who can plan, design and present personal and non-personal interpretation in order to provide quality guiding services. Interpreter is the most predominant role that ecotour guides play (Black & Weiler, 2005). Second, tour guides need to understand accurately the sites, resources and products in order to protect them as well as foster tourists' understanding of them. This information may be site-specific and can be taught locally. Third, tour guides must understand tourists in terms of their needs and desires, languages and cross-cultural differences in order to satisfy them as a return for money the tourists have paid (Salazar, 2007). This knowledge varies depending on sites because the exact same tourists cannot appear at different sites, and therefore it needs to be taught locally. Training programs may be developed and offered by each council, as Weiler and Ham contend

that local initiation and leadership in providing training are needed. These three aspects should be covered in training, in addition to the linkage between guiding and the goals of environmental education.

### **Summary and Recommendations for Current Practice**

The Japanese Ecotourism Promotion Policy requires tour guiding to be employed during an ecotour, and the majority of the Manual for Promoting Ecotourism focuses on techniques to design and implement tour guiding and non-personal interpretation. Little information, however, is provided on guiding achievements in relation to the goals of environmental education in these documents, which may hinder the support for facilitating tour guiding. Information on guiding achievements will help increase awareness of the guides' roles as well as help convince tour operators to allocate limited resources to tour guiding. It is therefore suggested that we must address the specific impacts that tour guiding can make with the linkage between guiding and environmental education goals. This information should be included in a policy-related document, so that tour guides will understand their goals and tasks regardless of sites.

Considering the time and cost required for launching a new mechanism that enhances guides' performances, advancing an already existing mechanism will be more efficient. In this context, training should receive primary attention. In training, the following four subjects ought to be included: (1) the importance of guiding in relation to achieving ecotourism and environmental education goals; (2) interpretation skills; (3) information about ecotour products and resources; and (4)

knowledge about tourists. The former two subjects may be taught nationally because of their fundamental importance to tour guiding regardless of sites. By contrast, the latter two should be taught regionally owing to the need for site-specific information. In this context, it is suggested that the Ministry of the Environment add explanations of guiding impacts on achieving the environmental education goals to one of its documents, such as a manual. Also, it is suggested that the Japan Ecotourism Society and the National Ecotour Center offer training programs that provide these explanations. Moreover, it is suggested that an ecotourism promotion council, which is required to make guide training available, provide the information about ecotour products, resources and tourists at its own site.

For quality guiding, the two nationwide non-profit organizations may take the initiative to develop codes of conduct, as third parties, because of their capabilities to reach and collect multiple stakeholders' viewpoints. They may also initiate developing professional certification because of its voluntary system. On the other hand, the Ministry of the Environment can develop a license system, or at least support it, because a governmental agency has the authority to impose mandatory legal requirements on practicing professionals.

To support the view of the Ecotourism Promotion Policy in Japan, it is recommended that the impacts of tour guiding be elucidated in policy-related documents, so that tour operators will appreciate the importance of guiding and guides will understand what should be demonstrated. The review of literature on guiding roles and approaches to enhancing guiding quality in this paper will hopefully help to identify the next steps in ecotourism development in Japan.

Finally, this review of the literature has revealed a shortage of studies regarding

ecotour guiding in Japan. Only a couple of studies on impacts of ecotour guides or interpretation are available. Most of the studies reviewed in this paper were conducted in Western countries, such as Australia and the USA. This may inhibit direct application of their findings and implications for Japanese situations, and additional perspectives may be required before adopting them. Further research is encouraged to investigate guiding impacts and training in Japan, so that approaches that best suit Japanese needs can be suggested.

## References

- Alcock, D. (1991). Education and extension: Management's best strategy. *Australian Parks and Recreation*, 27(1), 15–17.
- Armstrong, E. K., & Weiler, B. (2002). Getting the message across: An analysis of messages delivered by tour operators in protected areas. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 1(2/3), 104–121.
- Association for Interpretation Japan. (2009). *Interpreter training*. Retrieved April 14, 2009, from <http://interpreter.ne.jp/>
- Baba, T., & Morimoto, Y. (2006). Visitor's qualification and issue in Yakushima Island as an ecotourism promotion area [in Japanese]. *Environmental Information Science*, 20, 159–164.
- Ballantyne, R., & Hughes, K. (2001). Interpretation in ecotourism settings: Investigating tour guides' perceptions of their role, responsibilities and training needs. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, 12(2), 2–9.
- Beck, L., & Cable, T. (1998). *Interpretation for the 21st Century*. Champaign, IL: Sagamore Publishing.
- Beckmann, E. A. (1988). Interpretation in Australia: Some examples outside national parks. *Australian Parks and Recreation*, 24(3), 8–12.
- Black, R., & Ham, S. H. (2005). Improving the quality of tour guiding: Towards a model for tour guide certification. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 4(3), 178–195.
- Black, R., & Weiler, B. (2005). Quality assurance and regulatory mechanisms in the tour guiding industry: A systematic review. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, 16(1), 24–35.
- Black, R., & Weiler, B. (2008). Factors facilitating and inhibiting the use of research to inform interpretation practice: A case study of Australian protected area management agencies. *Visitor Studies*, 11(2), 163–180.
- Eagles, P. F. J., Browman, M. E. & Tao, T.C.-H. (2001). *Guidelines for tourism in parks and protected areas of East Asia*. Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK: IUCN.
- Eagles, P. F. J., McCool, S.F., & Haynes, C. D. (2002). *Sustainable tourism in protected areas – Guidelines for planning and management*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.
- El-Sharkawy, O. K. (2007). Exploring knowledge and skills for tourist guides: Evidence from Egypt. *Tourism: An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*, 2(2), 77–97.
- Fujita, H. (2004). Japanese environmental education and interpretation [in Japanese]. *Journal of the Japanese Institute of Landscape Architecture*, 67(4), 209–292.
- Ham, S. H. (1992). *Environmental interpretation: A practical guide for people with big ideas and small budgets*. Golden, CO: North American Press.
- Ham, S. H., & Krumpal, E. E. (1996). Identifying audiences and messages for nonformal environmental education: A theoretical framework for interpreters. *Journal of Interpretation Research*, 1(1), 11–23.
- Ham, S. H., Weiler, B., Hughes, M., Brown, T., Curtis, J., & Poll, M. (2008). *Asking visitors to help: Research to guide strategic communication for protected area management*. Gold Coast, Australia: Collaborative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism.
- Higham, J.E. S., & Carr, A. M. (2003). Sustainable wildlife tourism in New Zealand: An analysis of visitor experiences. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, 8, 25–36.
- Hiramatsu, R., & Horie, N. (2009). A study on introduction and development of interpretation program in national government parks [in Japanese]. *Landscape Research Japan*, 72(5), 585–590.
- Hiwasaki, L. (2003). Tourism in Japan's parks and protected areas: Challenges and potential for sustainable development. *International Review for Environmental Strategies*, 4(1), 107–126.
- Hiwasaki, L. (2006). Community-based tourism: A pathway to sustainability for Japan's protected areas. *Society and Natural Resources*, 19, 675–692.
- International Ecotourism Society. (1990). *Definitions and principles*. Retrieved March 8, 2009, from [http://www.ecotourism.org/webmodules/webarticlesnet/templates/eco\\_template.aspx?articleid=95&zzoneid=2](http://www.ecotourism.org/webmodules/webarticlesnet/templates/eco_template.aspx?articleid=95&zzoneid=2)
- Iwanaga, S. (2004). *Studies on interpretive architecture design* [in Japanese]. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba.

- Japan Ecotourism Society. (2009a). *Ecotour comprehensive*. Retrieved February 2, 2010, from <http://ecotourism.jp/>
- Japan Ecotourism Society. (2009b). *Ecotourism guide training seminars*. Retrieved September 1, 2009, from <http://www.ecotourism.gr.jp/>
- Jelinek, A. (1990). An interpretation emphasis for park management. *Australian Parks and Recreation*, 26(4), 32–33.
- Knudson, D. M., Cable, T.T., & Beck, L. (1995). *Interpretation of cultural and natural resources*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing.
- Kuo, L. (2002). The effectiveness of environmental interpretation at resource-sensitive tourism destinations. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 4(2), 87–101.
- Lackey, B. K. (2008). The state of interpretation in academia. *Journal of Interpretation Research*, 13(1), 27–36.
- Lackey, B. K., & Ham, S. H. (2003). Contextual analysis of interpretation focused on human–black bear conflicts in Yosemite National Park. *Applied environmental education and communication*, 2(1), 11–21.
- Lackey, B. K., & Ham, S. H. (2004). Assessment of communication focused on human–black bear conflict at Yosemite National Park. *Journal of Interpretation Research*, 8(1), 25–40.
- Lee, W. H., & Moscardo, G. (2005). Understanding the impact of ecotourism resort experiences on tourists' environmental attitudes and behavioural intentions. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 13(6), 546–564.
- Lewis, W. J. (1980). *Interpreting For Park Visitors*. Philadelphia, PA: Eastern Acorn Press.
- Matsushima, H. (2007). Effects of using interpretation method in regard to public beach management at Ishikari Coast, Hokkaido. *Landscape Research Japan*, 70(5), 523–526.
- META-project. (n.d.). *Planning for marine ecotourism in the EU Atlantic area: Good practice guidance*. Retrieved March 9, 2009 from <http://www.tourism-research.org/planning.pdf>
- Ministry of Environment. (2002). *Natural parks law*. Retrieved August 3, 2009, from [http://www.env.go.jp/en/laws/nature/law\\_np.pdf](http://www.env.go.jp/en/laws/nature/law_np.pdf)
- Ministry of the Environment. (2004a). *Manual for promoting ecotourism*. Retrieved from <http://www.env.go.jp/nature/ecotourism/manual.html>
- Ministry of the Environment. (2004b). *Shizen kouen no arikata ni tsuite* [How natural parks should be]. Retrieved April 14, 2009, from [http://www.env.go.jp/nature/ari\\_kata/shiryout/122\\_tyuukan.pdf](http://www.env.go.jp/nature/ari_kata/shiryout/122_tyuukan.pdf)
- Ministry of the Environment. (2007). *Ecotourism promotion law*. Retrieved January 8, 2008, from <http://www.env.go.jp/nature/ecotourism/law/law.pdf>
- Ministry of the Environment. (2008). *Ecotourism promotion policy*. Retrieved January 9, 2008, from [http://www.env.go.jp/nature/ecotourism/basic\\_policy/basic\\_policy.pdf](http://www.env.go.jp/nature/ecotourism/basic_policy/basic_policy.pdf)
- Ministry of the Environment. (2009). *Kokuritsu kouen ni kansuru ankeito shuukei kekka* [Results of questionnaire survey on national parks]. Retrieved April 14, 2009, from [http://www.env.go.jp/nature/park\\_an/04.html](http://www.env.go.jp/nature/park_an/04.html)
- Nature Conservation Society of Japan. (2009). *NACS-J no tokuchou* [Characteristics of NACS-J]. Retrieved April 14, 2009, from <http://www.nacsj.or.jp/nacsj/index.html>
- Nishimura, H. (2006). Nihon ni okeru shizengakkou no doukou [Trends of nature schools in Japan]. *Graduate School of Policy and Management, Doshisha University*, 8(2), 31–44.
- Novey, L. T., & Hall, T. E. (2007). The effect of audio tours on learning and social interaction: An evaluation at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. *Science Education*, 91(2), 1–18.
- Office of Communication with Nature. (2008). *Shizen tono fureai* [Overview of promotion of communication with nature]. Retrieved April 14, 2009, from [http://www.env.go.jp/nature/fureai\\_pamph/index.html](http://www.env.go.jp/nature/fureai_pamph/index.html)
- Orams, M. B. (1995). Using interpretation to manage nature-based tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 4(2), 81–94.
- Orams, M. B. (1997). The effectiveness of environmental education: Can we turn tourists into “greenies”? *Progress in Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 3, 295–306.
- Peake, S., Innes, P., & Dyer, P. (2009). Ecotourism and conservation: Factors influencing effective conservation messages. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 17(1), 107–127.
- Periera, E. (2005). How do tourist guides add value to an ecotour? Interpreting interpretation in the state of Amazonas, Brazil. *FIU Reviews*, 23(2), 1–8.
- Powell, R. B., & Ham, S. H. (2008). Can ecotourism interpretation really lead to pro-conservation knowledge, attitudes and behaviour? Evidence from the Galapagos islands. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 16(4), 467–489.
- Regnier, K., Gross, M. & Zimmerman, R. (1994). *The interpreter's guide book: Techniques for programs and presentations* (3rd ed.). Stevens Point, WI: UW-SP Foundation Press, Inc.

- Salazar, N. B. (2007). Towards a global culture of heritage interpretation? Evidence from Indonesia and Tanzania. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 32(3), 23–30.
- Sharpe, G. W. (1982). *Interpreting the environment* (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Skarvanis, C., Matsinos, Y. G., & Petreniti, V. (2004). Environmental education potential for Greek ecotourism. *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 61(6), 735–745.
- Takahashi, W., & Hirota, J. (2006). Effects to the national park management which a non profit organization brings about: Case study of Daisetsuzan Nature School in the Daisetsuzan National Park [in Japanese]. *Journal of Rural Planning Association*, 25(Special Issue), 323–328.
- UNESCO. (1977). *Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education*. Tbilisi (USSR): UNESCO in co-operation with UNEP.
- United Nations Environment Program. (1995). *Technical report series No. 29: environmental codes of contact for tourism industry*.
- Wearing, S. & Neil, J. (1999). *Ecotourism: Impacts, potentials and possibilities*. Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Weiler, B. (1999). Assessing the interpretation competencies of ecotour guides. *Journal of Interpretation Research*, 4(1), 80–83.
- Weiler, B. & Black, R. (2003). Nature, heritage and interpretive guide training: Mirror on the past and window to the future. In B. Weiler & R. Black (Eds.), *Interpreting the land down under: Australian heritage interpretation and tour guiding*, (pp. 21–40). Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.
- Weiler, B., & Ham, S. H. (2002). Tour guide training: A model for sustainable capacity building in developing countries. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 10(1), 52–69.
- Whole Earth Nature School. (2009). *Ecotourism kenkyu* [Ecotourism research]. Retrieved April 22, 2009, from <http://wens.gr.jp/ecotourism/04.html>
- Wiles, R., & Hall, T. E. (2005). Can interpretive messages change park visitors' views on wildland fire? *Journal of Interpretation Research*, 10(2), 18–35.
- World Tourism Organization. (2008). *UNWTO world tourism barometer*. Retrieved March 22, 2009, from [http://www.unwto.org/facts/eng/pdf/barometer/UNWTO\\_Barom08\\_3\\_en\\_LR.pdf](http://www.unwto.org/facts/eng/pdf/barometer/UNWTO_Barom08_3_en_LR.pdf)
- Yamamoto, K., & Hongo, T. (2006). A study of the environmentally friendly consciousness of users and the need for the guide in Aokigahara Jukai in Japan. *Landscape Research Japan*, 69(5), 641–644.
- Yui, M., Katsunori, F., & Kiso, J. (1996). A study on the activities of interpretation in the national vacation villages [in Japanese]. *The Technical Bulletin for Faculty of Horticulture, Chiba University*, 50, 135–148.
- Zeppel, H. (2008). Education and conservation benefits of marine wildlife tours: Developing free-choice learning experiences. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 39(3), 3–17.