

Kenya adopted ecotourism in the 1990s as a strategy to address environmental and local development problems facing many of her tourism destinations. After two decades, most of the problems that ecotourism sought to address still persist. In and around protected areas, there exist many contradictions as conventional mass tourism practices coexist with sustainable practices associated with ecotourism. Using an evaluative approach, this paper analyses the persistence of practices in three tourism destination (the Mt Kenya, Maasai Mara National Reserve and the Amboseli national park). The paper finds that despite introduction of interventions such as policy and legal framework and certification to establish sustainable and responsible ecotourism sector, these destinations still face many challenges of environmental nature. First, there is widespread violation of set regulations governing use of the protected areas especially by tour operators/drivers. Secondly, increasing visitor numbers in protected areas impact the carrying capacity by eroding their ecotourist appeal. Tourism entrepreneurs exacerbate the problems by constructing tourism accommodation and leisure facilities in disregard of environmental requirements thus eroding the destination's ecotourism allure. Finally, community activities also threaten the establishment of a responsible ecotourism practice as increased crop farming interests exposes these protected areas to encroachment risks.