

# Ecotourism as an alternative to traditional tourism (Saoura region model) L'écotourisme comme alternative au tourisme traditionnel (La région de Saoura comme modèle)

NEFFAH Zakarya<sup>1\*</sup>; BAHOUSSI Medjdoub<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Tahri mohammed, Bechar, Algeria, [zakaryaneffah@gmail.com](mailto:zakaryaneffah@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup> University of Tahri mohammed, Bechar, Algeria, [mahjoub\\_bahoussi@yahoo.fr](mailto:mahjoub_bahoussi@yahoo.fr)

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## Abstract:

The tourism sector has achieved a great level of development and activity, because of several factors such as the rising of income level, standard of living, political stability and security .... etc. On the other hand this development contribute to damage of the environment , in this regard, Philip Kotler said that one of the most important social welfare threats is The pollution. For that the eco-tourism was an alternative to traditional tourism, It's a Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. Based on that, this paper aims to clarify the basics and elements of eco-tourism with reference to a model of eco-tourism in Algeria (Saoura area).

**Keywords:** Tourism, Eco-Eourism, Environmental Problem, Bechar's state (Saoura area)

**(JEL) Classification :** L83 ·Q50.

## Résumé:

Le secteur du tourisme a atteint un niveau de développement et d'activité élevé en raison de plusieurs facteurs, tels que l'augmentation du niveau de revenu, le niveau de vie, la stabilité politique et la sécurité, etc., etc. D'une autre part, cette évolution contribue à la dégradation de l'environnement. À cet égard, Philip Kotler affirme à ce propos que la pollution est l'une des menaces les plus importantes qui menacent le bien-être humain. Pour cela, l'écotourisme était une alternative au tourisme traditionnel, c'est un voyage responsable dans des zones naturelles qui préserve l'environnement et améliore le bien-être de la population locale. Sur cette base, cet article vise à clarifier les bases et les éléments de l'écotourisme en se référant à un modèle d'écotourisme en Algérie (région de Saoura).

**Mots-clés:** tourisme, éco-tourisme, problème environnemental, La wilaya de Bechar (région de Saoura).

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\* Corresponding author: *NEFFAH Zakarya*, Email: [zakaryaneffah@gmail.com](mailto:zakaryaneffah@gmail.com)

## **1. INTRODUCTION:**

The tourism activity has witnessed a great development in recent decades, both in terms of the high number of tourists or the high revenues generated by this activity due to the improvement in the standard of living, through the reduction of working hours and the increase of wages and paid holidays ... etc, which gave great vitality to tourism activity. This has opened up new horizons in the tourism industry by creating new trends and innovative tourist services that are more diversified to suit every segment of customers. Large tourist structures have been created that provide entertainment, transport and accommodation services without taking into account the absorption capacity of the receiving tourist areas, neither the negative effects of these activities on the environment, where the only concern was how to obtain an immediate financial revenues, that lead to the depletion of natural resources, and the continuous deterioration of the environment and even cultural heritage.

### **1.1. Research Problematic:**

The tourism sector is one of the most important sectors which contributes to the national economy because of the foreign currencies that are provided by tourists which is useful for the local economy. However, the tourism activity, especially in the countries with large tourist attraction, has made huge quantities of wastes. In this regard Philip Kotler said that the most important threat to human well-being is the high level of pollution. By this we can say that the emergence of the environmental and social negative effects of tourism has created an urgent need for the emergence of other patterns that are alternative to traditional tourism, which positively affect the environment and at the same time contribute to increase the percentage of profits derived from tourism activity. So, here comes environmental tourism with an ecological balance, which aims to reflect on nature, plants, animals, and provide comfort to humans, not to damage the ecological balance, with linking investments and productive projects with the local community and protecting the environment, biodiversity and cultural areas of tourism. In this context, the problematic of our research is represented by the following question:

Can eco-tourism be considered as an alternative to traditional tourism?

## 1.2. Research Aims:

This study aims at clarifying the components of eco-tourism as part of sustainable tourism as it follows its environmental, economic and social bases, and contributes to the preservation of cultural and natural heritage, it works to involve the local population, and contribute to the planning and development of projects and thus contribute to economic development rather than preservation of the natural environment.

## 2. The theoretical framework of tourism and eco-tourism:

We'll treat some generalities of tourism and ecotourism as follows:

### 2.1. Concepts of tourism:

The concept of tourism is derived from the word "tour", which is derived from the Latin word "Torno". The term *Tourisme* was used for the first time in 1643 to indicate travel or roaming from one place to another. Here we'll refer to some definitions related to tourism from the linguistic and conventional aspects as follows:

- Guyer-Freuler gives a psychological definition for tourism where he says that : "The Tourism is a natural phenomena of modern ones, where it aims at rebuild health, to get recreation and change the environment that human lives in, and to cultivate the feeling of receptivity towards beauties of nature"(Graham Dan; 2009).

Tourism is defined as the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited. The use of this broad concept makes it possible to identify tourism between countries as well as tourism within a country. 'Tourism' refers to all activities of visitors, including both 'tourists (overnight visitors)' and 'same-day visitors'. (Stephen J. Page, 2007).

**Definition of the World Tourism Organization:** "Tourism is a group of activities provided to persons by the occasion of their travel and residence in places outside of their usual environment for entertainment, business or other reasons"(Alexis Papathanassis, 2011) .

According to definitions which we offered above, we conclude that:

Tourism is the activity which is doing by persons in order for entertainment, through moving to different other places where many relations are established

between different individuals and communities, which enabling the exchange of different cultures and languages, and enabling the identification of different customs and traditions. Also it has an economic dimension where it enables countries to provide new capital that contribute in the development and progress permanent.

## **2.2. Eco-tourism as an alternative to traditional tourism:**

Since the seventies of the last century, the conservation of environment has taken great interest that lead to save it at all levels including the field of tourism. Which have combined to produce the phenomenon of ecotourism, which at its simplest is environmentally responsible tourism in a natural setting. Eco-tourism is one of the most important types of tourism, not only for its economic returns, but also for its political returns, social returns, cultural impact and human and cultural interaction.

### **2.2.1. Defining ecotourism:**

The ecotourism has proved to be an enduring concept in the popular as well as the academic literature of travel and tourism. So, we'll present some definitions of ecotourism as following:

all scholars agree on the fact that ecotourism is “a form of nature-based travel, near-natural or protected areas to admire natural attractions” (*Hannah Schwamborn, 2014*) .

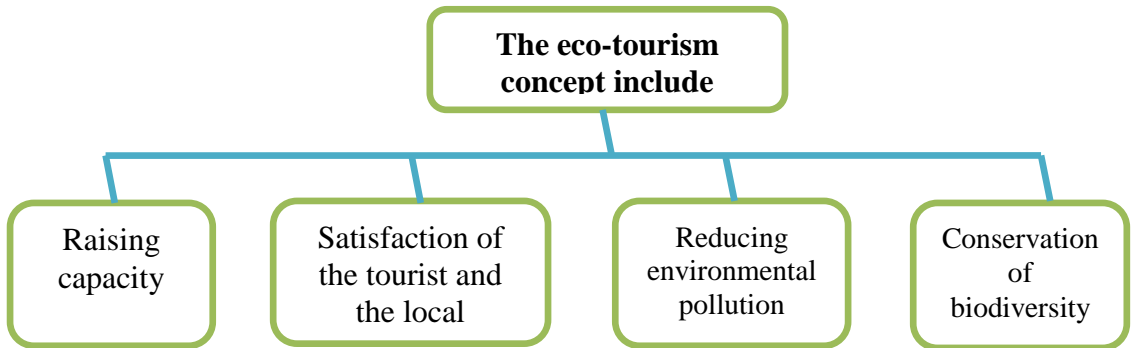
Ecotourism can be broadly defined as nature -based tourism that doesn't result in the negative environmental, economic and social impacts that are associated with mass tourism (*Rosaleen Duffy, 2013*) .

According to the International Ecotourism Society, the ecotourism is "A responsible travel towards natural areas, which preserves the environment and supports the prosperity of the local population" (*Marie Lequin, 2001*) .

According to the World Conservation Union, the Ecotourism is “ an environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (*Martha Honey, 2008*) .

The following figure summarizes the content of the eco-tourism concept:

**Fig. (01): The content of Ecotourism's Concept**



**Source:** Prepared by the researchers depending on the previous definitions.

### **3. The importance and rules of ecotourism:**

#### **3.1. The importance of ecotourism:**

The importance of ecotourism is represented by follows: (*David B. Weaver et al, 2001*).

##### **3.1.1. Economic importance:**

The economic importance of eco-tourism is represented by the possibility of achieving sustainable economic development through the revenues and profits generated by providing job opportunities for the unemployed. It also provides the opportunity to diversify economic returns and sources of national income and contribute to improving infrastructure and increasing government revenues.

##### **3.1.2. Social importance:**

The social importance of ecotourism is that it's friendly to the community. It works to develop social relations, achieve and improve the process of modernizing society and transferring isolated communities to open societies, also it works for keeping the society in a state of permanent work and minimizing seasonal risks and its social anxiety and disorder.

##### **3.1.3. Cultural importance**

The cultural importance of ecotourism is to spread the culture of preserving the environment, preserving cultural heritage, cultural and historical sites, making events and cultural events and taking advantage of local culture such as fine art, literature, folklore, and tourism seminars and cultural meetings.

#### **3.1.4. Environmental importance**

The environmental importance of eco-tourism is represented by:

- Preserving the ecological balance and thus protect the natural life of the land, sea and air from pollution, and therefore it is used as a method of prevention rather than treatment methods, for maintaining the mechanisms of balance, health and environment.
- Providing a simple and easy life, which is far away from discomfort, anxiety and tension by preventing noise and gas emissions that affect human efficiency as it approaches natural instinct and simple, uncomplicated life.

#### **3.2. The rules of ecotourism**

The rules on which ecotourism depends are as follows: (*GEORGIEVA Kamelia & MIHALKOVA Dessislava, 2004*)

##### **3.2.1. Natural basis:**

Ecotourism is a human activity practiced by human beings in accordance with conditions, controls and rules governing the protection and conservation of natural wildlife.

##### **3.2.2. Sustainable Environment**

Ecotourism preserves biodiversity and protects organisms from extinction.

##### **3.2.3. Local interest**

Ecotourism is an activity that has a return, whether material or moral.

##### **3.2.4. Tourist Satisfaction**

Ecotourism is an activity that combines authenticity with its natural cultural heritage, and modernity in its moral and ethical preparation.

##### **3.2.5. Eco-education**

Eco-tourism is a moral and ethical obligation rather than a contractual obligation. It is an effective commitment not only to the individual or to the organization at the level of the host country but also to the whole world.

#### **4. Types of eco-tourism**

There are many types and forms of eco-tourism and are directly related to nature and cultural heritage, they are as follows: (*Veronica Davidov, 2013*)

#### **4.1. Blue tourism**

Which is meant traveling to the shores of the sea and lakes to enjoy the views of the blue waters, and this tourism is spread in countries where there are attractive coastal areas and sandy beaches wet.

#### **4.2. Green tourism**

It is intended to enjoy the green areas of rural areas, and plants, this type caused the appearance what is known by tourism farms, which is represented by organizing visits to the farms and residing inside them, escaping from the congestion of the city to enjoy the various rural activities.

#### **4.3. Yellow tourism**

It's means desert and oasis tourism, which is concerned by the traveling to the desert areas, and this type of tourism is a new interest in countries that contain desert areas.

#### **4.4. White tourism**

White tourism means mountain tourism, moving to mountain areas and ice areas to practice various sports such as skying and mountain climbing.

### **5. Ecotourism in the state of Bechar (Saoura region)**

(We had prepared this section through internal documents from Bechar's Regional Directorate of Tourism).

#### **5.1. Definition of Bechar's state:**

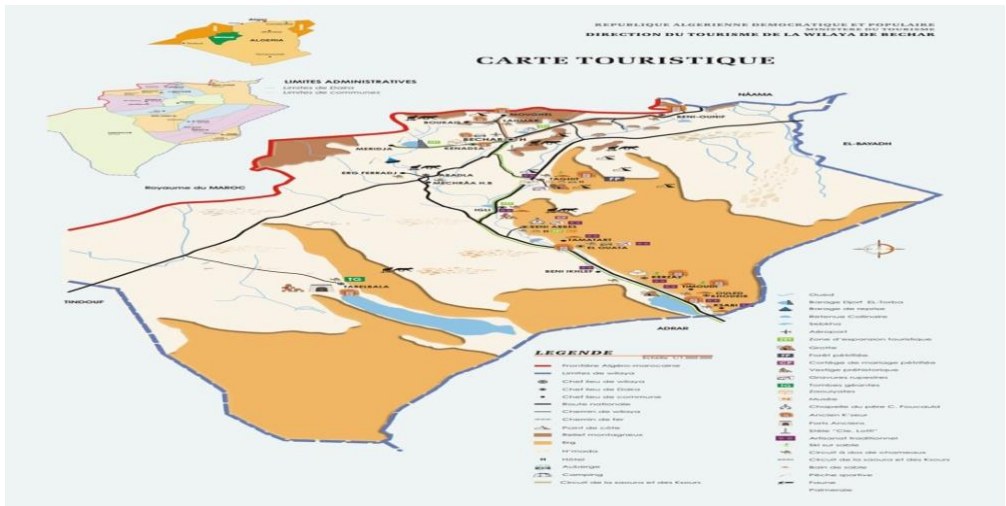
It's the Gate of the Algerian Sahara, because it links the north with the south. It's located in the south-west of Algeria, exactly on the Algerian-Moroccan border, it's far away 980 km from the capital. It's bordered from the north by both el-Bayed and el-Naama states, from the west bordered by the Morocco's Kingdom, it's far 80 km. From the south the state of Tindouf and from the east it's bordered by the state of Adrar, finally it's far away by 600 km from the Mediterranean Sea.

It's known by Bechar to refer to the name of the French captain, "Colomb Bechar", who had occupied it in 1857, where his armies stationed in the region, and called "Bechar" attribution to his name.

In another narration that says it's name was derived from the word "bashar", which means the bearer of the gospel, where the king of the Turkish king sent explorers from the north of the country to the desert to search for new sources of

water, one of them came to the Saoura region and discovered the springs of water, and returned the gospel to the Turkish Sultan, after that there has been a lot of talk about Bechar, who returned by the happy news, Since then, this region has been known as “Bechar”. ( Wikipedia)

**Fig. (01): The map of Bechar’s state**



**Source:** Bechar’s Regional Directorate of Tourism

## 5.2. Tourist Attractions in Bechar’s state (Ecotourism Components)

Due to its geographical location and beautiful views of its sand dunes, palm trees, the beautiful landscapes, the customs and hospitality of the inhabitants of the area and the basic facilities available, Bechar is a key factor in achieving environmental tourism.

### 5.2.1. Ecological factors in Bashar: State soil consists of topography

#### A. Mountains:

Mountains are different in terms of the summit, including low and high summits, as Antar’s mountain, which is about “1953 meters” high, Mountain of Qrouz “1835 meters” high, and the Mountain of Bechar which is about “1206 meters” in high.

#### B. The valleys:

The are three major valleys in the state as the following:



- ✓ Valley of "Bechar" which is characterized by violence, and several times causing traffic's block as it passes through the National Route N° 06 which is leading to the northern states.
- ✓ The Zuzvana valley, located 05 km away from the town of Beni ounif, its gravity has declined since the bridge was built in 1982.
- ✓ Zuzwana's valley and the valley of Qir (Abadala) meet in the district of Egli, and make The valley (oued) Al-Sawara.

#### **C. Plains:**

It is a decline areas located beside the valleys, the most important ones are: the plain of Zuzvana, Plain Beni ounif, plain Abadala, and Saoura plain.

#### **D. The Hamada:**

vast rocky areas such as Hamada of Qir, located in district of Abadla far away from the capital of bechar's state 120 km, and Hamada of Al-Saoura located in Egli's district.

#### **E. sweat:**

sand dunes are sometimes high, up to 300 meters, including the great Western race (Beni Abbas), the sweat of the Rawi, the sweat of ElAtchan, as well as the race of Afdi.

#### **5.2.2. Climate factors:**

The state of Bechar is characterized by hot climate in summer and cold in winter, the rainfall rate in the state is very small and irregular (less than 100 mm per year), while the temperature ranges between 16° minimum and 45° as highest degree, and Sandworms are year round (permanent and strong) especially in April and May.

#### **5.2.3. Plant wealth:**

The state contains many plants, and lots of are used for medical purposes, without forgetting the large barrage which called the barrage of Djorf El-Tourba which was built in 1969 on valley of Qir, a very beautiful area helps to recreation and fishing, where there are species of fish like the Carp fish.. .. etc.

#### **5.2.4. Livestock:**

There are deer which are in the way of extinction, as well as the existence of the Mountain Sheep in the section of Mount Qrouz and Mount Antar in the area of Beni Ounif and Sufissifa, and some of the Hedgehogs, Rabbits, Sand Fish, Dabb,

Varan, Fink, Fox and the ship of the desert (Camel). And from the birds: the Partridge, the Turtledove, the pigeon, the Swallows, and the Heron.

### **5.3. The most important tourist areas in the state:**

#### **5.3.1. Bechar's Region**

Bechar, the capital of the South, the Sahara Pearl and the Western Gate of Southern Algeria, it represents the most important population in the region. Its attractiveness lies in its beautiful oases that invite you to embark on an enjoyable journey where you would discover authentic culture and civilization hidden in its palaces, the Palace of Bechar "taghda" and the Wakda Palace. The city was famous by the leather and jewelry industry, the production of dates, vegetables, figs, cereals and almonds in the suburbs. It also contains the truffles "turfas", a kind of champignon that is watered by the rain of september and october. It is harvested beginning from february, and there is a special ritual for tea which is called 'latay' and prepared on the embers.

#### **5.3.2. Kenadsa area**

Located in the west of the state far away 25 km, it's now connected to the state by a highway. It was the first city where glowed the lamp since the discovery of coal by the French colonizer. The most important monuments there, are the old palace, which holds the finest architectural style in which the eastern, Moroccan and African architecture converged. And the religious school which played a cultural, scientific and social role that made it a destination for students of science and knowledge. It is also surrounded by golden sands and green oases that provide to the visitor psychological comfort. The region also has traditions in the depths of history. It celebrates several festivals, even if religious festivals such as the Prophet's birth and the Berkashu\* festival. It also boasts a musical group which is called "Elferda" that is characterized by its concise musical rhythm and regular claps, also it uses some local poems as a sings.

#### **5.3.3. Taghit**

It's called "Pearl of the Soura", it's a stretch on the golden sands, and a tourist area located 95 km on the south of Bechar state, which is full of tourist attractions that combine history, art and nature, including:

- The palaces (Zawia al-Tahtaniyah, Bakhti, Berbi, Brika, Zawia al-Foukania, and others).

- Homsh Sand Summit, which is more than 732 meters high, used for sand skiing.
- Caves located in the palace of "Sidi Ayyash" at the Zawia al-Tahtaniyah (found with rock inscriptions of animals, and birds lived with human Before the Christ).
- The palm oases, which contain more than 90,000 palm trees with different types, which have an annual festival called "Tagit season", in October of each year.
- Brother Amroush, a place which contain the rock inscriptions of animals and birds dating back more than 12 thousand years.
- bird's nest which called "Dayit al-Toyour", it's a lake where migratory birds are present.
- Al-Memsoukh area, that contain fossilized forest traces which indicate the presence of dense forests in the area.

Finally, Taghit occupies a prominent historical and tourist position in the national and international circles, without forgetting the hospitality and generosity of its inhabitants.

#### **5.3.4. Beni Abbas**

Located 240 km on the south of Bechar, it is a white and very clean oasis contain more than 100,000 palm tree, and it's shaped as a scorpion, it's glamorous by its twisted alleys, that natural mystery which dazzles tourists, Where there is the Old Palace in the center of this oases, which is classified within the national heritage and the recently restored international and the Ancient Mosque. Its palm trees produce what is known by the "palm of al-Hamira" with a beautiful taste and fame among the inhabitants of the region, also it has the highest sand summit in Algeria which qualified it to be a space for practicing the sky on sands, and medical treatment by burying in sands, as well as inscriptions of various animals and effects of old drawings in Marhoma neighbors, which is located 50 km from Beni Abbas, as well as fossilized animals that come across 30 km from the national road n°06, as a sign that the region lived a period of history where these animals existed in, and others threatened with extinction such as deer and some birds, and what's made it famous nationally and globally is the celebration of the "the Prophet Mouhammed's birth" which revives the region every year. Table 01 shows the tourist and archeological sites which Bechar Region includes. And table 02 shows the traditional industries that available at Bechar's region.

**Table (01): The tourist and archeological sites available at Bechar Region.**

Townships	Touristical Monuments									
	Sands	Oases of Palms	Old Palaces	Religious Schools	Small Barrages	Big Barrage	urban fees	Grottoes	Museum	Old Graves
Bechar	x	x	x							
Beni ounif	x	x	x							
Lahmer		x	x							
Moughel		x								
Boukais		x								
Kenadsa	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		
El-meridja						x		x		
Taghit	x	x	x				x			
Abadla					x					
Erq Ferradj					x					
Tabilbala	x	x	x							x
Eqli	x	x	x					x		
Beni abbes	x	x	x						x	
Tamtert	x	x	x							
El-wata	x	x	x							
Kerzaz	x	x	x	x						
Beni yekhlef	x	x	x							
Timoudi	x	x	x							
Ouled khedir	x	x	x							
El-qessabi	x	x	x							

**Source:** Bechar's Regional Directorate of Tourism.

**Table (02): Traditional industries available at Bechar's region**

Traditional industries in the region									
Townships	Sand Painting	Knitting	Traditional Carpet	Traditional Sewing	Pottery	Traditional embroidery	Sculpture on wood	Basketry	Musical Instrument
Bechar	x	x	x	x	x				
Beni ounif		x	x	x		x	x		
Lahmer			x	x		x			
Moughel			x	x		x			
Boukais			x	x		x	x		
Kenadsa	x				x		x		x
El-meridja		x	x	x		x			
Taghit		x	x		x	x			x
Abadla		x	x	x		x			x
Erq Ferradj		x	x	x		x			x
Tabilbala		x	x	x	x	x			x
Eqli		x	x		x	x		x	
Beni abbes		x	x		x	x		x	
Tamtert		x	x			x		x	
El-wata	x	x	x	x	x				
Kerzaz		x	x			x		x	
Beni yekhlaf	x	x	x	x				x	
Timoudi		x	x		x	x		x	
Ouled khedir		x	x		x	x		x	
El-qessabi	x	x	x		x	x			

**Source:** Bechar's Regional Directorate of Tourism.

Bechar, like other tourist areas, it includes cultural heritage values appreciate the value of tourism derives from the nature and goodness of its inhabitants. The urban form of its old palaces, which combine the Islamic and the Sahrawi style, makes it a special attraction that brings tourists from their first visit.

**The traditional industry is represented by:**

- Art of sanding (the most recent types of traditional and artistic industries in the region of Bechar).
- The manufacturing of musical instruments (Algumbbri and Oud).
- Traditional pottery (the oldest traditional industry).
- Basketry (this craft is famous because of the existence of palm oases).
- The tent industry (especially in the town of Tammert).
- Traditional sewing and embroidery.
- Traditional fabric.

- Popular Meals, mainly “couscous, mulukhia, tajine terffas (truffle), lemkhelaa (around bread full of minced meat)”.

About the historical and cultural heritage of Bechar’s region, it’s represented by the customs and traditions of the region, which represents a treasure for the region and the preservation of its people and their adherence to it, is a sign of their originality. So the tourist touches and recognizes that through:

- Weddings in which they celebrate by traditional folklores like “Hobei, Karkabo, Diwwan, Baroud, Issawa, Al –Allawi and Al- Ghaita”.
- The local celebrations (the birth of the Prophet Muhammad in Beni Abbas, the season of Taghit, the Apricot Festival in the Municipality of Ekli, the Berkashu Festival in Kenadsa).
- Religious holidays and what distinguishes them, like reading the Koran and visiting families each other.
- Traditional dress: Each region has its traditional dress that gives characterizes it, for example, we find in Bashar Lizar (women), Bernos (man) without forgetting the accessories that distinguish each dress.
- Traditional musical instruments like the “Goubri” which is made by animal skin (camel or goat), and the tendons are made from the intestine and are the backbone of the diwan's music.

## 6. Conclusion

Tourism is considered as one of the most developed industries in the world. From an economic perspective, it’s a productive sector that plays an important role in increasing national income, improving the balance of payments, employment opportunities and a source of foreign currency, as well as achieving the development.

From the environmental perspective, tourism is a factor of satisfying the tourists’ desires and enjoying the environment and the wonderful views of nature, where tourism involves highlighting the aesthetic features of the environment, hence, the positive effects of tourism on the environment, but despite these positive aspects, it may be a major source of environmental pollution. Therefore, the balance between tourism and the environment must be achieved. According to this study we’ve reached number of results we will quote as follows:

- Ecotourism is a natural pleasure with everything natural that exists around us in the land and sea.
- Ecotourism depends on nature in the first place, and the most important element based on it's not to harm the environment and not to disturb the environmental balance which resulted from the actions of the tourist and the pollution it may cause.
- Four types of eco-tourism can be distinguished: blue tourism which based on beaches, green tourism that based on green spaces, yellow tourism which based on desert areas and oases, and white tourism which is in mountainous regions.
- New trends have emerged in the developed countries, which provide a set of conditions for the practice of eco-tourism, which takes into account the environmental dimension in the first place, these conditions represented by : blue flag certificate, ISO certificate, nature reserves and environmental hotel.
- Desert areas and oases as tourist attractions have become the focus of global attention and appreciation of national and local, for its great role in the path of achieving sustainable development.
- Desert tourism as a kind of ecotourism has identified challenges in recent years, and it has links with other sectors such as the economic, social and cultural sectors.
- The region of Bechar is one of the most important national areas of Algeria, which has an important desert tourism capacity that must be valued and re-considerate, btu it's suffering from a range of problems that stand in front of its development in the region such as lack of infrastructure and entertainment, and structures to receive tourists.

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\* It's a local festival that takes place in a traditional style mixed with folk songs. carried out by the local population by disguise.