

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - A MODEL TO ANALYZE AN ECOTOURISM DESTINATION

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Abstract: *Yellowstone National Park is the first national park in the world (1872), entering the world natural heritage list for its rarity and uniqueness. The park receives over 3 million ecotourists annually, providing professional and qualitative services, as well as possibilities to practice various ecotourism activities. This paper presents Yellowstone National Park as a model to analyze an ecotourism destination, following logical steps (general overview of the ecotourism destination, location and accessibility, ecotourism attractions and activities, accommodation facilities, ecotourism flow, best practices in ecotourism management), summarizing a large amount of information into relevant conclusions, graphs, and chart presentations.*

Key words: *Yellowstone National Park, ecotourism destination, ecotourism flow, ecotourism management*

INTRODUCTION

Yellowstone National Park is the first national park in the world, established even since 1872. He entered the world natural heritage list for its rarity and uniqueness. The park is considered a wonder of the world, owning the largest collection of geysers on the Earth. It is an almost intact natural ecosystem from the temperate zone, a wild territory, the habitat of grizzly bears, wolves, bison, elk. The park receives over 3 million ecotourists annually, providing professional and qualitative services, as well as possibilities to practice various ecotourism activities. Add substantial funds for investments, diversified and ecologic infrastructure, or the promotion of environmental education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The theoretical research is based on the works mentioned in references. The study was based on analysis, processing and interpretation of statistical data from trusted sources, with updated data: U.S. National Park Service (www.nps.gov, Yellowstone National Park Trip Planner). This paper is an model to analyze an ecotourism destinations following logical steps (general overview of the ecotourism destination, location and accessibility, ecotourism attractions and activities, accommodation facilities, ecotourism flow, best practices in ecotourism management), summarizing a large amount of information into relevant conclusions, graphs, and chart presentations.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Position and accessibility - Yellowstone National Park is located in the intermountain region of the U.S., in the states Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. Park area is 8879 square kilometers in most federal property. The park is managed by the National Park Service and Xanterra Parks and Resorts, along with a number of NGOs. The park may be accessed in the five entrances (fig 1): north - Gardiner, Montana (the only entrance open all year), northeast Silver Gate, Montana, west - West Yellowstone, Montana, east - Cody, Wyoming, south - Jackson Hole, Wyoming (these four entrances are open only seasonally). Being located in a mountainous area above 2,200 m altitude, the park has a

cold climate, the weather is unpredictable (storms, land slides) and therefore the suitable season to visit it is from May to October.

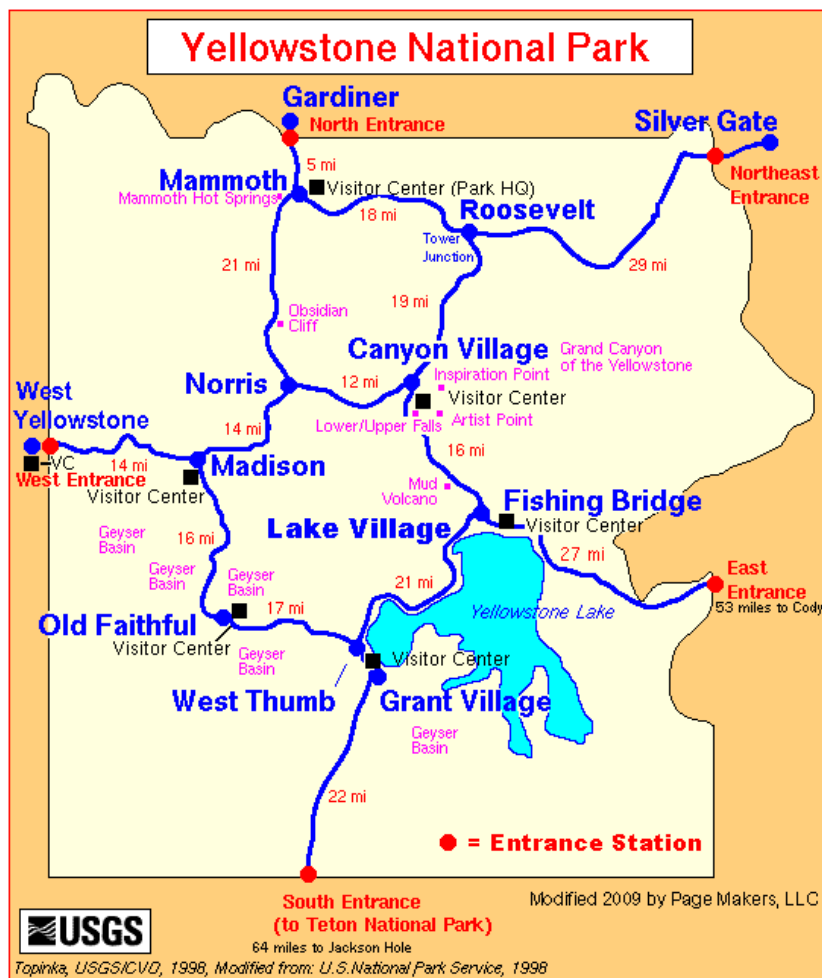


Fig. 1 Yellowstone NP – tourist map (entrances, visitor centers, main tourist attractions)

Source: <http://www.yellowstone.co/entrances.htm>

The **visiting permits** may be purchased for 7 days (\$ 25 for cars, \$ 20 for snowmobile or motorcycle, and \$ 12 for bicycle or by foot); they also include the entrance fee for Grand Teton National Park. The annual pass costs \$ 50. There are also annual passes for all U.S. national parks (\$ 80), with versions for elderly (\$ 10) or free for children (under 15), military, permanently disabled or blind people. 80% of the collected fees are retained by the park administration, while the remaining 20% are deposited in a special account for those parks that do not have sufficient revenue. The NPS Congress allocates the funds for investments in the park, such as roads, drainage systems, erosion control, facilities for disabled, campgrounds, repairs, etc.

The most important **ecotourism attractions** (fig 2) are: the geysers (Old Faithful, Norris Geyser Basin, Fountain Paint Pot, Firehouse Lake Drive, West Thumb Geyser Basin, Mud Volcano), the hot springs (Mammoth Hot Springs), Yellowstone Lake, the canyon and waterfalls of the Yellowstone river, the wildlife (grizzly bears, black bears, wolves, mountain lions, elks, bison, mooses, pronghorns, bald eagles), and the historical sites.



Fig. 2 Representative images of the ecotourism attractions and activities in Yellowstone NP

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/YellowstoneNPS>

The **ecotourism activities** practiced in Yellowstone National Park (fig 2) are: hiking, biking, camping, fishing, horse riding, boat trips, watching movies and exhibitions of geysers, wildlife, park history, social networking on visiting the park, expeditions, educational programs for young people and teachers, various ceremonies (weddings).

The **accommodation facilities** are hotels, lodges, campgrounds (there are 12 campgrounds: Bridge Bay, Canyon, Fishing, RV Bridge, Grant Village, Indian Creek, Lewis Lake, Madison, Mammoth, Norris, Pebble Creek, Slough Creek, Tower Fall), contacting Xanterra Parks and Resorts for reservations, YellowstoneNationalParkLodges.com (for online reservations), TDD (telephone booking).

Add guide **services**, museums, and visitor centers for ecotourism education and information (Fishing Bridge Visitor Center, Grant Visitor Center, Madison Information Station, National Park Ranger Museum, Norris Geyser Basin Museum, West Thumb Information, Albright Visitor Center Mammoth, West Yellowstone Visitor Information Center, Canyon Visitor Education Center, Old Faithful Visitor Education Center), food, medical, financial, and religious services, advertising materials (Yellowstone NP Trip Planner) and souvenir stores, a series of websites, weather information telephone lines, special events.

In case of the **ecotourist flow in Yellowstone National Park** (table 1, fig 3) we noticed the followings: a growing trend in arrivals in 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 (over 3 million ecotourists annually), with a maximum in 2010 (3,640,205 ecotourists); the number of visitors decreased in 2004-2006 (2.8 million ecotourists) and in 2008 (due to the economic crisis).

Table 1**Ecotourism indicators used in analyzing ecotourism destinations**

1	Name	YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK					
2	Position	Country	State			Region	
		USA	Idaho, Montana, Wyoming			IM intramontaneous	
3	Total area of the national park	km ²		hectars		acres	
		8879.16		887916.28		2219790.71	
4	National park area by property (hectars)	Federal area		Public area		Private area	Total
		887915.65		-		0.632	887916.28
4	Ecotourism flow in the latest 5 years	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Yearly average
		3066580	3295192	3640205	3394327	3447729	3368807
5	Multiannual average of ecotourists ecoturști (latest 10 years, 2003-2012)	3158901					
6	Average ecotourists per day	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	
		8402	9028	9973	9300	9446	
7	Total overnight stays in 2010	1306318					
8	Overnight stays by accommodation type in 2010	Concessioner		NPS Campgrounds		Backcountry	Non-Rec.
		Lodging	Campgrounds	Tents	RV's	45045	15890
		575313	512665	87580	69825		
9	Ecotourism seasonality in 2012	ian	feb	mar	apr	mai	iun
	Number of ecotourists	24766	27752	20248	29056	268251	671825
	Share (%)	0.72	0.80	0.59	0.84	7.78	19.49
	Ecotourism seasonality in 2012	iul	aug	sept	oct	nov	dec
	Number of ecotourists	888335	780286	527609	177070	14059	18472
	Share (%)	25.77	22.63	15.30	5.14	0.41	0.54

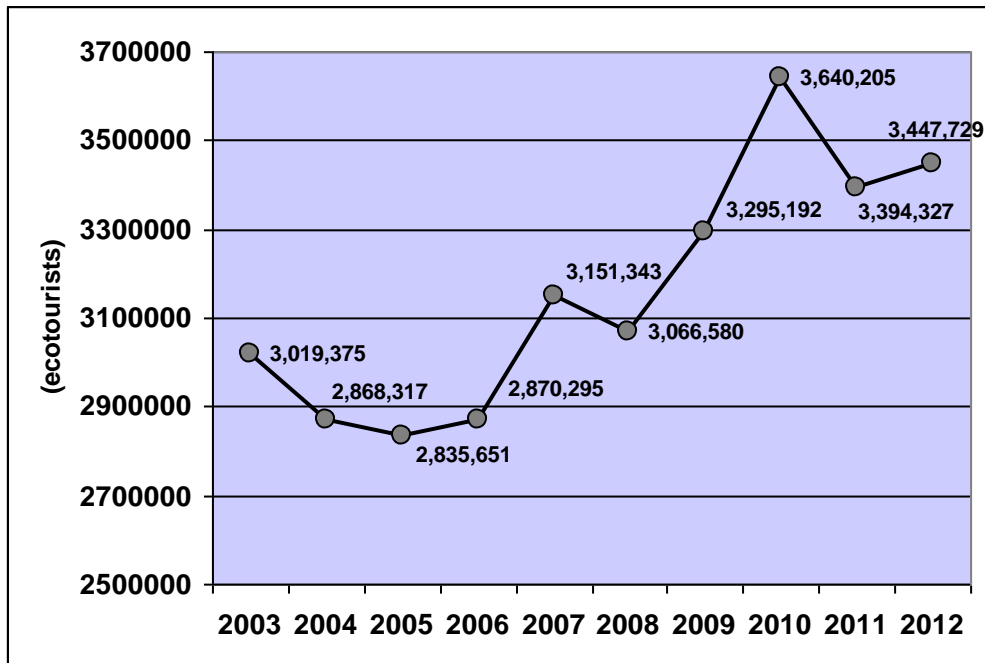


Fig. 3 Yellowstone ecotourism flow over the latest decade

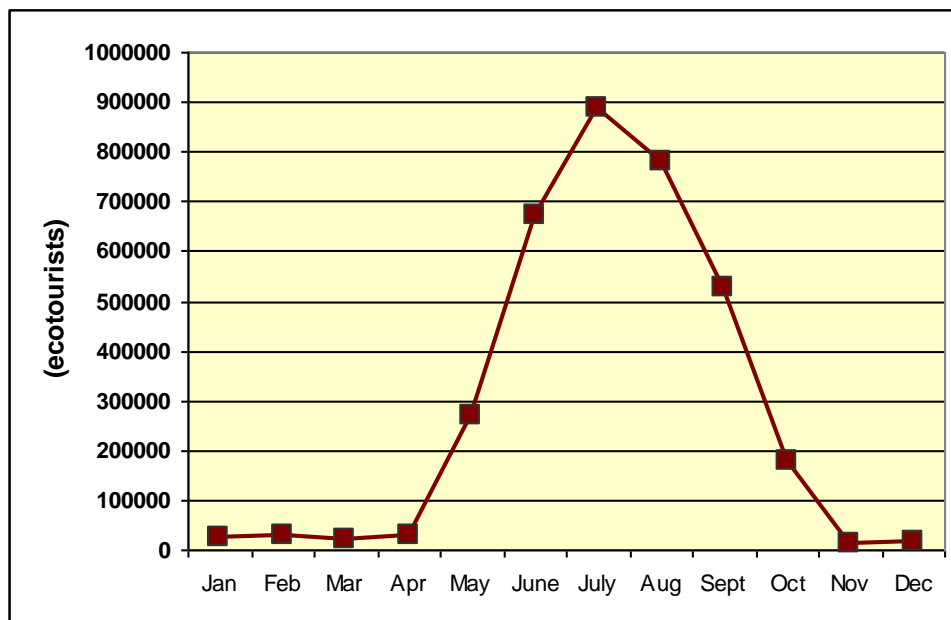


Fig. 4 Ecotourism seasonality in Yellowstone NP (2012)

Although the most arrivals in the park are during summer (68% of total arrivals) with the seasonal peak registered in July, the visiting season begins in May and lasts until October inclusive. The harsh winters in Yellowstone National Park determine a low tourist flow during the semester (November to April), with only 4% of total arrivals (fig 4). The overnight stays (fig 5) are 84% ensured in accommodation units located outside the park, and lower shares for overnight stays in tents and RV's located in the park campgrounds (12%) and backcountry (3%).

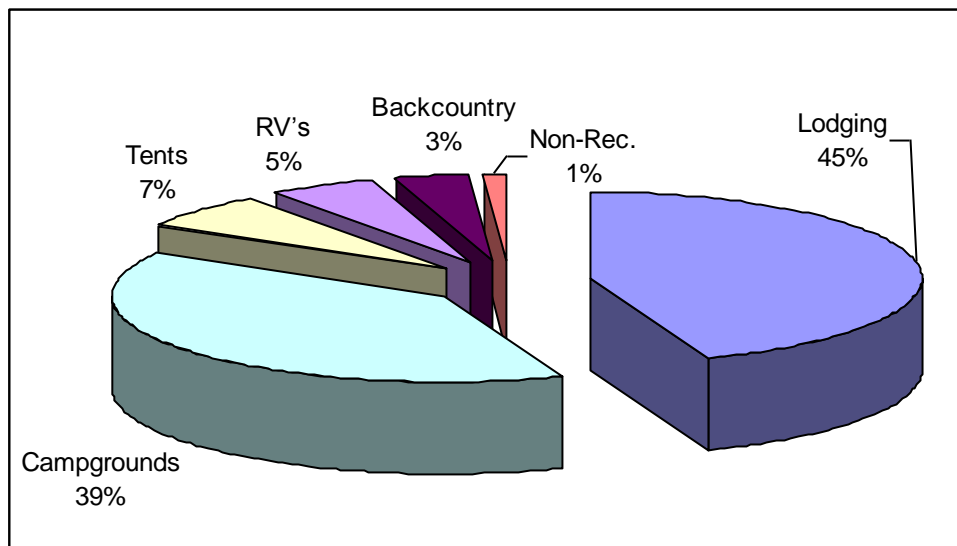


Fig. 5 Overnight stays by accommodation type in Yellowstone NP (2010)

CONCLUSIONS

Park administration has implemented alternative strategies to combat the economic crisis, as a more aggressive online promotion, more interactive web site redesign offering more information about the parks, online guides, developing and publishing online programs for the extra-season.

Among the ecotourism marketing strategies, we mention those focused on novel related ecotourism activities: extending activity in extraseason, developing programs during the cold season (winter hiking with rangers, “tales with Grizzly bears”, winter story at Mammoth Hot Springs), educational and scout programs for children, ceremonies (weddings), online webcams on tourist spots (Old Faithful, Mt. Washburn, Mammoth, Electric Peak), social media pages (Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter).

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