

Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a global industry that offers varied opportunities and contains characteristic risks. On the one hand it can contribute significantly to local communities' livelihoods, create an invaluable appreciation for their natural resources and offer opportunities for genuine cultural exchange; on the other, if the 'eco' component is superficial, as it often is, it can threaten the very foundations on which it depends, whether of culture or nature, and introduce the logic of profit-at-all-costs over time.

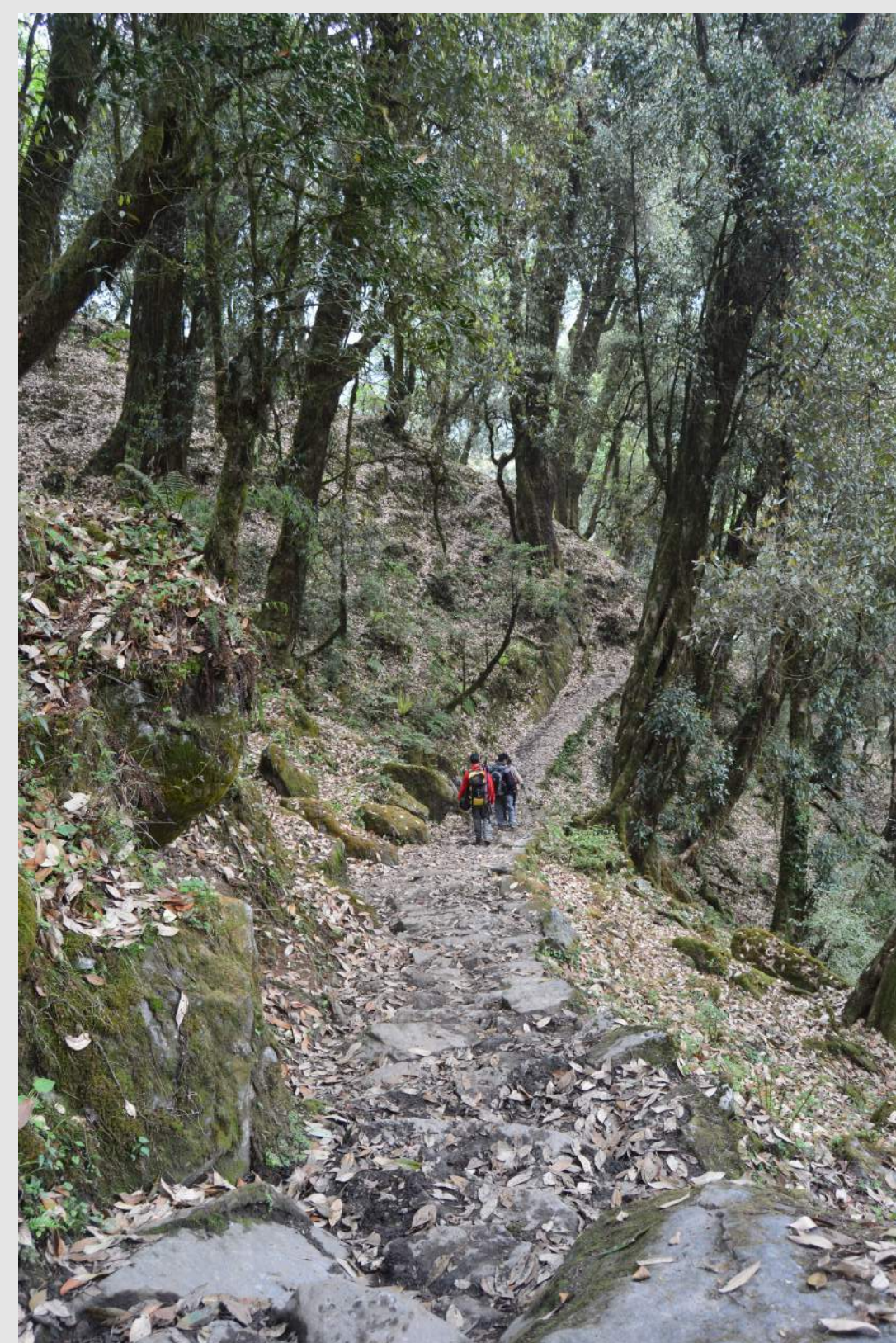


A homestay in Yuksom, Sikkim.



Garbage bins in Yuksom, which now also has a waste segregation center.

An example in Sikkim tells the story of a recovery from some of these less desirable traits of ecotourism. In 1996, local youth of Yuksom - the gateway village to Khangchengzonga National Park - set up the **Khangchengzonga Conservation Committee** (KCC) with a view to make treks into the park more sustainable. The committee introduced the idea of 'zero waste trekking' and organises homestays for visiting tourists. In conjunction with the Forest Department, it banned the use of firewood by trekking operators and instead provided kerosene stoves. In addition, plastic waste is recycled and sold as products at KCC's education center.



Trash-free trails in Khangchengzonga National Park.



Traditional art on Shaam-e-sarhad resort in Hodka, Gujarat, that uses mud and straw architecture.

In Kachchh, the village of Hodka is the gateway to the Banni landscape. Here Shaam-e-sarhad is a tourist camp built, owned and managed by the local community of **Maldharis**. Some of the guiding principles of the initiative are the use of traditional architecture and the conservation of local culture, including the arts, crafts and cuisine.