

ECOTOURISM IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is an important source of earning income for many regions and countries. Tourism brings in considerable amounts of income into a local economy in the form of payment for goods and Commodities services demanded by tourists. Eco tourism is one of these typologies of the niche tourism. Eco tourism holds many successful stories to sustain the nature and culture of fragile environment. Keeping all point in mind, the present study focuses on an overview of eco tourism in India along with assessing the central role of government to promote eco tourism. Ecotourism has been widely documented as one important promising alternative strategy to achieve sustainable development. It certifies ecotourism is a form of nature-based tourism focused on co- modifying the environment and ecology for economic gain. Ecotourism offers a series of external and financial benefits to local community. Ecotourism cannot solve all ecologic resources issues at present. How to balance ecotourism development and conservation is the core issue of ecotourism and sustainable development. We stress on the proper and useful environmental policy and management. This paper articulates the concept of tourism and ecotourism, and their interrelationship, and also explains the critical difference between tourism and ecotourism, it describes about the history, forms & benefits of tourism and ecotourism. It also discusses and focuses about the characteristics of responsible and sustainable tourism. The criticisms of ecotourism and tourism are also briefly described.

KEYWORDS: Tourism; Eco-Tourism; Environmental Consciousness & Responsible Tourism; Indian Government; Resources

Travel and tourism are among the world's fastest growing industries and are the major sources of foreign exchange earnings (FEEs). Eco tourism has attracted increasing attention in recent year not only as an alternate to mass tourism but as a mean of economic development and environment conservation. Eco tourism is growing niche market within large travel industry with the potentiality of being an important sustainable tool. The proper definition of eco tourism is ecologically sound tourism.

Boo (1990) defined as "travelling to relatively undisturbed or un-contaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals.

Eco tourism is a nature based form of special travel defined by the International Eco tourism Society (TIES) in 1991 as "responsible travel to natural areas which conserved the environment and sustain the wellbeing of local people."

Eco tourism has been broadly defined by ministry of Tourism, Government of India as tourism which is ecologically sustainable. The concept of ecological sustainability involves the environmental carrying capacity of a given area.

It means responsible travel to natural areas protecting and conserving the environment and improving the well being of the local people. Ecotourism focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth, and environmental sustainability. The service industries which benefit from tourism include transportation services, accommodations, and entertainment. It is a type of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas.

It is intended to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the nature and environment, and to foster and promote a greater appreciation of our natural habitats.

It typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions.

Ecotourism are sustainable ecological tourism, ecotourism, green tourism, soft, rural tourism and agro tourism, community tourism, solidarity and responsible tourism, all these opposing to the traditional, mass tourism.

"Best Eco friendly Hotel", "Best Responsible Tourism Project", "Best Eco friendly practices by Tour Operators" in the National Tourism Awards presented

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annually to various segments of travel tourism and hospitality sector”.

Ecotourism is a responsible tourism which conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people. It includes:

- Builds environmental awareness
- Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Respects local culture
- Supports human rights and democratic movements

DEFINITIONS

Ecotourism is: "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people and communities." (TIES, 2005)

The Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and the natural history of the environment; taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem; producing economic opportunities and possibilities that make the conservation of the natural resources beneficial to the local people (Epler Wood et al., 2008).

PRINCIPLES

According to the International Ecotourism Society:

- 1) Avoids negative impacts that can destroy the integrity of the natural environments being visited. Educates to traveler on the importance of conservation.
- 2) Directs revenues to the conservation of natural areas and management of protected areas.
- 3) Brings economic benefits to local communities and earn revenues to local people living adjacent to protected areas.
- 4) Emphasizes the need for planning and sustainable growth of the tourism industry.
- 5) To ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental 'carrying capacity.
- 6) Retains a high percentage of revenues in the host country by stressing the use of locally owned facilities and services.
- 7) Increasingly infrastructure facilities that has been developed sensitively in harmony with the environment.

8) Minimizing use of fossil fuels conserving local plants and wildlife, and combine with the natural environment.

9) Ecotourism has 4 core principles

(a) Environmental protection with wildlife and nature conservation.

(b) Community participation.

(c) socio-economic development.

(d) Education and awareness.

CHARACTERISTICS

1. Eco-tourism draws heavily from the local community and their culture.
2. It results in economic development in the area.
3. It tries to develop the entire area surrounding the area of ecological interest.
4. Individuals living there and the tourists also benefit.
5. It draws from the local population familiar for employment purposes
6. It also provides livelihood opportunities for the locals.
7. It is compatible with the local environment and their socio-cultural makeup.
8. Tourists can also witness the unique culture of the locals while engaging.

BENEFITS

1. Ecotourism can bring about economic, socio-cultural and environmental benefits for the government, private sector and local communities.
2. Revenue from tourist visits help create job opportunities for local people and communities which in turn, lead to more diversified economy for them.
3. Ecotourism can support conservation and environmental management.
4. Ecotourism can also be a tool to raise awareness about the environment and to educate the public on conservation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the role of central and state government in promoting eco tourism in India.
2. Understanding the term of eco tourism in context of developing and Asian countries.

3. Finding key issues in developing and promoting eco tourism in India.
4. Effective and successfully implementation of eco tourism project in India.

RESEARCH DATA

The present study is based on secondary data, Data sources such as books, journal, report, magazines and various concerned websites.

HISTORY

Ecotourism as equivalent to any sort of tourism based in nature and environment. Nature tourism, low impact tourism, green tourism, bio-tourism, ecologically responsible tourism, and others have been used in books and literature for marketing, although they are not necessary synonymous with ecotourism. The purpose of ecotourism is to engage tourists in low impact, non-consumptive and locally oriented environments in order to maintain species and habitats quite in underdeveloped regions. Ecotourism projects have failed to address some of the fundamental issues. Ecotourism may not generate the very benefits to these regions and their people.

ADVANTAGES OF ECO-LODGES

1. Help in the conservation of the flora and fauna.
2. Have minimal impact on the natural surroundings during construction.
3. Fit into its specific physical and cultural contexts through careful attention to form, landscaping and color.
4. Use sustainable means of water acquisition and reduce water consumption.
5. Provide careful handling and disposal of solid waste and sewage.
6. Meet energy needs through passive design and renewable energy sources.
7. Use traditional building technology and materials and combine for greater sustainability.
8. Endeavour to work together with the local community.
9. Offer interpretive programmes to educate employees and tourists.
10. Sustainable development through education programmes and research.

GUIDELINES OF NATIONAL TOURISM POLICY, (1997)

1. To create a tourist product that is desirable by an integrated infrastructure.
2. To involve local agencies, public, private and government, in tourism development.
3. To create synergy between departments and agencies those have to deliver the composite tourist product.
4. To use both the circuit and scheme approach so that people's participation will create a greater awareness of tourism.
5. To create direct access for destination off the beaten track.
6. To diversify the product with new options like beach tourism, forest, wildlife, landscape and adventure tourism, farm and health tourism.
7. To ensure that the development does not exceed sustainable levels.
8. To develop the north-eastern states, the Himalayan region and islands for tourism.
9. To maintain a balance between the negative and positive impacts of tourism through planning restrictions and through education of the people for conservation and development.

ECO TOURISM RESOURCES IN INDIA

Variety of different perspectives and criteria used to distinguish ecotourism. These are motivations for initiating ecotourism, the motivations of users, the presence and scale of environmental, social and economic impacts.

Ecotourism is neither a simple concept to define nor a straight forward phenomenon to implement. Ecotourism should be regarded to natural areas and should be viewed as a means of resource conservation and local development through tourism in a synergistic fashion.

To ensure that the goals of tourism development do not interfere with the goals of protecting natural areas and biodiversity. An ecotourism is different from a tourist in the sense that it is mindful of their environment. Ecotourism is misinterpreted as any form of tourism that involves nature. Self-proclaimed practitioners and hosts of ecotourism experiences assume it is achieved by simply creating destinations in natural areas.

WTO launched the International Year of Eco tourism in 2002. From that time, eco tourism in India continues to be a popular option because of its claim to support conservation attempts through the market based mechanism. Ecotourism market in developing countries more than USD 500 billion annually.

India has a substantial share of this market on account of its rich biological and cultural diversity and heritage and entrepreneurship skill in the tourism industry that has capitalized on eco-tourism. Eco tourism is formed by the tourists having nature consciousness. India, the land of varied geography offers several tourist destinations that are full of ecological resources. There are several ways to enjoy nature in most pristine way.

There are number of botanical, zoological and National parks along with wildlife sanctuaries and biosphere reserves and many more such spots having minimal impact of carbon footprints which are full of flora, fauna and other form of pristine nature and are great resources of eco-based tourism.

Biosphere Reserves

There are as many as 16 biosphere reserves which have been designated in India. They are Nilgiri (Tamilnadu, Kerala, and Karnataka); Nanda Devi (Uttarakhand) etc.

Mangroves

Mangrove is a type of tree and found only on coastal areas and works as a spinal column of an ecosystem that maintain an immense biodiversity. For Example: - Sundarbans

Coral Reefs

Coral reefs consist of huge communities of organism with huge diversity in color and life which live on or associated with huge limestone structure formed by animals called coral polyps. For Example: - Gulf of Mannar, Gulf of Katchch

Deserts

The desert regions are located in the western and north-western parts of the country. It can be divided into two parts those are the great desert and the little desert. Example Rann of Kutchch.

Mountains & Forests

The Mountain extends 2400 Km. divided into seven categories like Himalayas Aravali, Total forest cover in India is 692027 sq. Kms which is 25% of the total geographical area.

Flora and Fauna

47000 species of plants have been described by the BSI. India has 661 protected areas with 100 national parks, 514 wildlife sanctuaries, 43 conservation reserves and four community reserves in different geographic zones.

Seas Lake and Rivers

India has 7516 Km long coastline. Beautiful lakes like Dal lake, Pulicat Main Rivers are the Ganga and the Brahmaputra.

Caves

World famous caves like Ajanta & Ellora caves.

ROLE OF INDIAN GOVERNMENT

1. State forest departments should take up ecotourism activities in Forest areas.
2. It is promoted by Public private partnerships involving tour operators, local communities and Forest department.
3. Maximum involvement of Local communities to be ensured.
4. Selection of private tour operator in a transparent manner.
5. Plans for energy and water conservation, waste disposal, awareness generation and education for the tourist.
6. Boarding and lodging, maximum involvement of local people and skills, for regulation of tourist flow.
7. Monitoring the impact of eco tourism in forest and wildlife areas.

POSITIVE IMPACT

1. It works as deterrent to poaching as a steady flow of tourists hampers the secretive activities of poachers.
2. It provides no scope for collusion between forest department and poachers.
3. Creates an interest and awareness among people for India's indigenous flora and fauna.
4. It acts as a platform to educate and encourage conservation efforts.

5. Increase economic development in areas surrounding reserves through sustainable development.
6. Increases the revenue derived from tourism.
7. Preservation of local culture and tradition.
8. Creation of employment opportunities for the locals and surroundings.
9. Encourages participation of local community in protecting and conserving the area.

NEGATIVE IMPACT

1. The tourists arrive in and ride around the parks in vehicles which pollute the environment and scare the wildlife.
2. The incessant flow of tourist disturbs the animals.
3. Tourists leave behind garbage such as plastic bottles lead to environmental degradation.
4. Land around parks and sanctuaries are being cleared through deforestation, displacement of people, to accommodate hotels, resorts.
5. Mismanagement of eco-tourism sites causes more harm.
6. Eco-tourism takes away livelihoods from the locals.
7. No viable long-lasting employment opportunities with scope for growth are provided to the locals.

KEY ISSUES IN DEVELOPING ECO TOURISM IN INDIA

Reaction of several NGOs against the negative impacts of eco tourism. A neutral issue in developing eco tourism project is that tourism is a multifaceted industry and thus is almost impossible to control.

1. Lack of public-private-people (PPPPs) partnership.
2. Lack of scientific knowledge to assess the impact of a tourist's carbon footprints on undisturbed natural areas.
3. Adverse effect on indigenous culture through knowledge and cultural exchange programs.
4. Adverse effect on the reproductive behavior of wild animals, especially during mating season.
5. Displacement of locals for expansion of eco tourism project.
6. Gross violation of fundamental rights of locals.
7. Eco tourism leads to waste generation and pollution by tourist vehicles.

SUGGESTION

1. At the local level, ecotourism has become a source of conflict over control of land, resources, and tourism profits.
2. Ecotourism has harmed the environment and local people, and has led to conflicts over profit distribution.
3. Very few regulations or laws stand in place as boundaries for the investors in ecotourism.
4. Ecotourism is a strategy for conservation and development.
5. Ecotourism activities are, in and of themselves, issues in environmental impact because they may disturb fauna and flora.
6. Eco tourists believe that because they are only taking pictures and leaving footprints.
7. Environmental degradation with tourist infrastructure.
8. Population pressures from ecotourism also leaves behind garbage and pollution associated with the Western lifestyle.
9. Management of ecotourism sites by private ecotourism companies offers an alternative to the cost of regulation and deficiency of government agencies.
10. They have self-interest in limited environmental degradation, because tourists will pay more for pristine environments, which translates to higher profit.
11. If planning and decision-making do not involve local populations, then ecotourism will not succeed, and may even be detrimental to local communities.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

Because of the increasing environmental consciousness among people Tourism now a day's gaining the interest of the society in the form of eco-tourism. Despite the fact that ecotourism is known as a form of "responsible tourism", much controversy about its use exists. As some of the player just utilize it as a label to attract high paying tourist customers as the environmentally conscious tourist easily be ready to pay some extra cost for that eco- label.

Commercialization destroys the inner spirit of everything and same the case is with eco tourism in India. Eco tourism is a need of hour to disseminate wider

knowledge of nature, strengthening conservation efforts, and empowering local communities by providing them alternative source of livelihood.

Eco tourism should be promoted but regulated with more regularly compliance with active cooperation from environment officials and locals. The entry of tourists, the belongings should be thoroughly checked. The number of tourists and visit timing can be managed. Eco tourism can be a panacea for India if it is promoted under the strict definition of eco tourism that means making as little environmental impact as possible and helping to sustain the indigenous population and culture, thereby encouraging the preservation of wildlife and human habitats.

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