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Eco Tourism and the Sustainable Socio Economic Development

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Abstract

Tourism revenue generation can be channelled in to the management of the protected areas. Tourism could generate local employment, both directly from the tourism sector and from various support and resource management sectors. It could stimulate local industry i.e., hotel, restaurants, transport systems souvenirs and guide services. It generates foreign exchange. It diversifies the local economy, particularly in rural areas where agricultural employment may be sporadic or insufficient. It serves as an effective educational tool for visitors, creates awareness and instills in them a degree of concern which could perhaps eventually translate in to active support for the conservation of the area, the revenue earned from tourism prompts by convincing government officials and the general public of the value of natural areas. Maintain the stock of biological wealth in the region to Conserve life support services Conserve the diversity of nature and ensure that all resource impacts are sustainable to Minimise the depletion of non renewable resources and to Promote long term economic development. Effective protection of environment and prudent use of natural resources are maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

Key words: *Tourism, management, natural areas, protection, environment*

Introduction

Ecological principles applied to tourism; principles of human behavior used in eco-tourism issues; the relationship between natural resources and tourism; planning and management of natural, cultural resources and people's way of life for sustainable use in tourism with special focus on rural areas, wildlife sanctuaries and other areas of forests, mountains, beaches and islands. Eco tourism is relatively a small segment of the overall tourism sector. At the same time it is one of the fastest growing tourism segments and further rapid growth is expected in the future. Eco tourism has evolved as a concept in tourism. It is a purposeful travel to natural history of environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the eco system, while producing economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people. Saving environment around you

and preserving the natural luxuries and forest life is eco tourism. Beautiful beaches, forests and wild life and landscapes for eco-tourism. Snow, river and mountain peaks for adventure tourism. Technological parks and science museums for science tourism. Centres of pilgrimage for spiritual tourism. Heritage trains and hotels for heritage tourism. Yoga, ayurveda and natural health resorts for medical tourism.

There are 81,000 species of animals including, 50,000 species of insects, 12,000 species of birds, 45,000 species of plants and 15,000 species of flowering plants. Ecotourism framework came from Community-based Ecotourism of Kersten (1997) who defined Community-based Ecotourism as a kind of nature tourism wherein the local community maintains full (or major) control over the management and the profits of the project.

The emphasis of this strategy is community development and participation of the marginalized sector (including indigenous groups) rather than on regional or national development.

The objectives of the present study are to (i) Analyse the arrivals of tourists to India; (ii) Study the socio economic and environmental impact of ecotourism in India and (iii) Suggest suitable measures to strengthen tourism based on nature tourism. The study is based on secondary data collected from Websites, books and journals.

Arrivals of tourists

Table No.1: Number of tourist arrivals

Year	Domestic Tourists (No. in millions)	Percentage change	Foreign Tourists (No. in millions)	Percentage change
2002	269.60	14	2.38	
2003	309.04	14.6	2.73	14.3
2004	366.27	18.5	3.46	26.8
2005	391.95	7	3.92	13.3
2006	462.31	18	4.45	13.5
2007	526.43	13.9	5.08	14.3
2008	563.03	7	5.28	4
2009	668.60	18.8	5.17	-2.2

Table No.1 shows that both domestic and international tourist's arrivals have increased over the years with varying percentages except 2009.

The domestic tourists arrivals increased tremendously due to pleasure, recreation, holidays, visit etc., India has attractive natural and cultural tourist attractions such as Taj Mahal, Kashmir, Darjeeling, Ooty, Kodaikanal and Munnar in Kerala.

International tourists are attracted by Himalaya Mountains, lush valleys, plains and desert, white sandy beaches and islands. The number of arrivals increased year by year and the level of foreign exchange and state revenue also increased correspondingly.

Table No.2: State wise tourist arrivals

Year	Delhi	Maharashtra	Tamilnadu
2007	20,18,848	19,33,189	17,53,103
2008	23,39,287	20,56,913	20,29,140
2009	19,58,272	19,99,320	23,69,050

Source: Data bank -Tourism department.

Table No.2 shows the arrivals of tourists to top 3 attracted destinations of India namely Delhi, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, of which Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu are known for their nature based tourist spots. Besides, many new sites are emerging as popular domestic destinations.

In the west of the country, for example, the Konkan coast has turned into a tourist magnet and promises to compete with Goa as a holiday spot for the desi traveller, In the east, the beach towns of Mandarmani and Raichak may offer an exciting getaway to already popular hotspots like Darjeeling.

Table No.3: Vacation hotspots of India

Favourite holiday destinations		Most frequented States		Popular gateways	
Destinations	Tourist s (%)	States	Tourist s (%)	Gateways	Tourist s (%)
Gangtok(Northeast)	38.78	Maharashtra	16.31	Mountain	41.61
Darjeeling(East)	35.53	Uttarkand	12.48	Beach	13.94
Mahabaleshwar(West)	14.94	Tamilnadu	11.58	Wildlife	5.06
Ooty (South)	12.62	Karnataka	8.86		
Manali (North)	8.89	Himachal Pradesh	8.12		

Sustainable tourism

The concept of sustainable tourism being an outcome of the earth summit at Rio de Jeniro in 1992, the countries around the world are now conscious about sustainability and steps have been initiated to ensure its implementation. Sustainable development in relation to tourism means “developing the tourism product in such a way that it contributes to the economic, social and environmental growth of a region or local community, rather than destroying and degrading the resource on which it is based”.

- Social progress reflecting the needs for everyone.

- Effective protection of environment
- Prudent use of natural resources

Principles of sustainable tourism development

- Limit human impact on the planet and on the region to a level that is within its carrying capacity.
- Maintain the stock of biological wealth in the region.
- Conserve life support services.
- Conserve the diversity of nature and ensure that all resource impacts are sustainable.
- Minimise the depletion of non renewable resources.
- Promote long term economic development.
- Provide for an equitable distribution of the benefits and costs of resource use and environmental management.
- Provide for effective participation of community and interest groups.
- Promote the values that encourage others to achieve sustainability.

Socio-economic and environmental impact of eco-tourism

Tourism revenue generation can be channelled in to the management of the protected areas. Tourism could generate local employment, both directly from the tourism sector and from various support and resource management sectors. It could stimulate local industry i.e., hotel, restaurants, transport systems souvenirs and guide services. It generates foreign exchange. It diversifies the local economy, particularly in rural areas where agricultural employment may be sporadic or insufficient. It could benefit local people by stimulating development and improvement in support, infrastructure of services i.e. local transport, communications and water and energy systems. It serves as an effective educational tool for visitors, creates awareness and instills in them a degree of concern which could perhaps eventually translate in to active support for the conservation of the area, the revenue earned from tourism prompts by convincing government officials and the general public of the value of natural areas.

Some negative socio-economic and environmental impacts of eco-tourism

1. Tourism may cause degradation of the habitat by polluting waterways, accumulation of garbage, overharvesting of flora etc.

2. Unregulated tourist activity may cause disturbance to the flora and fauna e.g. Visitors may disturb nesting birds, use of spotlights shocks and disconcerts animals.

3. Frequent damage to flora may affect their regeneration potential.

4. Ecotourism ventures often alienate local people if they are denied access to the area in question on one hand while outside tourists are encouraged on the other

5. Influx of outsiders as tourists and entrepreneurs cause social and cultural degradation of the local population.

Swot analysis of ecotourism in India

Strengths

India has a well established tourism destination with a variety of natural attractions as mentioned in Table No.3

- Good number of domestic and foreign tourists visiting India.
- Unique culture of the local people.
- Already existing tourism infrastructure.
- Vast geography and varied culture

Weaknesses

- Lack of coordination among local people.
- Low involvement of local people in tourism.
- Little incentive for the local people from tourism in terms of income generation.
- Poor accommodation facilities
- Lack of adequate information
- Unhygienic environment
- Terrorism
- Economic slowdown

Opportunities

- Social mobilization through SHGs.
- Proper ecotourism package development involving local people in decision making and planning so that there is a larger involvement of the local people.
- Diversification of ecotourism products like stay in country boats, trail walks etc. which will help in retaining majority of the income generated with the local people.

Threats

- Potential negative environmental impacts (damage to vegetation due to rise in salinity, loss of species etc)
- Pollution by sewage, dumping of the wastes in river.
- Increase in biotic pressure due to increase in mass tourism.
- Lack of proper management causing negative impact on this fragile ecosystem.

Suggestions to strengthen the tourism industry

- The national Highways Authority of India must provide quality of road service to the tourists.
- The department of Tourism and Ministry of Tourism must provide information about the tourist spots and authorised licensed guides.
- Accommodation facilities must be improved in better manner.
- Discrimination in the entry fees should be avoided
- Department of Tourism and Ministry of Tourism should conduct entertainment programme such as dance competition and other activities through travel federation or tour operators.

- Proper sanitation facilities should be provided.
- Ecotourists must be responsible enough in conserving the natural habitats of flora and fauna, which may be affected by tourism.
- The host community also must be responsible in preserving nature and help the visitors in practising ecotourism principles.
- The Ecotourism operators and developers have a greater role to play in realizing their roles and responsibilities.
- NGOs, scientific and research institutions should create awareness about the practice of ecotourism development.

Government Responsibilities for Ecotourism

- Regulate structures that create visual pollution, anaesthetic views and are non-compatible architecture; and encourage use of local building material and structures befitting the local environment.
- Exclude developments in geologically unstable zones and define development and buffer zones after proper environmental impact assessments.
- Establish and enforce standards, building codes and other regulations.
- Specify environmental, physical and social carrying capacities to limit development.
- Ensure continuous monitoring of adverse effects of tourism activities and initiate suitable corrective measures.
- Recognise and award quality by accreditation of ecotourism operators.
- Provide visitor information and interpretation services covering particularly

(i) what to see; (ii) how to see it; and (iii) how to behave. This can be by way of brochures, leaflets, specialised guides, visitor information centres and such.

- Prepare and distribute codes of conduct to all visitors.
- Launch training programs on ecotourism for tourism administrators, planners, operators and the general public.

Conclusion

Tourism Vision- To conserve nature and culture preserving the heritage and environment.

Tourism Mission- To preserve the natural beauty, beaches, water, and hill stations etc. Both vision and mission accelerate the process of sustainable development of eco tourism. Maintenance of ecosystem by nurturing the nature for prosperity will boost the tourism industry in a long way to correct the socio economic imbalances in under reached part of India. And the sustainable development of the eco tourism project will succeed only with the local participation by utilizing their traditional knowledge, co operation and support. At present a small percentage of the local people are engaged in tourism related activities. Focus should be on more involvement and participation of the local people in ecotourism. This will help in maintaining a social balance in terms of income generation of the local people. This will also reduce their dependence on the forest to a great extent thereby aiding the conservation process. At present a small percentage of income generated percolates to the local people. Attention should be given so that the majority of the income from tourism is retained with the local people. Only then will the local people get an impetus to conserve the environment.

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