



Eco-Tourism and Sustainable Development

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Abstract:

Eco-tourism is a new concept in tourism, creating a different path towards the conservation of nature under the umbrella of sustainable development. In developing countries, eco-tourism has an exhilarating potential for economic development and environmental protection. The objective of this paper is to underline the wide scope of Eco-tourism in India by focusing on some of Eco tourist spot of India. This paper also focuses on how Eco-tourism has been emerging as an economy reader and how it has been using as a tool for balancing the environment issues and the sustainable development, as "Green Travel" has been marketed as a 'win-win' solution for the third world (developing countries), the environment, the tourist and the travel industry. This paper also discusses the efforts made by government in promoting the Eco-tourism to counter the contemporary environmental issues and a few study on the major eco-tourism spots of India.

Keywords: *Eco-tourism, environmental protection, Sustainable development*

1. Introduction

Today, the entire world is facing a deep crisis and is in the danger of being doomed and heading towards the sixth mass extinction. The rich forest areas and biological diversities have been ruthlessly divested to erect concrete jungles has led to Global Warming and Greenhouse Effects. Fortunately, this has led to some insight, and now the world has awakened for new beginnings about human responsibility towards nature. Sustainable development has become the global theme in all the international conferences and summits. Policy creators and development specialists believe Eco-tourism as a perfect economic activity to endorse both sustainability and development.

Travel and tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. It has become bliss in global economic power house, not only contributing a lot to the global GDP. Tourism alone stands for 10% global GDP and accounted for 1 in 11 jobs worldwide. Tourism is an integral part of economy of a country. For countries like Macau, Seychelles, Bahamas etc. it is the direct source of income contributing a huge share in their countries' GDP. Nature based tourism is a major tourism sector, contributing more than 25% of the global travel market. Eco-tourism is emerging as a new impression in the tourism industry. The International Eco-tourism Society (TIES) has defined Eco-tourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education".

The word "Eco-tourism" has a wider concept rather than tourism only. It involves the Conservation of natural and cultural heritage and enhancing bio cultural diversity, the participation of the communities by increasing local capacity building and employment opportunities to fight against the poverty, the emphasis on environmental awareness and inspiring personal experiences.

2. Eco-Tourism around the World

Year 2017 has been declared as the international year for Sustainable tourism for Development recalling the potential of tourism to advance the universal 2030 agenda for sustainable tourism by

United Nations General Assembly. International organisations like United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) dedicated in promoting and developing of ecotourism by providing guidelines and standards, training, technical assistance, and educational resources. TIES' global network of ecotourism professionals and travellers is leading the efforts to make tourism a viable tool for conservation, protection of bio-cultural diversity, and sustainable community development. TIES currently has members in more than 120 countries.

Table 1: contribution of Eco-Tourism in GDP and Employment of different countries.

Name of the country	% of total GDP	% of total employment
Macau	46.7	51
British Virgin Islands	27.1	32.8
Aruba	26.5	29.9
Seychelles	24.7	26.3
Anguilla	22.9	24.1
Maldives	22.4	20.8
Bahamas	22.0	30.6
Antigua and Barbuda	18.5	18.8

Source: WTTC 2012

About 83% of the developing countries rely on eco-tourism as a major export and contributory factor in their gross domestic product and employment level calculations. The small country of Macau contributes to 51% of the total employment of the country and 46.7% direct contribution to GDP through eco-tourism. Seychelles accounts for 24.7% of the total GDP and about 26.3% of the total employed people are engaged in tourism activities. Anguilla depends heavily on eco-tourism, contributes to the employment of this country- to the tune of 26.3 % and 22.9% to GDP (WTTC 2012). There are many more examples of countries' dependency on its nature and biodiversity for their sustenance and eco-tourism has paved the way for conservation of nature as 'sustainable tourism' or 'green tourism'.

3. Eco-Tourism in India

India is a land of mountains, deserts, plateaus, plains, coastal plains and islands thus supports rich species bio-diversity as well as cultural bio-diversity. India is among the world's 18 mega bio-diversity countries and solely represents 4 out of the 35 biodiversity hotspots in the world. India's topography with picture perfect landscapes fascinates a lot of eco-tourism. Currently, there are about 103 national parks, 18 biosphere reserves and 537 wildlife sanctuaries, working for the protection and conservation of wildlife resources of India (MoEF annual report). Areas that have been opened for ecotourism

3.1 Andaman & Nicobar Islands

The Department of Environment & Forests - Andaman & Nicobar Islands Administration and the ministry of tourism – government of India has opened up many islands for ecotourism and invested Rs. 5 crores to Rs.100 crores (equivalent to US\$ 1.1 - 21.8 million) in 2004 to build super resorts and luxurious hotels in both the island groups of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, ten islands were identified in Andamans including Havelock and North Passage.

3.2 Chhattisgarh

The state has several 'virgin attractions' in protected areas such as Kanger Valley National Park, Barnawapara, Sitanadi, Udanti and Achanakmar Sanctuaries. Mainpat (Surguja), Keshkal valley (Kanker), Chaiturgarh (Bilaspur), Bagicha (Jashpur), Kutumsar caves, Kailash caves, Tirathgarh falls, Chitrakot falls (Bastar), which "are all exhilarating destinations being promoted for nature and wildlife tourism. Wildlife areas, camping grounds and trekking facilities would be few of the prime

attractions”. The government is even relying on ecotourism for the protection of its state bird Hill Myna (*Graculis religiosa peninsularis*) and state animal Wild Buffalo (*Bubalis bubalis*) which have been categorised under endangered species. Hence ecotourism will help in preserving these and other species of biodiversity.

3.3 Uttarakhand

The state has a tourism policy which states that “Uttarakhand has blessed with exceptional diversity of flora and fauna, making it an ideal area for developing eco-tourism, projects and activities like jungle safaris, trekking on mountain and forest trails, nature walks, catch and release angling for mahaseer and other fish species. All these activities should be conducted in a manner that promotes awareness of environment and helps to maintain the fragile ecological balance” And for wildlife tourism: “Along with the world-famous Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand has several other breath-taking destinations for Wildlife Tourism. These include the Rajaji National Park, Govind Pashu Vihar, Asan Barrage, Chilla, and Saptarishi Ashram, and providing a glee for bird watchers”.

3.4 Kerala

Kerala is an unexplored hub for eco-tourism and a paradise for nature’s lovers. Its coastal location, greenery, evergreen forest, mountains, hills, valleys stream, rivers, backwaters, beaches, lagoons, cultural heritage and rich bio-diversity provide a wide base for the development of eco-tourism. Thenmala in Kerala has become first plan eco-tourism destination in India, where eco-tourism resorts provide the best services to the travellers, to go close to the nature, fresh air laden with flowers while sipping in warm cups of coffee, have breakfast listening to the mellifluous tunes of birds and take a walk around the resort to feel the best of both worlds.

4. Link between Green Tourism and Sustainable Development

The Earth Summit (1992) has grown a pressure for the tourism industry to lift its environmental performance in common with other economic sectors, mobility towards green tourism development in every corner of the world. In order to develop sustainable tourism, in addition to the three principles of sustainability viz., environment, economic and social, cultural sustainability is an important issue, particularly when the tourism practices in a certain location are based on local or indigenous culture and tradition. Although sustainable tourism development on a global scale remains a telic concept, the journey toward the goal of sustainability is vital for current and future economic, ecological, and socio-cultural well-being and should be integrated with community- based economics, conservation with equity, and integration of the environment with the economy (Figure 1).

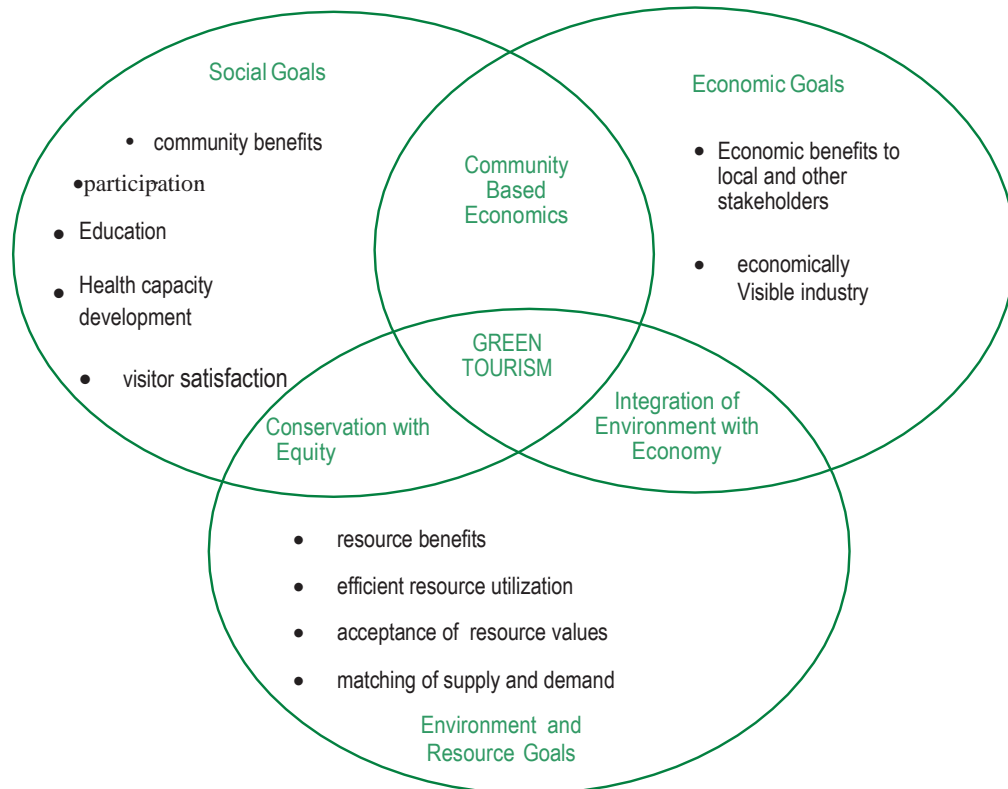


Figure 1: A model of green tourism values and principles

Source: Adapted from Hall et al. 1997

5. Government's take on Eco-Tourism

The ministry of environment and forest has drafted the framework guidelines on the selection, planning, development, implementation and monitoring of ecotourism in India for state governments, Protected Area Management, Tourist facilities/ Tour operators, Temple/Pilgrimage Boards, Local Communities and Public / Visitors respectively. The government of Karnataka has even declared 2017 as the year of the Wild, to popularise wilderness tourism and eco-trails across the state. The Ministry of Tourism even awarding the stakeholders to promote and practise Eco-Tourism practises in the categories of "Best Eco Friendly Hotel", Best Responsible Tourism Project", Best Eco friendly Practises by Tour Operators" in the National Tourism Awards as an encouragement towards sustainable tourism.

6. Summary

Eco tourism has to be about ecology not economy. If it's going to be about economy only, then it will create problems. The environmental impact of tourism development can be serious if it exceeds the carrying capacity of nature. It can lead the damage of natural attractions due to overcrowding and unreasonable activities. Building resorts and hotels can lead to environment degradation and deforestation. Such type of activities can create pollution, generate waste and non- biodegradable waste will damage the fragile ecosystem and natural wildlife

Ecotourism, when practiced correctly, is an important economic and educational activity. It has the scope to link to a wider constituency and build conservation support while raising awareness about the worth and fragility of such ecosystems in the public at large. It also promotes the non-consumptive use of wilderness areas, for the benefit of local communities living around, and dependent on these fragile landscapes. It involves tourism to natural destinations which gives escapism from the hyper tensed artificial world and a short term relief from the pollution of the metropolitan cities. It builds an environmental awareness among the visitors, when people personally

experience the connection with the nature it generates a sense for its conservation on individual basis and creates an environmental awareness. It highlights the local and tribal cultures and engenders a respect for these untold cultures. Eco-tourism not only generates employment but also provides financial aid benefits and it empowers the local people. For a developing country like India ecotourism creates a lot of opportunities in environmental issues, empowering local tribes, generating employments and sustainable development.

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