

Eco-Tourism-Responsible and Sustainable Travel in Natural Areas

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Abstract: *Tourism is the world's largest industry. For developing countries, it is one of the income generators and job providers. According to 2011 data from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTCC), the tourism sector accounts for 9.1 % of the world's GDP and 8.6 % of global employment. The contribution of travel and tourism to the global GDP is expected to increase to 9.6 % in 2020. Tourism is the largest service industry in India, contributing 6.23% to the national GDP and 8.78% of total employment in 2010. In 2010, the total foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) to India was 5.78 million, and in 2008, India earned around 200 billion USD and is expected to grow to 375.5 billion USD by 2018 at a 9.4% annual growth rate. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, India was a tourism hot spot from 2009 to 2018, with the highest potential for 10 years of growth. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2007 ranks tourism in India sixth in terms of price competitiveness and 39th in terms of safety. India's rich history and cultural and geographical diversity make international tourism large and diverse. The rich diversity of geography, climate, demographics, culture, etc. attracts tourists from abroad. It offers heritage and cultural tourism, including medical, business, and sports tourism. India is the largest and fastest-growing medical tourism sector due to growing high-tech medical technology. Along with foreign tourists, the number of domestic tourists is also increasing. Middle-class Indians tend to spend their growing personal expenses on beautiful beaches, virgin forests, and scenic islands. Despite the huge potential, the country of India has not been able to benefit from the tourism sector. From a lack of tourism infrastructure to a variety of perennial conflicts to geographical proximity, India is lagging behind the rest of the world in its prosperity due to numerous problems. The proposed research seeks to focus on tourism development and planning in India in general and India in particular by considering various sectors related to tourism. The present study provides a critical analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of ecotourism activities in the West Vasai region coastal area. The region's unique natural features were a strength but a lack of rigorous environmental management was found to be a weakness. Ecotourism can be a great tool for income generation and environmental tourism.*

Keywords: Ecotourism, Sustainability, SWOT Analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Becoming one of the fastest-growing sectors in the world, tourism has placed itself in a thriving global industry with the power to shape developing countries, like India. Tourism cannot be ignored in India, a country of 15,000 plant varieties, 1200 bird species, and 500 species of mammals, and also where the Western Ghat & Eastern Himalayan Forest has been declared as one of the best by UNESCO. Tourism has rediscovered valuable heritage like Khajuraho, which was unknown to average Indians even in the early 60s. The Taj Mahal was a place for beggars and vagabonds before Lord Curzon's initiation in the preceding century. Much before that, previous to 1817, when few English platoons had invented Ajanta, hardly anyone knew about that place (Chattopadhyay, 2012). So, the Government of India has set up the Ministry of Tourism and Culture which launched a campaign called 'Incredible India!' to encourage different types of tourism in the country ("Developing Ecotourism", 2012). India enjoys a coastline on all three sides. The Bay of Bengal East, the Indian Ocean in the south, and the Arabian Sea in the West side. Northeast India is a tourism hot spot of India.

The Ministry of Tourism calls the region a 'paradise unexplored' as myriads of tourist destinations have yet to catch the eagle eye of foreign tourists. The alluring land of the region is one of the most treasured eco-friendly sites in the entire world. The isolated and mysterious land of natural abundance is still to be ventured by the world. The region popularly known as seven sisters provides rich natural beauty with diversity, exotic cultural and ethnic mosaic, flora and fauna, and the serenity of unexplored ecosystems.

Concept

“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES 2015). It utilizes the wide range of natural and cultural ecosystem services provided by mangroves to improve local livelihood.

In the Indian context, “Tourism with an ecological conscience”. It involves visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively untouched natural areas, to support conservation efforts. One observes the flora and fauna in their natural environment and causes as little impact as possible.

As defined by the International Ecotourism Society, ecotourism refers to “responsible travel that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”. Also called “nature tourism”, the objective of ecotourism is to minimize the impact brought about by tourism on the environment.

Key features of ecotourism design elements can be specified as the genuineness of nature environment, specific wildlife, pure ecosystem with accessible interpretation trails, level of excitement of its nature phenomenon, ecolodge, cultural immersion of local people, and historical heritage.

Ecotourism is a niche segment of tourism in natural areas. Sustainable tourism does not refer to a specific type of tourism, it is an aspiration for the impacts of all forms of tourism. All forms of tourism should be sustainable.

II. TOURISM AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIA

The industry in general has both positive and negative effects on the country as follows:

Positive Impact:

1. **Generating Income and Employment:** Helps in poverty alleviation and sustainable human development.
2. **Source of Foreign Exchange Earnings:** This has a favorable impact on the balance of payment of the country.
3. **Preservation of National Heritage and Environment:** Several places of historical importance, like the Taj Mahal, the Qutab Minar, Ajanta, and Ellora temples, etc., are declared as heritage sites and hence are taken care to be protected. Similarly, the natural habitats of many endangered species are also conserved.
4. **Developing Infrastructure:** Development of multiple-use infrastructures is encouraged. The development of infrastructure has in turn induced the development of other directly productive activities.
5. **Promoting Peace and Stability:** Peace and stability in developing countries like India are maintained by providing jobs, generating income, diversifying the economy, protecting the environment, and promoting cross-cultural awareness.
6. **Contributions to Government Revenues:** User fees, income taxes on sales or rental of recreation equipment, and license fees for activities such as rafting and fishing can provide governments with the funds needed to manage natural resources.

Negative Impacts:

1. **Undesirable Social and Cultural Change:** Sometimes the social fabric of a community is destroyed. The more tourists come into a place, the more the perceived risk of that place losing its identity.
2. **Increase Tension and Hostility:** Tension, hostility, and suspicion between the tourists and the local communities can increase when there is no respect and understanding for each other's culture and way of life. This may further lead to violence and other crimes committed against tourists.

3. **Creating a Sense of Antipathy:** Large hotel chain restaurants often import food to satisfy foreign visitors and rarely employ local staff for senior management positions, preventing local farmers and workers from reaping the benefit of their presence. This has often created a sense of antipathy towards the tourists and the government.
4. **Adverse Effects on Environment and Ecology:** Increased transport and construction activities led to large-scale deforestation and destabilization of natural landforms, while increased tourist flow led to an increase in solid waste dumping as well as depletion of water and fuel resources. The flow of tourists in ecologically sensitive areas destroyed rare and endangered species due to trampling, killing, and disturbances in breeding habitats. Noise pollution from vehicles, water pollution, vehicular emissions untreated sewage, etc. also have direct effects on the bio-diverse ambient environment and general profile of tourist spots.
5. **Depletion of natural resources:** pressure from tourism can fall on natural resources when consumption increases in areas where resources are already scarce.
6. **Destruction and Alternation of Ecosystem:** It threatens and puts pressure on the species-rich ecosystem which is often severe because such a place is very attentive to both tourists and developers. Moreover, habitat can be degraded by tourism leisure activities.

Thus, the value of the very environmental and social-cultural assets that attract travelers can erode over time. Tourism should be developed in such a way that it accommodates and entertains visitors in a manner that is minimally intrusive or destructive to the environment and sustains & and supports the native cultures in the locations where it is operating.

Ecotourism - Sustainability

Apart from all definitions, ecotourism can be easily considered as an instigator of change, as the introduction of tourists to areas that were earlier infrequently visited by new demands upon the environment associated with new actors, outsiders will certainly create new activities and new facilities. This will, in turn, generate new relationships between people and the environment, people with different lifestyles, and between a wide variety of forces for both change and stability (Wall, 1997). Thus, ecotourism is (1) cultural tourism- a cross-cultural experience, (2) nature tourism - assisting with conservation programs, (3) a travel-learn experience - discover how we are coping with modernity, (4) a little bit of soft adventure, and (4) benefiting the well- being of indigenous people (Kahveci et al., 2003).

However, the word 'sustainable' plays a dubious role in tourism literature. Interchangeable use of the terms ecotourism and sustainable tourism displays an inadequate understanding of both terms for, evidently, not all forms of ecotourism are sustainable and not all sustainable tourism needs to be to natural areas (Wall, 1994, as cited in Wall, 1997). The average eco-tourist may be more demanding environmentally than the mass tourist who may not need to visit endangered species in remote locations, and whose needs and wastes can be more readily planned for and managed in large numbers incorporating economies of scale. As reported in McCool (1995) (as cited in Kahveci et al., 2003) for tourism and environment, the concept of sustainability in ecotourism should consider four key challenges: (1) a better understanding of how tourists value and use natural environments, (2) enhancement of the communities dependent on tourism as an industry,

(3) identification of the social and environmental impact of tourism, and (4) implementation of systems to manage these impacts (Kahveci et al., 2003). On the other hand, one of the most articulate critics of sustainable tourism, Butler (1993) (as cited in Wall 1997), has differentiated sustainable tourism and sustainable development in tourism in such a way as to clear the fact that tourism is unlikely to be the sole user of resources and that a balance must be found between tourism and other existing and potential activities in the interests of sustainable development. In other words, trade-offs between sectors are necessary though not sufficient.

Principles of Eco-tourism

1. Avoid negative impacts on the natural and cultural environment.
2. Educate the traveler on the importance of conservation.
3. Direct revenue for the conservation of nature driven and the management of protected areas.

4. Bring economic benefits to local communities.
5. Stressing the use of locally owned facilities and services.
6. Emphasize the need for planning and sustainable growth of the tourism industry.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The nature of the said research is a case study. The research considers Eco-tourism - Responsible and Sustainable Travel in Natural Areas. Kalam and Rajodi Beach in Vasai have been studied for micro-level study. In this, only 20% people of in the area have been surveyed.

Objectives:

1. To study the concept of ecotourism.
2. To understand the social and environmental impacts of ecotourism.
3. Studying responsible and sustainable forms of nature travel in ecotourism.

Hypotheses:

1. Ecotourism helps society economically.
2. Ecotourism is an important part of tourism.
3. Tourism can be successful with proper management and guidance.

Scope & Limitation:

The said research is limited to Kalam and Rajodi Beach in Vasai Taluka. But ecotourism is about acting responsibly and sustainably when traveling to natural areas across the globe.

1. Vasai Taluka in the Palghar District of Maharashtra State is on the coast of the Arabian Sea.
2. Both the coasts are on the Arabian Sea coast.

Brief about Kalamb and Rajodi Beach.

Kalamb: According to Census 2011 information the location code or village code of Kalamb village is 552404. Kalamb village is located in Vasai tehsil of Thane district in Maharashtra, India. It is situated 23km away from sub-district headquarters Vasai (tehsildar office) and 55km away from district headquarters Thane. As per 2009 stats, Kalamb village is also a gram panchayat.

The total geographical area of the village is 246.48 hectares. Kalamb has a total population of 5,329 people, out of which the male population is 2,644 while the female population is 2,685. The literacy rate of Kalamb village is 79.64% out of which 83.13% of males and 76.20% of females are literate. There are about 1,169 houses in Kalamb village. The pin code of Kalamb village locality is 401304.

Vasai-Virar City is the nearest town to Kalamb for all major economic activities, which is approximately 10km away.

Rajodi: Rajodi Beach is located in Satpala Gram Panchayat. According to Census 2011 information the location code or village code of Satpala village is 552403. Satpala village is located in Vasai tehsil of Thane district in Maharashtra, India. It is situated 23km away from sub-district headquarters Vasai (tehsildar office) and 55km away from district headquarters Thane. As per 2009 stats, Satpala village is also a gram panchayat.

The total geographical area of the village is 257 hectares. Satpala has a total population of 3,751 people, out of which the male population is 1,881 while the female population is 1,870. The literacy rate of the staple village is 78.38% out of which 82.67% of males and 74.06% of females are literate. There are about 865 houses in the sample village.

IV. SWOT ANALYSIS OF ECOTOURISM IN KALAMB AND RAJODI BEACH.

Strength

1. Environmentally and ecologically sensitive.
2. Unique features: Natural forests with rich biodiversity and long beaches.

3. Local people strongly support the need for ecotourism in this area as their alternative livelihood.
4. Easily accessible from the nearest metropolitan city.
5. Existence of the tourism facilitators such as resorts.
6. Many villagers farm in both villages and few are doing fishery in Kalamb village
7. Research station: many science scholars select this place as their study site.

Opportunity

1. Proper ecotourism package development involving local people in decision-making and planning.
2. Development of a hotel industry that recruits local people and thus increases employment generation.
3. Generation of interlinked livelihoods like housekeeping services, tea shops, food hotels, car & and auto services, etc.
4. Development in the cottage industry like small handicraft shops, fresh vegetables, fruits, and fish on beaches.
5. Creating environmental awareness on nature conservation in local and cultural through education.
6. Gram panchayat also generates income through entry fees to give good quality services like roads, transportation, lifeguards on beaches, etc.

Weakness

1. Tourists are mainly from urban metropolitan and with little or no knowledge of the importance of the ecosystem.
2. The hotels developed as part of tourism are mostly owned by outside private investors.
3. Absence of strict rules for entering the beach and reserved forest.
4. Absence of proper solid waste management.
5. Straying of poor people on beaches and visiting spots hints at tourists of being theft.

Threats

1. Pollution by sewage, littering of wastes on beaches.
2. Vehicular air and noise pollution due to the gathering of tourist buses and motor vans and DJ sound coming from the resort. It affects villagers, especially students and those who are doing work from home.
3. Increase in biotic pressure due to increase in mass tourism.
4. Lack of proper management hurts this fragile ecosystem risk of destruction of unique features like mangroves etc.
5. Criteria and planning problems in ecotourism planning concerning its financial, social, cultural, and ecological aspects.
6. Illegal trade on endemic species.
7. Transformation of ecotourism from nature friendship activities to new fresh products for the market.

V. CONCLUSION

Sea-side to witness the beauty of nature as well as the wilderness in serenity. Hence, the name ecotourism is already very well known in this area. It is a win-win solution in this destination as sensitization about the environment is best achieved through ecotourism and also the livelihood opportunity component of ecotourism is considered to be a means of poverty alleviation for the local people. However, for ecotourism to be effective in its true sense there is a need to develop a proper package that should be different from the existing mass tourism packages. Focus should be given to more involvement and participation of the local people in ecotourism. This will help in maintaining a social balance in terms of income generation for the local people and reduce their dependence on the forest to a great extent thereby aiding the conservation process. Thus, the concern for the survivability of flora and fauna should also include the protection of these human communities, as stewards of the natural environment and as producers. Save the future today, and make the environment excellent.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Although SWOT is recommended to be performed by a group of individuals it is also possible to be carried out by a single individual. This is advantageous in that ideas could be sparked from a line of thinking beginning from an individual. However, the time factor and biased ideas could be the disadvantages of group discussions.

- a. Determining the main stakeholders, defining the ecosystem area, and developing the relationship between them.
- b. Characterizing the structure and function of the ecosystem, and setting in place mechanisms to manage and monitor it.
- c. Identifying the important economic issues that will affect the ecosystem and its inhabitants.
- d. Determining the likely impact of the ecosystem on adjacent ecosystems.
- e. Deciding on long-term goals and flexible ways of reaching them.
- f. Need good responsible management for ecotourism development.
- g. Awareness about responsibility is needed when people doing ecotourism

Moreover, credible ecotourism should be firmly based on scientific ecological principles that define ecosystem integrity, especially the resilience of ecosystem processes to disturbance. Such tolerance should be the fundamental measurement against which ecotourism products are monitored Hence if these steps are incorporated into ecotourism, the sustainability of the ecosystem vis-à-vis the environment will be nourished in a true sense through tourism. While going for ecotourism, we need to take full responsibility.

Go green, breathe clean, stop polluting the environment. Save our planet. Think before you trash it.

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