

SOCIAL IMPACTS OF ECOTOURISM IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Worldwide tourism is recognized by the governments as a sector with high potential for economic development and employment generation. International agencies like World Tourism Organization (WTO) have underscored the vast developmental potential of tourism particularly for the developing nations like India. It is estimated that economies like India and China would emerge as the superpowers in world tourism by the years 2020. In spite of the appreciable growth in tourism over the last few years and the excellent growth prospects of the industry, there are growing apprehensions regarding the sustainability of tourism as a development paradigm primarily because of the adverse environmental impacts of tourism. It is widely believed that environment friendly tourism alone can be sustainable for development in the long run, and accordingly the concept of 'Ecotourism' is gaining significance day by day. Ecotourism promises employment and income to local communities and needed foreign exchanges to national governments while allowing the continued existence of the natural resource base.

The study is undertaken with the objectives of analyzing the problems and prospects of Indian ecotourism and to analyze the impact of eco-tourism on the Indian economy. The study is based on secondary data. Published books, Journals and reports have been used to collect relevant information and data. The impact study has been made by analyzing the extent of foreign tourist's arrival to India, India's foreign exchanges earnings, and domestic tourist visits in India. Percentage has been widely used in the study. The study period has been taken from 1999 to 2016.

Key words: Eco-tourism, Impact, Problems, Prospects, Sustainable development

1.INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the largest as well as the fastest industry of the world. India's glorious traditions and rich cultural heritage are closely related with the development of tourism. In the global scenario, tourism is the world's largest industry. Ecotourism has received much attention in recent years, especially within the developing world. It has been linked to sustainable development initiatives, protected area, conservation efforts and regional and community development strategies in many places. In today's world eco-tourism is the only tool for sustainable development. Ecotourism has lot of scope and at the same time, at the same time, the rapid growth of tourism has also affected environment and socio-cultural concerns negatively. Ecotourism is "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." (The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), 1990)

In the present study, an attempt has been made to study the problems and prospects of eco-tourism and to analyze how far ecotourism appears to be a viable option for sustainable development and conservation of rich culture and environment of India.

1.1 ECOTOURISM IN INDIA

Tourism in India is economically important and is growing rapidly. In last twenty years India has opened its doors to international visitors and is now fostering tourism largely to gain an increase in foreign earning to help its economy. In 2015, 8.03m international tourists visited the country, an increase of 10.2% on the previous year. In last twenty years India has opened its doors to international visitors and is now fostering tourism largely to gain an increase in foreign earning to help its economy. In 2015, 8.03m international tourists visited the country, an increase of 10.2% on the previous year. However, India's tourism infrastructure is barely keeping pace with the industry increase and problems are evident in the accommodation, transport and personnel sectors. Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial (mass) tourism. Its purpose may be to educate the traveler, to provide funds

for ecological conservation, to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, or to foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. Since the 1980s ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavor by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention. Eco-tourism advocates leaving to future generations a stock of natural resources no less than that inherited by previous generations. This means preventing irreversible changes to environmental assets which have no substitute, preventing the loss of the ozone layers and living species, and damages to the essential functions of ecosystems such as tropical and primary forests wetlands and coral reefs. The same principle applies to human resources, local cultures, traditions, livelihoods and the land on which, they are based, need to be respected.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The study is undertaken with the following objectives.

- a) To study the problems and prospects of Indian ecotourism.
- b) To study the impact of ecotourism on the Indian economy.
- c) To suggest policy recommendations in the light of the findings of the study.

1.3 METHODOLOGY AND DATA BASE

The study is based on secondary data. Published books, Journals and reports have been used to collect relevant information and data. The impact study has been made by analyzing the extent of foreign tourist's arrival to India, India's foreign exchanges earnings, and domestic tourist visits in India. Percentage has been widely used in the study. The study period has been taken from 1999 to 2016.

1.4 USEFULNESS OF THE STUDY

The study would be useful to all the stake holders in tourism. It is useful in understanding the problems and prospects of ecotourism in India and thereby helps to promote sustainable development by raising standards of living with a great environmental protection. The suggestions and policy recommendations made in the study would be useful to formulate proper policy for the future growth of ecotourism in India.

1.5 MAJOR STAKE HOLDERS IN TOURISM

There are six main stake holders of tourism.

1. The public sector.
2. The tourism industry.
3. Voluntary sector organizations.
4. The host community.
5. The media.
6. The tourist.

1.6 CHARACTERISTICS OF ECOTOURISM

Some of the general characteristics of ecotourism are: It should be nature-based and ecologically sustainable involving appropriate returns to the local community and long-term conservation of resources. It should involve education and interpretation of natural environment to manage it in an ecologically sustainable way. It should also support the protection of natural areas by creating economic opportunities and providing alternative employment for local communities. Local community involvement is very much crucial for the sustainable ecotourism practices. More broad based democratic participation of the local communities in planning and implementation of ecotourism programmes would ensure long term sustainability.

1.7 PRINCIPLES OF ECOTOURISM

Fundamentally, ecotourism means making as little environmental impact as possible and helping to sustain the indigenous populace, thereby encouraging the preservation of wildlife and habitats when visiting a place. This is responsible form of tourism and tourism development, which encourages going back to natural products in every aspect of life. It is also the key to sustainable ecological development. The International Ecotourism Society defines eco-tourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." This means that those who implement and participate in Ecotourism activities should follow the following principles:

- Minimize impact
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate
- Support international human rights and labor agreements

1.8 CHALLENGES TO ECOTOURISM

Eco-tourism in India is facing various challenges mainly due to lack of infrastructural facilities such as roads and accommodation, strategic business plans, well-trained nature guides, methods of gaining community consensus and awareness programmes etc. . To attract eco-tourists, many terms such as nature tourism, green tourism and bio-tourism etc., are used in the name of eco-tourism although they are not synonymous with eco-tourism. Some of the different kinds of impacts that ecotourism development and operational activities can have include;

- **Threats to ecosystems and biodiversity:** e.g loss of wildlife and rare species, habitat loss and degradation,
- **Disruption of coasts:** e.g. shoreline erosion and pollution, impact to coral reefs and fish spawning grounds,
- **Deforestation:** loss of forests for fuel wood and timber by the tourist industry also impact on soil and water quality, biodiversity integrity, reducing the collection of forest products by local communities,
- **Water overuse:** as a result of tourist recreational activities e.g golf courses, swimming pools, and tourist consumption in hotels,
- **Urban problems:** Congestion and overcrowding, increased vehicle traffic and resultant environmental impacts, including air and noise pollution, and health impacts,
- **Exacerbate climate change:** from fossil fuel energy consumption for travel, hotel and recreational requirements.

2. PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF ECOTOURISM

India is one of those rare countries which have a wonderful blend of all the resources essential to make it a golden star on the tourism map of the world. Being blessed with a rich variety of both natural and manmade tourist resources, India attracts only 0.5% of World's tourists. According to Aparna Raj(2003), one of the basic reasons why Indian tourism has not seen the expected progress is, because the planners have been much ahead of time, and they started promoting tourism in the country at a time when the tourism infrastructure was not ready to meet the expectations and the standards of the tourist from the West. The local people are not participating in sustainable tourism. Indian tourism needs to be revamped so as to have sustainable development. We are poorly managing our tourism. According to M.P.Bezbaruach (2000) this has led to the following problems.

- Heritage Sites
- Commoditization of the sacred
- Create a market for prostitution and drugs
- Reduce biological diversity
- Destroy habitat for wildlife
- Pollute lakes
- Overuse valuable fresh water resources
- Contribute significantly to global warming
- Leads to loss of scenic beauty
- Reduce the pleasure and satisfaction obtained from an unspoiled environment
- Experiences throughout the world suggest that poorly planned and managed tourism that fails to support its environment base, results in falling market share and sows the seeds of its own destruction.

2.1 RESULT ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:

The World Travel & Tourism Council calculated that tourism generated 6.3% of the nation's GDP in 2015 and supported 37.315 million jobs, 8.7% of its total employment. The sector is predicted to grow at an average annual rate of 7.5% to 18.36 lakh crore by 2025 (7.2% of GDP). Eco tourists are likely to spend more money than other tourists. The most popular activities for eco-tourists are trekking/hiking, bird watching, nature photography, wildlife safaris, camping, mountain climbing, fishing, river rafting/ canoeing/kayaking and botanical study. Most eco-tourists are from Europe, North America and Japan, as they have more money and more leisure time than that of other countries. The eco-tourist will be a key player in the success or failure of eco-tourism.

Table-1: Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India, 1999-2016 (till June)

Year	FTAs in India # (in million)	Percentage (%) change over the previous year
1999	2.48	5.2
2000	2.65	6.7
2001	2.54	-4.2
2002	2.38	-6.0
2003	2.73	14.3
2004	3.46	26.8
2005	3.92	13.3
2006	4.45	13.5
2007	5.08	14.3
2008	5.28	4.0
2009	5.17	-2.2
2010	5.78	11.8
2011	6.31	9.2
2012	6.58	4.3
2013	6.97	5.9
2014	7.68	10.2
2015	8.03	4.5
2016 (P) (Jan-June)	4.19	8.9@

Source: (i) Bureau of immigration, Govt. of India, for 1999-2015

(ii) Ministry of tourism, Govt. of India, for Jan-June, 2016

It is clear from the Table No: 1, that during the period from 1999 to 2015, the foreign tourist arrivals to India have increased by 2.3 times. The number of foreign tourist arrivals has varied in between -6.0% and 26.7%. This shows an impressive improvement in the foreign tourists visit to India.

Table-2: Number of Domestic Tourist Visits (DTVs) to all States/UTs in India, 1999-2015

Year	No. of DTVs (in million) to States/UTs	Percentage (%) change over the previous year
1999	190.67	13.4
2000	220.11	15.4
2001	236.47	7.4
2002	269.60	14.0
2003	309.04	14.6
2004	366.27	18.5
2005	392.04	7.0
2006	462.44	18.0
2007	526.70	13.9
2008	563.03	6.9
2009	668.80	18.8
2010	747.70	11.8
2011	864.53	15.6
2012	1045.05	20.9
2013	1142.53	9.3
2014	1282.80	12.3
2015	1431.97	11.6

Source: State / UT Tourism Departments.

The table No: 2 shows the domestic tourist visits in India increased from 190.67 million in 1999 to 1431.97 million in 2015 which shows an increase of about 7.5 times. In case of domestic tourism, the country has shown a significant improvement.

Table-3: Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs), in Rupees Core, from Tourism in India, 1999-2016 (till June)

Year	FEEs from Tourism in India (in Rs. Crore)	Percentage (%) change over the previous year
1999	12959	6.6
2000	15626	20.7
2001	15083	-3.5
2002	15064	-0.1
2003	20729	37.6
2004	27944	34.8
2005	33123	18.5
2006	39025	17.8
2007	44360	13.7
2008	51294	15.6
2009	53700	4.7
2010	64889	20.8
2011	77591	19.6
2012	94487	21.8
2013	107671	14.0
2014	123320	14.5
2015	135193	9.6
2016 (Jan to June)	73065	14.1@

Source: (i) Reserve Bank of India, for 1999-2010

(ii) Ministry of tourism, Govt. of India, for 2011-2016

It is clear from the table No: 3, that the foreign exchange earnings from tourism activities have gone up from Rs. 12959 crores in 1999 to Rs. 135193 crores in 2015 which shows an increase of about 10.4 times. This indicates a marked increase in tourism activities in the country. Through multiplier effect it could generate large scale income and employment and lead to sustainable development of the country. However, India is still far behind in the World Tourism Map.

3. SUGGESTIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Restoration and preservation of historical monuments, artwork, painting, carving etc with every care.
- Improve and add value to existing destinations / packages and create new one.
- Private sector tour operators should be encouraged to come forward and take part in the Tourism promotion exercise.
- Pay more attention on environment protection, more emphasis should be placed on encouraging eco friendly sustainable tourism. For this, awareness should be created and there should be people's participation in the mission.
- Improve the management of India's natural and manmade resources.
- The government tour operators, local tourism promoters should work hand in hand in developing effective sustainable tourism.
- Set standards of recruitment, to govern employment in the tourism and hospitality sector.
- Tourism planning, development and operation should be a part of conservation or sustainable development strategies.
- Agencies, corporations, groups and individuals should follow ethical and other principles with respect the culture and environment of the host area.
- Tourism should be undertaken with equity in mind to distribute fairly benefits and costs among tourism promoters and host people and areas.
- Good information, research and communication on the nature of tourism should be made available.

- All round development of infrastructure, efficient means of transport including civil aviation.
- Integrated environmental, social and economic planning analysis should be undertaken prior to the commencement of any major projects.
- What is now essential is that the players of tourism or stakeholders of the tourism industry should take all possible steps to implement plans and strategies which strengthen India's position on the World Tourism Map.
- We need to leverage our heritage and culture, the richest in the world. We need to leverage Nature's enormous gifts to India.

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