

Importance and Major Implications of Eco-Tourism in General Perspective

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Abstract:

This paper makes an attempt to assess major implications of eco-tourism in general perspective. In this article, more focus was given to the importance of ecotourism. Eco tourism emphasised on the areas like conservation, education, tourism responsibility and active community participation. There is now a need to encourage tourism that contribute to the conservation of the ecology and environment, contributes to the local community and provides the tourist an opportunity to relax, experience and participate in nature. Eco tourism is the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry worldwide and more and more travelers are demanding eco-tourism holidays. This is a qualitative study.

Key Words: Eco-tourism, environment, nature, conservation,travel,sustainability.

Introduction

Tourism has been identified as one of the largest industries in the world. Tourism as industry has ushered-into a new area of expansion and importance. The significance of tourism has been well recognized in both the developed and developing countries. Tourism is a major phenomenon of the modern society and has emerged as an important economic activity of immense global importance. Tourism has found significant because it serves as an effective instrument for generating employment, earning revenue and foreign exchange, enhancing environment preservation, rejuvenation of the culture and tradition and thereby facilitating overall development.¹ Tourism has emerged as one of the most important area

¹ Chandra Ashish, Kandari O.P, *Tourism Biodiversity Sustainable Development*, Isha Books, New Delhi, 2004

in the planning process of different countries. Tourism is a multifaceted activity with historical, social, cultural, political and other implications.

The word tourism is related to Tour which is taken from a Latin word “tornus” means a tool for describing a circle or turners wheel only from this word the nation of “round” tour or package tour resulted which is very much essence of tourism. The concept of tourism was first formulated in the period between the two world wars. Export earnings generated by tourism grew to USD 1.7 trillion and globally, travel and tourism directly contributed approximately 2.9 trillion U.S. dollars to GDP in 2019.

Eco-Tourism- A profile.

Since age, nature worship and the conservation ethics have been an inseparable part of Indian thought and traditions. The Indian tradition has always taught that human kind is a part of nature and one should look upon all creation with the eyes of love and respect. As the new millennium unfolds, we are becoming increasingly aware of the finile, interconnected and precious nature of our planet home. Likewise, tourism is becoming an increasingly popular expression of this awareness. With advancements in transportation and information technology, over more remote areas of the earth are coming within reach of the traveler. Infact, tourism is now the world’s largest industry, with nature tourism the fastest growing segment. In response to this increasing appreciation of nature experiences, a new travel ethic has arisen, which is now called eco tourism. This term has become increasingly popular in both conservation and travel circles.²

The origin of current eco-tourism lies in nature and outdoor tourism. Environment aesthetics is the most vital pull factor innate in an eco tourism destination. Eco-tourism is a form of tourism that is inspired primarily by the natural history and the environment of an area.. As a concept, eco tourism has gained momentum recently in India, but as a way of life Indians have practiced eco-tourism since times immemorial by their traditional approach to nature and rich cultural heritage.³

² Singh Ratandeep, *Indian Eco Tourism; Environmental Rules and Regulations*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2003

³ www.keralatourism.com

Eco-tourism is an amalgam of two separate concepts: ecology and tourism, but viewed jointly assumes great significance both for ecological conservation and development of tourism. Another name of eco tourism is ecological tourism. Eco tourism can be distinguished from nature tourism by its emphasis on conservation, education, tourism responsibility and active community participation. Nature tourism, low impact tourism, green tourism, bio-tourism, ecologically responsible tourism and others have been used in literature and marketing, although they are not necessarily synonymous with eco tourism. Eco-tourism can become an important factor in expansion of the level of tourism. The returns from eco tourism are higher than agriculture in many cases.

Defining Eco-tourism.

While a universally accepted definition of eco tourism remains elusive, it is important to appreciate that eco-tourism attempts to address concerns and interests around environmental, economic and social impacts of conventional mass tourism. There are various definitions about eco-tourism put forwarded by scientists and academicians. Hector Coballas Laus Curian, a Mexican Environmentalist coined the term Eco tourism in 1983 and was initially used to describe nature-based travel to relatively undistributed areas with an emphasis on education. The concept was, however developed into a scientific approach to the planning, management and development of sustainable tourism products and activities. Eco-tourism as a distinct tourism product, started in getting prominence in late of 18th century. By mid 19th century, countries such as Costa Rica, Brazil, Belize, Australia and Malaysia had developed eco tourism destinations and evolved clear-cut policy guidelines and strategies. Eco tourism is now at various stages of development in different regions.

Eco tourism is often referred to as ‘green’, ‘conservation’ and ‘sustainable’. Any tourism program that is: -

- A) Nature based
- B) Ecologically sustainable
- C) Where education and interpretation is a major component and
- D) Where local people are beneficial can be called Eco-tourism.

If it does not satisfy any one of these components then it cannot be called a real Eco-tourism venture. It is nature based because eco tourism contributed to the conservation

of natural areas by providing protection to the forests. Eco tourism activities are ecologically sustainable by waste management, non-polluting techniques were used, locally available materials are used in construction, environment impact assessment has been done and parameter of sustainability has been done and parameter of sustainability has been laid down. Education and interpretation is a major component under eco tourism activities by providing nature education, special concession rate in eco tourism zones are offered for school children and collage students, local youth are given training and local guides are utilized. It is beneficial to the local people by the way of providing both direct and indirect employment to the local people.⁴

The Nature Conservation has joined the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in adopting the following definition of eco tourism “Environmentally responsible travel to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local people”. The International Eco tourism Society (TIES) defines eco tourism as, “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of people”. This means that those who implement and participate in eco tourism activities should follow some principles like minimize impact, build environmental and cultural awareness and respect, provide financial benefit to local people and support international human rights and labour agreements. In short Eco-tourism is nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable.⁵

India has been experiencing various forms of eco tourism. In India with its immense natural wealth and panoramic environs, is recognized as one of the earths biologically, wealthiest nations, offering an unparalleled ecological diversity to eco-tourism. Some of the prominent eco tourism locations across India are Sunderbans (West Bengal), SePahijala-wildlife sanctuary (Tripura), Tumthang (Sikkim), PlageParadiso Sea-beach (Pondicherry), Lohtak lake (manipur), Kalpeni- a blend of aqua marine sea, coconut gloves and Coral reefs (Lakshadeep), Gir national park (Gujarat), Kazhيرانju national park

⁴ Vikas Priya rajurvedi, "Tourism in India", Yojana, December 2002 Vol.16.p-48

⁵ Hall.R, "The Greenip Wonder", *Kerala Calling* P, 13-14, July 2007.

(Assam), Thenmala (Kerala) and Chilka lake (Orissa). Among states in India, Sikkim and Kerala are the states that achieved a wide success in the Ecotourism development. The first planned eco tourism destination in India was the Thenmala Eco tourism in Kerala. The potential eco-tourism destinations in Kerala are Thenmala, kuruva, Tirunelli, Pookot, Kumarakam, Vagamon, Thattakkadu, Bhoothathankettu, Thekkady, Munnar, Athirappally-Vazhachal falls, Nelliampathy, Silent Vally, Nilambur, Perumvannamuzhy, Pythalmala and soon. Kerala has some of the forest hill stations like Munnar, 14 wild life sanctuaries and two national parks. Eco tourism can take several forms: to be in a beautiful natural forest or land-scape, wild life safaris, to enjoy watching animals, birds and trees or corals and marine life in area, mountain climbing, to engage in trekking, boating, river raffling, botanical study etc. These are some of the common forms of Eco tourism.⁶

Criteria.

Ideally, eco tourism should satisfy several criteria, such as: -

- ❑ Conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through eco system protection.
- ❑ Promotion of sustainable use of bio-diversity by providing jobs to local populations.
- ❑ Sharing of socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous people by having their informal consent and participation in the management of eco tourism enterprises.
- ❑ Tourism to unspoiled natural resources, with minimal impact on the environment being a primary concern.
- ❑ Minimization of tourism's own environmental impact.
- ❑ Affordability and lack of waste in the form of luxury.
- ❑ Local culture, flora and fauna being the main attractions.

Characteristics of Eco tourism.

- It must promote positive environmental ethics-fostering preferred behavior in its participants.

⁶ Bezbaruah M P, *Frontiers of New Tourism*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2001

- It does not degrade the resource. There is no consumptive erosion of the natural environment visited.
- It concentrates on intrinsic rather than extrinsic values.
- It is bio centric rather than homocentric in philosophy.
- It must benefit the wildlife and environment.
- It is a first hand experience with the natural environment.
 - It has an expectation gratification'. Being able to water wildlife, help local earn livelihood, could be gratifying.
 - It has a high cognitive and effective experimental dimension.

Guiding Principles of Eco tourism.

- 1, Avoids negative impacts that can damage or destroy the integrity or character of natural environment.
- 2, Educate the traveler on the importance of conservation.
- 3, Directs revenues to the conservation of natural areas and management of protected areas.
- 4, Bring economic benefits to local communities and direct revenues to local people living adjacent to protected areas.
- 5, emphasizes the need for planning and sustainable growth of the tourism industry and seek to ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental carrying capacity.
- 6, Retains a high percentage of revenue in the host country by stressing the use of locally owned facilities and services.

History of Eco-Tourism.

The history of Eco tourism started in the 1950s. Before that, the concept is not widely recognized or misunderstood. In the history of eco tourism, eco tourism existed in a few different forms that primarily try to achieve the same thing that the current eco tourism does. Eco tourism was first introduced in Africa in the 1950s with the legalization of hunting. This need for recreational hunting zones led to the creation of protected areas, national parks and game reserves. In the 1980s, the concept of eco tourism became much widely known and studied modern eco tourism beginning in the 1980s.

Many in the general public, who have always taken a traditional recreation tourism vacation, will not be very familiar with the concept of eco tourism some would say that the concept is very older, beginning with the first traveler who forsook a pleasure trip for one that involved education and gathering of information.

Most would not have projected the growth of this concept into a profitable industry. At first, the “movement” involved a few entrepreneurs who saw a chance to make some money by organizing events and trips for those who could pay. But these adventurous businessmen soon realized that travelers wanted something more. The tourists wanted to experience nature in its unspoiled state and they wanted to visit remote destinations that had not been on tour itineraries before some enterprising individuals bought land or leased property, then provided facilities they called eco-lodges, in which the accommodations were quite simple and kept the visitors close to nature. These were the humble beginnings of eco tourism. In the decade of the 1990s, the idea of profiting from eco tourism moved beyond individual entrepreneurs to community leaders and government officials on the regional and state level.⁷

Another view about the history of eco tourism is that in some places, following the 1973 rise in oil prices and subsequent international debt crisis, the World Bank adopted a similar strategy of tourism development as a potential means of encouraging foreign investment and earning foreign exchange. In response to the economic and environmental difficulties; various institutions prompting tourism development has shifted to include sustainable measures, environmental protection as well as the need to include local communities in the planning and implementation process. Many environmentalists began to support conservation and tourism was viewed as a potential mechanism to ensure sustainability. It is here that we first witness the emergence of eco tourism as a distinct category that is, the combinations of economic and environmental practices

⁷ www.world-tourism.org

in order to promote conservation and development through small-scale locally owned tourism projects.⁸

Eco-Tourism and the United nations.

Eco tourism activities have expanded rapidly and further growth is expected in the years to come. Because of its global importance the UN designated the year 2002 as the International year of eco tourism and its commission on sustainable development requested international agencies, governments and the private sector to undertake supportive activities. The world Tourism organization and UN Environment Programme organized a pioneering forum in 2000, which was conducted solely online. The prime objective was to provide easy access for a wide range of stakeholders involved in eco-tourism to exchange experiences and voice comments.

Eco-Tourism and Globalization.

Globalization has become a driving force to many industries in today's world. Tourism being one of the fastest growing industries has benefited from it. It is essential to understand that both tourism and globalization feed off each other. Through globalization, communication has become much more easily accessible between people. As a result of this, traveling from one country to another is increasing day by day; which makes tourism as an industry. As a result of this, the negative impact of mass tourism also increases. The main challenge that the tourism industry faces is to sustain economic growth while ensuring the long-term protection as the social and natural environment. Eco tourism is a solution to this challenge. The important thing is that the globalization channels significant information to every potential traveler on today's environmental threats such as global warming and oil spills making more and more people look for alternative and sustainable travel solutions. Environment has become more pronounced with globalization of the world economy. The important stages in the eco tourism development were taken place in the post-liberalisation period.⁹

⁸ Khan Saman, "Market Potential of Tourism Services in India" SAJOSPS, vol.9, p155-159

⁹ www.indiatraveltimes.com

Eco-Tourism and Third world countries.

Eco tourism is one of the worlds biggest industry is a global focal point. The result is eco tourism that is increasingly introduced in third world countries in form of a development package, involving capital, expertise technology and management systems, and is thus becoming something like a new green revolution. However, these recent trends in tourism development schemes-projected as sustainable, nature based, soft, green and eco tourism ventures has generated considerable public debate, potential serious implications on nature and society, particularly in southern countries. There are a lot of initiatives and thrust in the third world countries for development of eco tourism as a possible potential/opportunity for poverty alleviation and income generation as component in environmental and bio diversity projects. It sometimes deliberately directed towards the removal of all barriers to travel including physical, economic, social and legal barriers. Eco tourism has been a major source of revenue in the third world. Third world countries view tourism as a shortcut to rapid development. Eco tourism in third world countries and developing countries has been increasing annually by 5% as compared to 2.5% in developed countries. After all, it is in these areas that relatively undisturbed and preserved natural environments and exotic areas are located.¹⁰

The Dimensions of Eco-Tourism

Environmental Dimension.

By definition, the descriptive component of eco tourism involves the natural environment as an attraction. Conversely, the prescriptive component involves the impacts of visitation on the natural environment. Eco tourism can generate positive and negative environmental dimension.

Experiential Dimension.

Most of the attention within eco tourism, and within sustainable tourism generally has been on environmental sustainability. However, tourism should be sustainable in other dimensions, including the experiential dimension. If the visitor experience is

¹⁰ Murugan, Annamalai. (2005). Challenges and Changes in Indian tourism. *Sajosps*.july-Dec.102

sufficiently degraded there will be a reduction in visitation that jeopardizes sustainability.

Socio-cultural Dimension

As with the natural environment, the socio-cultural environment serves as both an eco tourism attraction and a recipient of eco tourism impacts. Many eco tourism activities involve relatively intense interaction between greatly different cultures, and these differences may exacerbate the negative socio-cultural impacts of eco tourism.

Economic Dimension.

The final dimension is economic. There are various stakeholders in eco tourism, from operators to natural area managers to local communities. Like general tourism, the economic impact of tourism can be grouped into three categories-direct, indirect and induced economic impacts.

Importance of Eco-Tourism.

The importance of eco tourism is increasing day by day. All the eco tourism projects forms a major part of the whole sector. In the context of high unemployment, weakend agricultural and industrial sector, tourism is considered to be the best alternative for priority in the economic and social development. Among different types of tourism, eco tourism is the most relevant. Eco tourism development not only improves the state's income, brings valuable foreign exchange and increases employment but also results in distribution of benefits across the state as opposed to most of the other states which tend to localize the economic and social benefits to a particular region. Eco tourism as a sustainable tourism should be beneficial to the future generations also.¹¹

The concept of eco tourism has got wide ranging acceptability cutting across the countries whether the state of environment and ecology are partly or wholly affected. In the era of globalization, competition among the countries for the energy production by exploiting natural resources like water, coal, uranium etc has become a great concern as the raw materials are getting exhausted hour after hour and at the same time the

¹¹ Mishra Sitikantha, Parida B Husan, Pandu K Tapan, Tourism Management; *The Socio Economic and Ecological Perspective*, Universities Press (India) Pvt Ltd, Hyderabad, 2004.

ecological surroundings are also unbalanced noticeably. This loss of ecology and environment is irreparable. Thus, eco tourism has become extremely topical in government, industry, academic and even community circles in recent years. The declaration of the year of eco tourism in 2002 by World Tourism Organization has provided impetus to the government and private entrepreneurs to initiate plan of action for eco tourism development both in the protected areas and other nature based areas with direct support and participation of local community.¹²

The four fundamental pillars of eco tourism are: -

- Minimum environmental impact
- Minimum impact on and maximum respect for host culture
- Maximum economic benefit to host country and
- Maximum recreational satisfaction to the participation tourist.

Tourism is the world's largest industry. It is bigger than steel, electronics, autos etc. In India tourism is the third largest foreign exchange earner after garments and gems and jewellery. The foreign exchange earning from tourism especially from eco tourism is very high. The World Resources Institute estimated that nature tourism was growing between 10-30% a year. Today, it is likely that growth is even higher. The International Eco-Tourism society estimated that of all tourists in the recent years, between 60-80% were nature based.

According to the Worldwide Fund for nature-India (WZF), eco tourism is an alternative tourism and it respects social and cultural traditions. It is decentralized in nature and seeks to integrate rural development. Eco tourism would ideally generate revenue for conservation of natural and cultural wealth and afford cultural exchange among rural and urban population. It can be defined as a nature based tourism that involves education and interpretation of natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable.

Eco tourism has a wider scope. Eco tourism recognizes the full integration of tourist industry in order to ensure that travel and tourism provide a source of income for the people of the area, and that in return they contribute to the

¹² Jagmohan,"Eco-tourism Planning", Jojana, August 2002,p-7

conservation, protection and restoration of the earth's eco- system. Eco tourism a part, it is also significant to throw some light on environmental and ecological aspects related to adventures like mountaineering and trekking. Generally speaking, eco tourism focuses on volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on the planet, typically involving travel to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions.¹³

The importance of eco tourism is evident from a recent study conducted by the World Tourism Organization of global spending on eco tourism was increasing by 20% a year about six times the average rate of growth for the tourism industry. Research finding indicate that an increase in the demand for and participation in outdoor activities in general, specifically eco tourism.

Many conservation and resource management professionals increasingly have viewed natural area visitation as an avenue for enhancing natural area finance and providing conservation related benefits, particularly to residents living near natural areas. Many observers believe that the growth rate for eco tourism will be higher than for tourism generally. Thus, assuming an increase in the proportion of tourism represented by eco tourism from 7% to 10% and assuming that the WTO forecast of 229 million international arrivals by 2010 is accurate, an extremely rough estimate of the regions international eco tourism arrivals for 2010 would be 22.9 million. To this, one must add the substantial number of domestic visitors to natural areas.¹⁴

The development and increasing popularity of eco tourism is a clear outgrowth of escalating concern for conservation of the world's natural resources and bio diversity. Global importance of environmental problems also increases the relevance of eco tourism. Eco tourism helps local people because they benefit economically as much for more by preserving habitats and wild life for continuing use by eco travelers than they could by "harvesting" the habitats for short term gain.

¹³ www.ecotourism.org

¹⁴ Chandra Ashish, Kandari O.P, *Tourism Biodiversity Sustainable Development*, Isha Books, New Delhi, 2004

Eco tourism can reduce pollution considerably. Eco tourism provides for the impetus of awareness that educates the public on the importance of environmental issues. Supporting the eco tourism movement is not just a leisure activity; it is a vital part of the safety of our society and the natural world. India has potential for eco tourism development. India has bio-diversity, various plants, flora and fauna, mountains, wild animals and rich forests. The government of India supports for eco tourism program. In Kerala, eco tourism sector attracts huge investment. There is a wide scope for eco tourism in Kerala. The Western Ghat regions of Kerala can be projected as an eco tourism zone. The recorded forest area is 1112559 sq.kms. Kerala has 12 wildlife sanctuaries and two national parks. The first planned eco tourism project in Asia was Thenmala Eco-Tourism project in Kerala. Among states in India, Sikkim and Kerala are the states that achieved wide success in the field of eco tourism.¹⁵

Advantages of Eco-Tourism.

There is no truth in saying the global economic slowdown has not affected us. It is surely having a slowing effect on tourism industry especially eco tourism. The main goal of eco tourism is to attract the immense tourism market to the natural areas of the country. Profits that may originate from this programme are used for sustainable economic development and to found local conservation projects for the preservation of the environment. During the period between 1990 and 2002, international tourism arrivals globally grow by 54% and now stand at around 700 million. By 2020 it is expected that this figure will have more than double. Global receipts from international tourism amounted to \$475 billion in 2024.

The main advantages of eco tourism are below: -

Economic.

The main economic advantages of eco tourism are: -

- Provide direct and indirect employment opportunities.
- Development of related economic sector.
- Increased local land values.

¹⁵ Singh Ratandeep, *Indian Eco Tourism; Environmental Rules and Regulations*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2003

- It provides an excellent source of foreign exchange.
- Provide employment opportunities to both skilled and semi skilled people.
- Eco tourism activities improve the income level of weaker sections.
- The tenth plan outlay for development of new eco tourism destinations, wild life sanctuaries and to promote plantations and farm based activities.
- Increase in income and standard of living.
- Autonomous and regional development
- It contributes to an important portion of national income.
- It can also promote business partnership between the private sector.
- It is an industry without chimneys that is, can promote economic growth without damaging the environment.
- Eco tourism supports the international labour agreements.
- Eco tourism promotes the overall economic development.

Environmental.

The major advantages of eco tourism in terms of environment are: -

- It safeguard natural environment, the very basis of tourist attraction.
- Eco tourism provides solution for tourism related environmental problems.
- It maintains biological diversity.
- Eco tourism provides protection to natural resources.
- Eco tourism ensures environmental sustainability
- It preserves the wildlife and species
- It promoting nature travel.
- Eco tourism and its associated activities is a better form of land use than most agricultural pursuits.
- Eco tourism enhances ecological balance.
- It improves resource management practices.
- Increased multi-stake hold will to conserve at landscape level.

Social.

The important social advantages of eco tourism are: -

- Improved local infrastructure-communication/transport.

- Increased social capital building, local organizational and managerial capacity.
- During the past ten years, there were drastic changes in the provision of accommodation facilities as a result of eco tourism development.
- It provides positive attitude and experience among the travelers.
- Eco tourism is a peace industry because it promotes respects for other culture.
- It promotes the welfare of the people.
- It satisfies the visitors in all aspects.
- Increased media exposure to natural areas around the world.
- Eco tourism helps in the manpower development.
- Improvement in the quality of living.
- Eco tourism provides and maintains the quality of tourist experience and satisfaction.
- Local people get more benefits from eco tourism.
- Eco tourism improves the income level of weaker sections.
- Eco tourism respects our social and cultural traditions.
- It plays an important role in the rural development.
- Eco tourism provides environmental education to the students.
- It helps in the regional development.
- It has positive influence on arts and crafts.

There are various explanations for eco tourism growth including:

- Increasing environmental awareness and interest, including the desire to be perceived by others as environmentally sensitive.
- Increasing dissatisfaction with traditional tourism destinations and products, and a desire for more educative and challenging vacations.
- Desire to go to novel destinations, sometimes as a way to “out do” others.
- Easier access to remote eco tourism destinations through development of air routes, roads and other infrastructure.

Conclusion

Eco tourism in the regional and globally has grown faster than tourism generally, and this probably will continue over the next several years. Many observers

believe that the growth rate for eco tourism will be higher than for tourism generally. Thus, assuming an increase in the proportion of tourism represented by eco tourism from 7% to 10% and assuming that the WTO forecast of 229 million international arrivals by 2010 is accurate, an extremely rough estimate of the regions international eco tourism arrivals for 2010 would be 22.9 million. By mid 1990s, eco tourism as a concept began to enter a period of maturity. Eco-tourism is a new concept in tourism industry. Within the international tourism, eco tourism is fast growing segment. Eco-tourism ensures the concept of sustainability in tourism. The explosion of interest in eco tourism led to the emergence of a lively debate among academic and industry leaders about the merits of the eco tourism.¹⁶ Eco-tourism plays a vital role in achieving the national objectives of promoting social and cultural cohesion and also national integration.

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¹⁶ Singh Ratandeep, *Indian Eco Tourism; Environmental Rules and Regulations*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2003

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