



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Commerce

A STUDY ON ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF ECO TOURISM IN INDIA

KEY WORDS: Deforestation, Environment Degradation, Employment, Ecological System.

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ABSTRACT

Traveling to relatively pristine or unspoiled natural environments with the primary aim of observing, appreciating, and enjoying the landscape along with its native flora and fauna, as well as any cultural expressions present in these regions. Ecotourism represents a niche segment within the broader tourism industry in India. Eco-tourism is recognized as one of the fastest expanding sectors within the tourism industry, with projections indicating continued rapid growth in the future. The concept was introduced by Hector Ceballos Lascurain in 1983, referring to nature-based travel to relatively pristine areas, emphasizing education, cultural experiences, and employment opportunities while promoting a scientific approach to sustainable tourism development. Consequently, this study aims to address various issues and challenges associated with eco-tourism. The paper is structured around two primary objectives: to identify the challenges faced by eco-tourism in India and to examine the underlying reasons for these challenges. Data for this analysis have been gathered from a range of secondary sources, including books, magazines, and academic journals. The challenges include insufficient infrastructure, particularly in transportation, a lack of proper sanitation facilities, and the disposal of campsite sewage into rivers, which contaminates wildlife, livestock, and the drinking water sources for local populations. Additionally, issues such as deforestation, disruption of ecological systems, and various forms of pollution contribute significantly to environmental degradation. There is also a threat to indigenous cultures, as local communities face difficulties in preserving their cultural identity and expressing their traditions freely. The ecotourism sector is encouraged to adopt more inclusive, innovative, and socially equitable practices. Furthermore, it is imperative for the government to conduct environmental impact assessments for all new projects and to perform regular environmental audits on ongoing activities, thereby fostering the development of programs aimed at environmental enhancement.

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism, a niche segment of the tourism industry, emphasizes responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, respects local cultures, and promotes sustainable development. In India, a country renowned for its diverse landscapes, rich biodiversity, and cultural heritage, ecotourism has significant potential to contribute to economic growth and environmental preservation. From the Himalayan mountains in the north to the Western Ghats in the south, and from the vast deserts of Rajasthan to the lush mangroves of Sundarbans, India's natural and cultural diversity offers a plethora of opportunities for ecotourism. However, the journey to establish India as a leading ecotourism destination is fraught with numerous challenges and issues that require immediate attention. The lack of awareness and education among tourists is another hurdle. Many visitors, unaware of the principles of ecotourism, engage in activities that harm the environment, such as littering, disturbing wildlife, or using non-biodegradable materials. Without proper guidelines and enforcement, such practices continue to threaten the sustainability of ecotourism in India. Additionally, climate change poses a long-term challenge to ecotourism in India. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and natural disasters not only impact the physical infrastructure but also threaten the biodiversity and natural beauty that attract ecotourists. For instance, the melting glaciers in Ladakh and Sikkim could reduce the appeal of these regions for nature-based tourism.

Concept of Eco-tourism

The prefix "eco" is derived from the Greek term oikos, which translates to "house." This prefix is also found in the words economics and ecology. In the context of ecotourism, its immediate reference is to the term "ecology." Ecotourism can be defined as "ecologically sound tourism" or "ecologically sensitive tourism." It represents "tourism to the house or home." Just as a homeowner invests attention and care into their residence, a similar level of consideration should be applied to tourism. Ecotourism requires individuals to value and protect the destinations they visit, akin to the care and appreciation one has for their own home. Thus, ecotourism embodies ecological tourism, where the term ecological encompasses both environmental and social dimensions.

Methodology

This methodology ensures a balanced and holistic approach to understanding the issues and challenges of eco-tourism in India while involving all relevant stakeholders in the analysis.

Here are some potential objectives for a study on the issues and challenges of ecotourism in India.

- To study Understand the Concept and Scope of Eco-tourism in India.
- To study Identify Issues and Challenges Faced by Eco-tourism in India and Andhra Pradesh

These objectives can guide the study to provide a comprehensive understanding of ecotourism in India while addressing its current challenges. A study on the "Issues and Challenges of Eco-tourism in India" requires a robust methodology to collect, analyze, and interpret data effectively. Below is a suggested methodology outline for such a study.

Research Design

Type Descriptive and exploratory research to identify the current state, issues, and challenges. Approach Mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods for a comprehensive understanding.

Data Collection

Secondary Data was collected from Government reports (e.g., Ministry of Tourism, National Biodiversity Authority). Research papers, books, and journals on eco-tourism. Reports from international organizations like UNWTO or WWF. Online articles and credible websites. Purpose: To understand existing eco-tourism policies, frameworks, and challenges identified in earlier studies. Study Areas Selection of eco-tourism destinations across different regions in India, such as. The Western Ghats (Kerala, Karnataka). Himalayan regions (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand). Wildlife reserves (Ranthambore, Sunderbans). Coastal areas (Andaman and Nicobar Islands).

Review of Literature

Scheyven (1999) defined as Ecotourism, although a minor component of the broader tourism industry, is among the

segments experiencing the most rapid growth. In 1996, the World Tourism Organization projected an 86 percent increase in tourism revenue, with a significant portion anticipated to stem from travel related to action, adventure, nature, and culture.

Silva and Mc Dill (2004) noted that ecotourism frequently occurs in designated protected areas or national parks, which may have been established at the expense of the indigenous communities.

Sharpley (2006) identified ecotourism as the fastest expanding segment within the world's largest industry, serving as an alternative source of income and employment.

Karunakaran (2017) examined the supporting arguments for ecotourism and validated its conservation benefits. Ecotourism, therefore, provides job opportunities, fosters indirect employment, generates foreign exchange earnings, and contributes to the income of businesses and individuals. It expands the economic foundation, promotes entrepreneurial initiatives, and enhances local awareness regarding the significance of eco-tourist destinations.

Principles of Eco-tourism

- Mitigates adverse effects that could compromise the integrity of the natural environments being explored. Informs travelers about the significance of conservation efforts.
- Allocates financial resources towards the preservation of natural areas and the management of protected regions.
- Generates economic advantages for local communities and provides income opportunities for residents living near protected areas.
- Highlights the necessity for strategic planning and sustainable development within the tourism sector.
- Ensures that tourism expansion remains within the social and environmental limits of the area.
- Maintains a substantial portion of revenues within the host nation by promoting the use of locally owned businesses and services.
- Develops infrastructure in a manner that is sensitive and harmonious with the surrounding environment.

Characteristics of Eco Tourism

- Eco-tourism significantly relies on the local community and its cultural heritage. It fosters economic growth within the region and aims to enhance the broader area surrounding sites of ecological significance. Both residents and visitors gain advantages from this initiative.
- The local population is engaged for employment opportunities, and it creates sustainable livelihood options for the inhabitants. Furthermore, it aligns well with the local environment and the socio-cultural framework.

Positive Impact of Eco-tourism

One of the most significant benefits of ecotourism is its ability to foster a greater awareness among travelers and tourism-related businesses regarding the importance of nature. It promotes a commitment to sustainable practices and responsible behaviors that can mitigate the negative impacts associated with tourism activities.

Negative Impact of Eco-tourism

Although the intentions behind ecotourism are commendable, there are also drawbacks associated with this practice. For example, while ecotourism can generate employment opportunities for residents in targeted tourist regions, many of these positions may be precarious or seasonal, resulting in periods of unemployment throughout the year. Even with measures implemented to mitigate the adverse effects of tourism, an increase in carbon emissions is likely as tourists arrive with their vehicles.

Issues of EcoTourism

Overcrowding and Environmental Consequences: Elevated tourist volumes can result in environmental deterioration and disrupt natural ecosystems.

Insufficient Regulation: A lack of adequate regulations may lead to irresponsible tourism practices that harm local environments.

Cultural Disrespect: Tourist activities can unintentionally offend local cultures, resulting in social discord.

Economic Leakage: A considerable share of tourism revenue may not directly benefit the local populace.

Wildlife Disruption: Unregulated ecotourism can interfere with wildlife and alter their natural behaviors.

Infrastructure Pressure: Mismanaged tourism can place excessive demands on local infrastructure, impacting community well-being.

Land Use Disputes: Tensions may emerge between conservation objectives and the land and resource needs of local communities.

Tourism Dependency: An overreliance on tourism can create economic vulnerabilities during periods of decline.

Green Washing Practices: Certain enterprises may misleadingly present themselves as environmentally friendly, resulting in misinformation for travelers.

Impact of Climate Change: Emissions associated with travel contribute to the carbon footprint, exacerbating climate change.

Challenges of Eco-tourism

- Achieving a balance between development and conservation presents significant challenges. The promotion of tourism must be carefully managed to ensure the protection of the environment and the well-being of local communities.
- Funding for ecotourism initiatives often falls short, as governments and organizations may lack the necessary financial resources to support awareness campaigns and educational programs.
- The influx of tourists can exert considerable pressure on natural resources, resulting in pollution, a decline in biodiversity, and contributing to climate change.
- Moreover, insufficient infrastructure, including transportation and sanitation systems, can exacerbate environmental issues.
- The cultural heritage of indigenous populations may also be at risk due to the impacts of ecotourism, potentially jeopardizing their traditional ways of life.
- Additionally, the complexity of ecotourism certification processes can create confusion, making it challenging for consumers to identify and access certified products and services.
- Local authorities may sometimes prioritize other interests over environmental concerns, leading to an uneven allocation of resources.
- Finally, irresponsible ecotourism practices can result in increased foot traffic that harms ecosystems, alongside issues such as noise pollution and littering.

Suggestions for Eco tourism

The government ought to establish a robust infrastructure to support eco-tourists. It is imperative for the government to implement essential measures aimed at environmental protection and the preservation of national cultural heritage. Tour operators should focus on diversifying their offerings by developing new tourism products, including the establishment of large-scale tourism resorts

CONCLUSION

Ecotourism fosters economic development while safeguarding the environment by maintaining ecosystems and biodiversity. It encourages community involvement, enhances environmental awareness, and promotes social responsibility. The essence of ecotourism lies in minimizing environmental impact and supporting local communities,

which in turn aids in the conservation of wildlife and their habitats during visits.

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