

# ECO TOURISM IN INDIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

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## Abstract

Travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any cultural manifestations found in these areas. Eco tourism is a small segment of the overall tourism sector in India. It is one of the fastest growing tourism segments and further rapid growth is expected in the future. The term was coined by Hector Ceballos Lascurain in 1983 to describe nature based travel to relatively undisturbed areas with an emphasis on education, culture, and employment opportunities into a scientific approach and develop a sustainable tourism. Therefore, an attempt has been made to focus various issues and challenges towards eco tourism. This paper is based on two objectives: to find out the challenges of eco tourism in India; and to analyze the reasons for it. Secondary data have been collected from books, magazines and journals, etc. The challenges are inadequate infrastructure such as transport, lack of adequate sanitation facilities, disposal of campsite sewage in rivers, contaminating the wildlife, livestock and people who draw drinking water from it, deforestation, disruption of ecological life systems and various forms of pollution, all of which contribute to environmental degradation. There is a threat to indigenous culture i.e. the local people struggle for cultural survival and freedom of cultural expression. The ecotourism community is expected to be more inclusive of innovative and socially equitable approaches. The government should undertake environmental impact assessment for all new projects and conduct regular environment audits for all ongoing activities, leading to development for environmental improvement programmes.

**Key words:** Deforestation, environmental degradation, ecological life and conservation, eco tourism, etc.

## 1. Introduction

India's tourism industry is experiencing a strong period of growth, driven by the burgeoning Indian middle class, growth in high spending foreign tourists and co-ordinate government campaigns to promote "Incredible India". The tourism industry in India is substance and vibrant and the country is fast becoming a major global destination. India's travel and tourism industry is one of the most profitable industries in the country and credited with contributing a substantial amount of foreign exchange. Tourism in India is the largest and fastest growing in the country. It has a vast impact on the national economy and plays a major role in other aspects of the country's growth and development, especially the creation of jobs. There are the different types of tourism. But now the concept and genesis of eco tourism evolved from a creative strategic view for conservation and protection into a massive global economic enterprise.

## 2. Concept of eco tourism

The prefix “eco” comes from the Greek word oikos meaning “house.” It is the same prefix on economics and ecology. In the case of eco tourism, the immediate origin should be the word “ecology”. Eco tourism means quite simply “ecologically sound tourism” or “ecologically sensitive tourism.” Ecotourism is “tourism to the house or home.” All of the attention and maintenance that a homeowner puts into a house should be the amount of care we put into tourism. The eco tourism must care for the place visited as much as she or he cares for and appreciates home. Eco tourism means ecological tourism, where ecological has both environmental and social conversations. The International Eco tourism society defines “Eco tourism is the responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of local people. Thus ecotourism is a form of travel dedicated to sustainable travel destinations. Eco tourism focuses on local culture, wild life’s, adventures, volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on the planet. Responsible eco tourism includes programmers that minimize the advent effects of traditional tourism on the natural environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people.

## 3. Importance of eco tourism

Various human activities have triggered an increase in the population of invasive species which make the survival of other species difficult. This directly hampers the food chain along with the habitat and leads to vulnerable existences in the eco system. Today, mother earth is screaming for protection and man is single handed responsible for having put her in such a trouble. There is still time to put a full stop to this destruction by those responsible for this vulnerable position. Statistics confirm that an increasing member of travelers will be reaching remote eco-tourism destinations with greater ease at less cost and faster than even before, indicating that some eco-tourism destination may become vulnerable. Many responsible eco tour operations are working successfully today, around the globe to create well planned, interactive learning experiences that introduce small groups of travelers to new environment and cultures, while minimizing negative environmental impacts and supporting conservation efforts. Tour operators have been hesitant to develop their own reporting system, making it difficult to statistically document eco-tourism overall performance.

Ecotourism is entirely a new approach in tourism. Eco tourism is a preserving travel to natural areas to appreciate the cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care not to disturb the integrity of the eco system, while creating economic opportunities that make conservation and protection of natural resources advantageous to the local people. Since ages, nature worship and the conservation ethics have been an inseparable part of Indian thought and traditions. Traces go back to ancient civilisations of India, when people used to nurture the philosophy of the oneness of life. It is tragic that since last few decades, the mad quest for the

material end and economical progress in India and abroad has become identical with the exploitation of nature in all its appearances. Today, the entire world is facing a deep crisis and is in the danger of being doomed. The rich forest areas and biological diversities have been relentlessly divested to erect concrete walls. The continuous denuding of forest reserves has led to global warming and greenhouse effects. Fortunately, this has led to some realisation, and now the world has awakened for new beginnings about human responsibility towards nature.

#### 4. Issues of eco tourism

The term eco tourism is used to describe nature based travel to undistributed areas having educative value. People all over the world are turning to nature for peace happiness and enjoyment. Eco tourism is based on 3 approaches namely economics, marketing and ecology. But these approaches are used down namely: human centric approach, bio-centric approach. The human centric approach is based on the supremacy of man. This approach emphasized that God empowered man to exploit nature which is gifted to him for the fulfillment of his needs. Bio centric approach negates human supremacy. It considers man as a mere link in the total ecological system. This is based on the principle of mutual trust and respect. Based on these two approaches, the following are the issues in eco tourism:

**Taxation impact:** This can be viewed from 2 perspectives: the taxes on expenditure by tourist and the fiscal taxes and benefits given to the eco tourism industry. The impact of taxation is very high on the tourism sectors realizing the fact the government of India has initiated by abolition of expenditure tax of 20 per cent and extended income tax benefits as given to infrastructure units and duty imports by hotels of consumer items including liquor

**Evolving a tourism plan:** A holistic approach would require significant funds the creature of supporting infrastructure and in capacity building amongst the local community to manage and operate the sector.

**The negatives:** It may be noted that media greatly affects both the investment climate and arrival of tourists. This is a negative perception amongst the western media and public. It is important to create a critical mass of quality products in order to become a destination worth traveling to

**Roads:** Quality roads are necessary for faster and efficient movement of tourism and related products from airports, stations to the tourism properties. The state of the roads has been appalling.

**Airports:** It serves as the first direct experience that a tourist has to attract. But unfortunately the airport infrastructure in India leaves a lot to be deserved congested airports, improper layouts, monopoly of airports authority of India. There are lack of proper facilities such as utilities, shopping areas and long delay in immigration clearance.

**Entry/immigration facilities:** The immigration and entry/exit formalities and the time required at the Indian airport visa, a good quality international airport needs to be improved.

**Tourist service:** There are obvious requirement of international tourist would be clean airports hassle free arrival, clean public utilities and accessible information and guides.

**Financing and self sustainability of eco tourism projects:** The development and maintenance of flora and fauna and other elements of purely bio-physical environments such as natural parks, wild life sanctuaries or wet lands must be furnished.

## 5. Challenge of eco tourism

The challenges of eco tourism depend on the travelling public. Through voting with dollars and pressuring with votes, the traveller can change the way the travel business treats natural areas. The first step is to be an informed traveller. Make the effort to collect information before the travel, not just about the air fares and accommodations, but maps, guidebooks, history books, and field guides about the places you intend to visit.

## 6. Responses

Eco tourism development must be acknowledged as a national strategy before specific policies and legislations will be effective. General policies on tourism alone are inadequate to deal with community based eco tourism. Therefore, it must be framed to clarify authority and responsibility of various stake holders in eco tourism development. Eco tourism allows visitors to enjoy an attraction community with a volume of tourist and impact such that the local culture and environment remain unimpaired. Tourism and recreational are always led to some level of impairment to natural resources. Hence, there is a need to develop and eco tourism policy that is holistic practicable and provides sensible linkages of social and natural environments by encompassing all relevant parameters.

## 7. Suggestions

The government should provide an adequate infrastructure to the eco tourists. The government must take necessary steps with reference to environmental protection and preservation of national cultural heritage. The tour operators should introduce new tour product development diversification, including development of mega tourism resorts. The central and state governments must improve the development of trekking, winter sports wild life and beach resorts to attract foreign tourist. Ministry of Tourism should explore new source markets in regions and countries with cultural affinity. Department of Tourism must improve services efficiency in public sector corporation. The airport authorities of India should streamline the procedures of airports and improve the utilities. The government must strengthen the tourist organization. The government should provide inexpensive accommodation in different tourist centres. Travel agents must be

invited so that they can hang from the ceilings of their offices. Festivals should be timed to occur out of season to maintain tourist flow during the traditional vacation periods of wealth nations. The government should create public awareness and participations.

## 8. Conclusion

Ecotourism promote economic growth, while conserving the environment of an area by preserving the eco system and biodiversity. It promotes a spirit of community participation, environmental awareness and social sensitivity. Eco tourism means making a 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 a responsible form of tourism and tourism development which encourages going back to natural products in every aspect of life. It can be said that eco tourism is a form of tourism that involves visiting the natural areas in the remote wilderness or rural environments. It lays emphasis on environmental conservation, and preservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through protection of eco system. Furthermore, it promotes sustainable use of biological diversity by providing jobs to local populations. Thus, eco tourism is inevitable to achieve the goal of sustainable development.

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