

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION THROUGH ECO TOURISM ACTIVITIES – A STUDY IN INDIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

India has introduced in recent times, for the concept itself is a relatively new one. Eco tourism entails traveling to places that are famous for their natural beauty and social culture, while constructing confidently not to destruct the ecological balance. Eco tourism pertains to a conscious and responsible effort to protect the multiplicity of a naturally gifted region and supporting its beauty and local culture. Indians have been identified since ages to worship and preserve nature. Thus, the growth of eco tourism in India is natural. In addition, the government of India has association with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture to promote eco tourism in India alongside other types of tourism activities. Eco tourism in India has grown-up significantly in recent years since the country has varied geographical locations which led to the development of many tourist locations. These diverse places not only distress the tourists but also refresh the people. There are different ways in which tourists can get pleasure from nature in India. And this has given eco tourism activities in India a major boost up. Places such as Kerala, Lakshadweep Islands, Himalayan region, north-east India, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands are some destinations in India where tourists can participate in eco tourism related activities. In Kerala, Thenmala is a designed eco tourism spot and is the first of its kind in India. Great care has gone into the care and preservation of Thenmala as a result that it caters to nature lovers and eco tourists. In this context, the present study concentrates how eco tourism contributes environmental sustainability in India.

Key words: Tourism, eco tourism, environmental protection, rain-forest, eco system, sustainability, etc.

1. Introduction

Eco tourism is completely a novel approach in tourism sector. Eco tourism is a safeguarding journey to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care and not to disturb the integrity of the ecosystem, while creating economic prospects that make conservation and protection of natural resources beneficial to the local community. In brief eco tourism can be classified as tourism activity that is "Nature based, ecologically sustainable, where education and interpretation is a major ingredient and where local communities are benefited." All this together can be called eco tourism. If a travel does not make happy any one of these constituents, then it is not called a genuine eco tourism project. Since ages, nature devotion and the conservation principles have been an inseparable part of Indian contemplation and civilization. Traces go back to ancient civilizations of India, when people used to rear the philosophy of the oneness of life. The Indian custom has always trained that, humankind is a part of nature and one should look upon all arrangements with the eyes of a love and values. It is disastrous that since last few decades, the mad quest for the material end and economical progress in India and abroad has become indistinguishable with the exploitation of nature in all its emergences. Nowadays, the entire

world is facing a deep crisis and is in the threat of being hopeless. The wealthy forest areas and biological diversities have been relentlessly divested to rigid concrete walls. Continues removing of forest reserves has led to global warming and greenhouse effects. Fortunately, this has directed to some realization, and currently the world has awakened for new commencements about human conscientiousness towards nature.

2. Importance of eco tourism

Various human activities have triggered amplify in the population of omnipresent species which make the continued existence of other species are not easy. This directly obstructs the food chain along with the environment and leads to vulnerable existences in the ecosystem. Nowadays mother earth is shattering for security and man is single handedly answerable for having put her in such a problem. There is still time to put a full stop to this demolition by those answerable for this vulnerable position people find us in.

3. Need for conservation of nature

Most resources and raw materials that we use today for medicinal or industrial purpose come from the forests. The ozone layer is still intact, thanks to forests; else we'd be dying of skin cancer. Studies say that pollution and temperature rise shall destroy all the coral reefs in the next 20-40 years. The earth's biological treasures are thrashed and scientists are calling it the 6th mass extinction event. Thanks to birds that today we can fly Mumbai-Delhi and overseas in no time. Nature is highly inspirational. The tourism that we are discovering nowadays is not about living in luxury resorts, littering waste on roads and in lakes, travelling in AC cars, feeding wild animals, habitat destruction and disturbing the entire balance of the ecosystem. We are talking about responsible tourism where you trek, cycle, live with local tribes, understanding the real jungle, learn and preserve. Promising yourself to do all that it takes to shield nature that is what makes you answerable eco tourist.

4. Eco tourism in India

India, the land of diversified geography offers several tourist destinations that not just de-stress but also rejuvenate you. There are several ways to enjoy Mother Nature in most immaculate way. The few places like the Himalayan Region, Kerala, the north-east India, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Lakshadweep islands are some of the places where you can enjoy the treasured wealth of the Mother Nature. Thenmala in Kerala state is the first planned eco tourism destination in India created to cater to the eco tourists and nature lovers. The India topography boasts an abundant source of flora and fauna. India has abundant rare and endangered species in its surroundings. The declaration of numerous wildlife areas and national parks has encouraged the growth of the wildlife resource, which abridged due to the wildlife hunt by several kings in the past.

At present, India has many wildlife sanctuaries and implemented protection laws. Presently, there are about 80 national parks and 441 sanctuaries in India, which works for the safeguard and conservation of wildlife resource in India. There are abundant botanical and zoological gardens in India, which are working towards the improvement of the ecosystem. Poaching has clogged to huge level. There are harsh punishments for poachers, hunters and illegal traders of animals and trees. Tree plantations are taking place in several places. There are quite a lot of animal and plant rights organization, which fight for the rights of the animals and plants. Numerous organizations and non-governmental organizations are coming forward to provide environmental education to the common people at the grass root level.

5. Need for promotion of eco tourism in India

India is one of the most diverse economies in the world, and that spells magic. Eco tourism in India is a blossoming industry owing to the fact that country has administered to save its magnificent natural beauty. The country has a biological park, zoological parks, tea plantations, wildlife sanctuaries, great mountains and flourishing green jungles in its kitty. Being admired for its exclusive nature and tribal population, India is nature's bounty and the best place to continue in the world. Other than Thenmala, there are multiple eco tourism destinations in to select from states viz., Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, etc. Eco tourism not only permits you to get one step closer to nature, but also supports protection initiatives. Promoting eco tourism will lead to:

- Safeguarding of wildlife and animal's natural habitat.
- Platform to carry the local ethnic community into the attention and gain some revenue.
- Development of isolated areas surrounding.
- Revenue that earned through eco tourism projects can develop the long-term economic prospects of India.
- Not only helps in protection initiatives but also assists in raising awareness about political and social issues in developing countries.
- Both local and visitors, become more conscious of the adjacent areas environmental wealth.

6. Eco tourism activities in India

India has the creations of one of the best eco tourism destinations in the globe. Leisurely and gradually, India is developing infrastructure without devastating natural surroundings. Eco tourism delights that every tourist should experience on an eco tour to India are: trekking and cycling; nature study and bird watching; village home stay; and agro tourism. Case studies on eco tourism destinations in India:

Thenmala, Kerala: India's first planned eco tourism destination, Thenmala in Kollam district is royally set in the midst of evergreen forests in the knees of the Western Ghats and hosts a wide range of exciting activities and leisure activities for all kind of travelers. Its mounting attractiveness among both domestic and international tourists is due to its unique vistas, biodiversity and functioning. Forest trails and night camping in the middle of the jungle permits you to nestle into nature, whereas sneak a look into the traditional tree house that is used by the forest inhabitants turns your leap into the wild more exciting. Thenmala also boasts a lake where one can go for boating, a rope bridge, a musical fountain, and offers countless activities like rappelling, rock climbing, and biking. The Thenmala eco tourism is separated into three different zones such as the culture zone, where one can spree into savoring various Keralian cuisine; leisure zone, where one can go for a refreshing walk almost upto the dam and adventure zone, where one can go for actions like hiking, rappelling, biking and rock climbing.

Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu: One of the admired weekend getaways in South India, Kodaikanal is graciously set in the Palani Hills, between the Parappar and Gundar Valleys, of the eastward spur of Western Ghats at an approximate altitude of 2,130 meters. Kodaikanal was dotted in the map of India as a summer retreat by the British in 1845 and later due to its auspicious location gifted by the forests and grasslands topping the hillsides and it blossomed as one of the major eco places in India. This mighty hill station in South India is gifted with a nature's basket encompassing the montage rainforests that houses some of the endemic flora and fauna, waterfalls, and perennial streams cutting through the valleys. The places such as Kodaikanal Lake, Bryant Park, Coaker's Walk, Bear Shola Falls, Silver Cascade, Guna Caves, Dolphin's Nose, Pillar Rocks, and Berijam Lake are some of the major natural attractions located in Kodaikanal hill areas. In addition to that the Palani Wildlife Sanctuary composing a mystical environment tuned up with several waterfalls, namely the Fairy Falls, Neptune Falls, Pambar Falls, Thaliar Falls, Alanthoni Falls, Poombarai Falls, Skamba Falls, and more is no doubt a sanctuary for naturalists and worth exploring. The planned Palani Hills Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park, which will be an up gradation and spreading out of the Palani Wildlife Sanctuary, will cover an approximate area of seven hundred and thirty seven square kilometers providing shelter to several endangered species and plant life.

Chilika, Odisha: India's largest coastal lagoon and the world's second largest, the Chilika Lake and its surrounding environment are residence to a number of migratory birds and animal and plant species. The region, covering over 3500 square kilometers, residences of the Irrawaddy Dolphins, green sea turtle, dugong, blackbuck, spoon billed sandpiper, limbless skink and fishing cat. Some of the endemic species such as Milk fish, Indo-Pacific tarpon, ten pounder, Bream, Hilsa, and Mullet are living with harmony. Some of the aqua fauna namely Greater and Lesser Flamingos, Goliath Heron, Grey and Purple herons, Egrets, Spoonbills, Storks and Black-headed Ibis amongst some of the migratory birds and Asiatic Dowitchers, Dalmatian Pelican, Pallas's Fish-eagles,

migrant Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Spot-billed pelican from some of the rarest bird species are living together. The eco system dotted with more than seven hundred species of blossoming plants is also a sanctuary to a large number of mammals, reptiles and other amphibians. The area comprising a group of small islands was acknowledged as a marshland of international importance by the Ramsar Convention and is one of the major eco tourism destinations in India that supports the wildlife photographers, bird lovers, and naturalists.

7. Conclusion

Eco tourism is the key agent for sustaining tourism. It gives up multiple benefits such as conserving and organizing natural resources, amplifying local cultures and communities in terms of economic betterment, providing employment, and supporting tourism industry and providing environmental education. Hence, the tourism industry, communities dependent on nature, tourists and the government should take responsibility for the promotion of eco tourism in order to defend the still available natural areas and resources and take measures for eco restoration, keeping in view the welfare of ever growing human inhabitants in India.

8. Reference

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