

A REVIEW ON ECOTOURISM AND ITS IMPORTANCE

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Abstract : *The International Ecotourism Society defines Ecotourism as: "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people".*

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 peoples. It can also provide a viable economic development alternative for local communities with few other income-generating options. Moreover, ecotourism can increase the level of education and activism among travellers. Tourism causes damage but Ecotourism strives to minimize the adverse affects of hotels, trails and other infrastructure by using either recycled materials or plentifully available local building materials, renewable sources of energy, recycling and safe disposal of waste and garbage, environmentally and culturally sensitive architectural design. Minimization of impact also requires that the numbers and mode of behaviour of tourists be regulated to ensure limited damage to the ecosystem. Thus ecotourism makes more enthusiastic and effective agents of conservation.

Key words: *Environment, conservation, ecotourism, nature*

I.Introduction

Ecotourism is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people". While "nature-based tourism" is simply describes travel to natural places, ecotourism is a type of nature-based tourism that benefits local communities and destinations environmentally, culturally and economically. It represents a set of principles that have been successfully implemented in various global communities and are supported by extensive industry and academic research. Generally, ecotourism deals with living parts of the natural environments. Ecotourism mainly focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Ecotourism is intended to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats.

Like ecotourism, such terms as sustainable tourism and responsible tourism are rooted in the concept of sustainable development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs". With this concept in mind, sustainable tourism was defined in the 1992 Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry as tourism that "meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future."

Ecotourism first grew out of the global environmental movement in the late 1970s. While the development and growth of ecotourism took various paths in different parts of the world, by the early 1990s, ecotourism, along with nature-based, cultural, heritage and adventure tourism, had become among the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry worldwide. More recently, ecotourism has helped to spawn a variety of new terms, such as sustainable tourism, pro-poor tourism, and responsible tourism, all of which encompass the concept that tourism can and should benefit conservation and host communities. An important trend within the development of sustainable tourism is initiatives to mainstream sustainability within travel and tourism, by taking the principles and good practices of ecotourism and applying them to wider swath of the market, e.g. hotel chains, urban tourist attractions, ski resorts, golf courses and beach resorts.

II.Importance of ecotourism

- Eco tourism is a responsible tourism which conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people.
- Builds environmental awareness.
- Provides direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Respects local culture.

III.Ecotourism a review

Honey *et al.*,(2008) reported that since the 1980s ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavour by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention. Several university programs use this description as the working definition of ecotourism. Generally, ecotourism deals with living parts of the natural environments. Ecotourism focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth and environmental sustainability Many environmentalists have argued for a global standard of accreditation, differentiating ecotourism companies based on their level of environmental commitment. A national or international regulatory board would enforce accreditation procedures, with representation from various groups including governments, hotels, tour operators, travel agents, guides, airlines, local authorities, conservation organizations, and non-governmental organizations (Elper wood, 1998). The decisions of the board would be sanctioned by governments, so that non-compliant companies would be legally required to disassociate themselves from the use of the ecotourism brand. Crinion (1998) suggests a Green Stars System, based on criteria including a management plan, benefit for the local community, small group interaction, education value and staff training. Wight.P.A(1993) supports the human rights and democratic movements. That includes

- Conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection
- Promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, by providing jobs to local populations
- Sharing of all socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous peoples by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism 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
- Local people benefit from this form of tourism economically, often more than mass tourism.

There are many different benefits that can be derived from ecotourism if it is used as a tool by local communities rather than large outside interests. However, the results are a direct reflection of the motivation behind the project. Since these motivations are often mixed it follows that the results are often mixed too.

IV. Ecotourism and Biodiversity Conservation

Whether called nature tourism or ecotourism, recreational and educational travel based on natural attractions is a promising means of advancing social, economic, and environmental objectives in developing countries. It offers countries new opportunities for small-enterprise investment and employment and increases the national stake in protecting their biological resources. However, making ecotourism a positive economic and environmental tool requires policies that foster responsible nature tourism development, broad-based and active local participation in its benefits and conservation of developing countries biological heritage.

Forest and marine habitats are being destroyed and some of the wildlife they contain is being driven to extinction under the pressures of hunting, logging, agriculture and fishing. Where areas have been officially reserved for nature conservation, many developing country governments lack sufficient funds to manage and protect them. These areas are being destroyed because they are not fully valued for their role as nature's genetic reservoirs of the world's biological resources.

V. Discussion

Contributions of ecotourism include raising local awareness about the value of biological resources, increasing local participation in the benefits of biodiversity conservation (through new sources of jobs and incomes) and generating revenues toward conservation of biologically rich areas.

Wildlife and its habitats in developing countries are becoming increasingly popular attractions for international tourism. Many of the richest areas, biologically, are in the developing world. Growing numbers of ecotourists are flocking to the mountains of Nepal and Madagascar, the tropical forests of Costa Rica and Thailand and the beaches of Belize and Sri Lanka. Nature tourists bring with them money to spend, money that creates jobs and incomes for households and communities in and around national parks and other protected areas. Ecotourism enterprises, tour agencies and guide services, lodges and private reserves as well as such satellite activities as crafts industries, transportation and food services, also generate revenues and foreign exchange. Governments can use this income in operating and protecting natural habitats.

By recognizing the importance of protecting biological diversity, ecotourism is raising appreciation for biological resources and leading to better conservation practices by developing country populations. It must of course be properly regulated and managed to protect against adverse environmental and cultural effects that can come with overbuilding of tourist facilities and influx of populations around fragile ecosystems. Assuming such oversight, nature tourism can benefit both the environment and economic development.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author is grateful to the University Grants Commission, SERO, Hyderabad, India for providing the fund for Minor project.

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