

Ecotourism: An Emerging Trend in Tourism

Abstract

Tourism is an act of travel undertaken predominantly for leisure or recreational purpose. It is a temporary movement of people from their precinct to another destination. Ecotourism is an offshoot of tourism. It is the fastest growing industry in the world. It is a confluence of two varied concepts: Tourism and Ecology, but is viewed as one. What distinguishes it from tourism in the general sense, is its positive contribution to the conservation of natural environment. The paper is an attempt to highlight the key features, concepts and principles of ecotourism. Since, it contributes greatly in funding conservation in developing countries, its impacts and importance will also be discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Ecology, Sustainable, Conservation, Indigenous, Employment.

Introduction

The paper intends to talk on the term ecotourism which is fast gaining currency across the world and more so in India. Ecotourism is a travel to an undisturbed and pristine area in nature with the specific objective of studying and enjoying natural scenery along with its flora and fauna. It also aims to study the extant cultural features, both past and present.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to acquaint with the term ecotourism, its principles and importance. Since ecotourism, is fast catching attention with nature lovers, various ecotourism hotspots have also been discussed in the paper.

Review of Literature

Broadly speaking two types of analysis are available on the subject:

1. There are number of books published on the subject and myriad articles and research papers published in various journals and magazines.
2. There are few online comments and reactions posted by environmentalists explaining the term and its relationship with sustainable development.

Research Design

1. To define Ecotourism.
2. To analyze its Concept, Features and Principles.
3. To discuss its impacts, importance, future prospects and trends.

“What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another”

Mahatma Gandhi

Tourism is the world's most flourishing industry with an estimated us\$3.5 trillion activity and 127 million workers. In the recent decades, Ecotourism has taken an unprecedented importance owing to certain factors. It's observed that people all round the world have taken travelling as a constructive pastime; wherein vacations are planned to natural areas which cater to the educational and challenging thirst of an individual . Also, there's an urgent need to generate funds and resources for the care and management of protected areas.

Ecotourism refers to the various principles of natural and cultural environments and encompasses the social well -being of humans. Ecotourism as a concept gained momentum somewhere between 1970s and 1980s and, in the simplest form. The term can be defined as an intricate relationship between environment, culture and tourists. An awareness towards this concept grew on account of a lackadaisical approach of the government and other agencies towards the development from an ecological perspective. The global importance of ecotourism, its benefits and impacts was recognized with the launching of the year 2002



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as the international year of tourism by the United Nations General Assembly.

Ecotourism is a term coined by Ceballos-Lascurian (Thomas 1995). Ceballos defined it as, "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 existing cultural manifestations, both past and present found in these areas." Ecotourism goes hand in hand with the environment which comprises of flora, fauna and the cultural heritage. Without environment there would definitely be no tourism. The demand for nature-based tourism which was sought as an alternative to general tourism ignited this concept. Slowly, the less developed countries started encashing on its revenue value and as a less destructive use of resources.

Ecotourism develops the entire local area, benefitting the local community and their culture. The local people get sources of livelihood and the tourists in turn get enriched by interacting and blending with the local culture. It not only boosts the economic development of the area but also helps in sustainable development of the environment. It therefore is, as Goodwin defines,

"Low impact nature tourism which contributes to the maintenance of species and habitats either directly through a contribution to conservation or indirectly by providing revenue to the local community sufficient for local people to value and therefore protect their wildlife heritage area as a source of income".

Ecotourism blends both ecology and tourism. From an ecological perspective it aims at preserving the ecosystem of the earth and implies a scientific and aesthetic approach to travel. The tourism viewpoint exemplifies in its potential to generate employment for locals and adding to their revenue. "Ecotourism is a sustainable development strategy because it may offer new growth opportunities to depressed economics without threatening the continued functioning of natural ecosystems and human cultural systems. Therefore, ecotourism by definition covers positive aspects of the Nature, education, enjoyment and well-being of human populations."

It is noteworthy that ecological perspectives and tourism needs have to be deftly balanced so that they maintain the biological diversity, cultural ethics, ecological processes and at the same time fulfil the social and the economic needs.

Principles of Ecotourism

1. It lays stress on the education of the traveller on the importance of conservation and focuses on the encouragement to all parties to recognize the intrinsic value of the resources.
2. It seeks to preserve the natural or cultural environment of the places to be visited.
3. It works at providing employment and revenue benefits to the local people living near the protected areas. In the same length, it looks into providing long-term benefits to all the concerned people (the local community, the resource and the industry.)

4. It aims at providing positive experiences for both visitors and local people.
5. It prepares travellers to minimize their negative impacts that can hamper and destroy the natural environments of the place that is being visited.
6. It works at designing, constructing and operating low-impact facilities.

It has to be kept in mind that, "Ecotourism in principle is nature-based and involves some degree of learning but education and interpretation serve as key elements and defining ecotourism experiences"(Raju Solomon, pp.15)

Importance of Ecotourism

Ecotourism has myriad advantages. Firstly, it creates a value for natural areas. Areas which are natural, pristine and unspoiled. Interest is generated so that people enjoy the natural beauty, wildlife, flora, fauna and culture, found in these areas. It focuses on wilderness, adventures, local cultures and environmental protection. It would not be an exaggeration to mention that the ecological diversity of India is arguably the most varied in the world. Ecotourism can be extremely beneficial for India considering that it has the richest biodiversity in the world.

Secondly, it generates money and provides economic stability. There are many people directly involved in ecotourism: the hotel owners, drivers, guards etc. all these people make money out of purchases made by people (i.e tourist) in the form of art products and souvenirs. Thirdly, ecotourism can play an important role in promoting relations and international goodwill amongst nations as it creates awareness and appreciation of other countries culture and nature.

Ecotourism Hotspots in India

India is a mega biodiversity centre and a land of rich cultural heritage. It is a rich storehouse of natural and cultural wealth with seven principal mountain ranges and a large number of national parks and sanctuaries, in almost all the states. Some prominent ecotourism hotspots are:

Himalayas

The unique ecosystem of the mountains, its grandeur and rich flora and fauna (which comprises of rare medicinal herbs) and a number of adventure sports, including trekking and camping make it a perennial source of attraction.

Coorg

Located in the Western Ghats in Karnataka, the area is famous for its flora and fauna. The diverse natural life along with a number of farms and gardens provide an exhilarating experience.

Kerala

A land of wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and home to rare animals, birds, reptiles, insects and plant species. Kerala is God's own country.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Natural beauties, marine life, animals, plants, deep jungles surrounded by coconut trees, make it an attractive spot for nature lovers.

Corbett National Park

This beautiful sanctuary situated in the foothills of Himalayas is an area rich in flora and

fauna. It houses almost 560 species of birds, 50 species of mammals, 110 species of trees and plenty of Deers and Wildboars, marking it as the ultimate ecotourism hotspot for animal lovers across the world.

Gir National Park

Situated in Gujarat, it is the home to Asiatic lion and is a popular tourist destination. Sprawling over 3387 sq kms, it has remarkable mix of deciduous forests along with Teak, Acacia and Banyan.

Sunderbans

Situated in west Bengal, the world's largest natural delta, it is a home to the endangered Royal Bengal Tiger of India. Eco visitors experience sheer bliss in witnessing crocodile project, mangrove trees, bird sanctuary and tidal rivers.

Conclusion

Ecotourism principles and practices have more bearing in the contemporary scenario as, tourism has tremendous economic activity in the world. Estimated with, 88 national parks and 490 wildlife sanctuaries. India has immense scope for promotion of ecotourism.

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