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An Analysis of the Aptitudes of Indian Eco-Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial (mass) tourism. Its purpose may be to educate the traveler, to provide funds for ecological conservation, to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, or to foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. Since the 1980s ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavor 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. 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.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that involves visiting natural areas—in the remote wilderness or rural environments. According to the definition and principles of ecotourism established by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) in 1990, ecotourism is "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." (TIES, 1990). Martha Honey, expands on the TIES definition by describing the seven characteristics of ecotourism, which are: Involves travel to natural destinations. Minimizes impact. Builds environmental awareness. Provides direct financial benefits for conservation. Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people. Respects local culture. Supports human rights and democratic movements, such as: Conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection. Promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, by providing jobs to local populations. Sharing of 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.

2. OBJECTIVES

1. To collaborate with like-minded bodies and implement ecotourism objectives in India.
2. To create awareness on ecotourism, sustainable and responsible tourism.

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3. IMPORTANCE OF ECO-TOURISM IN INDIA

In the words of Mark Twain, 'India is a fabulous world of splendor and rags, the one country under the sun with an imperishable interest, the one land that all men desire to see'. The diversity of wildlife in India is as rich as those of the flora and fauna found only in Africa. The great wealth of Indian wildlife can be imagined with the sight of the majestic elephants, the dance of the peacock, the camel's stride, the roar of the lion are unparalleled acts of beauty.

The vastness of the wildlife and wilderness in India is unparallel in the world. This accounts for the immense opportunities for wildlife tourism in India. Ecotourism development has entered an exciting phase in North India. The Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal offer a very large coastline. India is one of the 12-mega bio-diverse countries of the world and has a rich cultural heritage too. It has a vast potential for ecotourism that needs to be tapped for healthy conservation and preservation of nature and bringing about economic benefits to the local communities. Ecotourism in India has developed recently, for the concept itself is a relatively new one. India has spectacularly attractive natural and cultural tourist attractions. India offers enormous diversity in topography, natural resources and climate. There are land-locked mountainous regions, lush valleys and plains, white sandy beaches and islands. Central India has numerous wildlife sanctuaries with countless varieties of flora and fauna.

Ecotourism in India is a niche industry that has mainly developed in the past few years. Ecotourism is largely based on the concept of sustainable tourism or eco-friendly tourism. It has often been the case with the tourist destinations in India where the ecological balance of a fragile area has degraded drastically due to the pressure of tourism. Hence, the country is trying to promote tourism in a manner in which it generates considerable revenue without disturbing the delicate eco-system in the region. This type of tourism is extremely essential for India considering that it has one of the richest biodiversity's in the world. The Indian topography boasts of an abundant source of flora and fauna. India has numerous rare and endangered species in its surroundings. The declaration of several wildlife areas and national parks has encouraged the growth of the wildlife resources. Today, India has many wildlife sanctuaries and protection laws. There are numerous botanical and zoological gardens in India, which are working towards the enhancement of the ecosystem. There are severe punishments for poachers, hunters and illegal traders of animals and trees. There are several animal and plant rights organization, which fight for the rights of the animals and plants. Numerous organizations and NGOs are coming forward to provide environmental education to common people at the grass root level.

Ecotourism industry is one of the leading employment generating sectors of India and it generates directly or indirectly approximately 3.8% employment out of the total employment generation every year in India.

4. CONSIDERING FACTORS FOR THE POTENTIAL OF ECOTOURISM INDUSTRY IN INDIA

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- **To increase foreign exchange:** Ecotourism is one of the important industries that earn foreign exchange for a country without actually exporting any material goods. The income from ecotourism has tended to increase at a higher rate than merchandise export in a number of countries.
- **To help in the development of infrastructure facilities:** Development and improvement of infrastructure facilities are another important benefit offered by the ecotourism industry. A variety of secondary industries may be promoted which may not serve the needs of ecotourism. Thus, indirectly; tourist expenditure may be responsible for stimulating other economic activities of a country.

- **To help in balanced regional development:** Tourism development greatly benefits underdeveloped regions of a country. These economically backward regions mostly have places of high scenic beauty which if developed for the tourism industry, will help to bring a lot of prosperity to the local people.

- **To help in generating employment:** Tourism industry is highly labor intensive service industry that generates employment for highly skilled, semiskilled and unskilled labor in sectors like hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, tourism offices, shops etc.

- **To help in maintaining peace and understanding:** Tourism plays an important role in promoting international goodwill. It creates awareness and appreciation of other countries culture and nature.

IMMENSE POTENTIAL OF NORTH EASTERN STATES FOR ECO-TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Government attaches great importance to the development of tourist infrastructure in the northeastern region in view of immense tourist potential of the region. The rich natural beauty, serenity and exotic flora and fauna of the area in the eight states of the north eastern region are invaluable resources for the development of ecotourism.

The national ecotourism policy and guidelines aim to preserve, retain and enrich natural resources and to ensure regulated growth of ecotourism with its positive impacts on environmental protection and community development. Under these guidelines, the government has prioritized several projects in various parts of the country. Assam has immense potentialities for the growth and development of ecotourism. 99

The Tourism Ministry has taken several steps including the setting up of a Chapter of Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management at Guwahati on the basis of sound ecotourism principles.

5. FEW ECO-TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN INDIA

Eco-Tourism in Kerala-A paradise for tourist: Kerala, which is known as ‘God’s Own Country’ is situated in the lap of southwestern coast of India. Eco-visitors found Kerala as a green heaven. Sandy beaches, tropical dense forests etc. enhance the natural attraction to the nature lovers. Here we can witness several animal species and thousands of plant species. The Nilgiri mountain range will definitely draw tourist’s attention. There are many wildlife

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sanctuaries in Kerala. In Kerala, tourism activities are mainly based on nature and its facilities. The first planned ecotourism destination in Asia was the Thenmala Ecotourism Project in Kerala. Idukki is one of the districts in Kerala, which has abundance of wide scale tourist attractions. There is wide scope for ecotourism in Idukki.

Sundarban Eco-Tour- World's largest natural delta: In West Bengal, Sundarban is a place that introduces us the real meaning of ecotourism. The world's largest natural delta is a name of Royal Bengal Tigers. Wildlife sanctuary, bird sanctuary, crocodile projects are the main attractions for the eco-visitors. The tidal rivers, water channels, large mangrove trees etc. will give us the feeling of adventure with the essence of freshness. The mangrove swamp in the south of West Bengal is the place where the Royal Bengal Tigers rule. These majestic big cuts are fascinatingly beautiful and extremely dangerous. Unfortunately, these animals are now on the verge of extinction. This marsh land has become a sanctuary for these magnificent creatures in yellow and black strips. Deer, antelopes, gaur and wild pigs also have made this marsh land their home.

Goa Eco-Tour: Goa is a place where the visitors can have the real feeling of enjoyment and fun with the package of ecotourism. Goa is a combination of natural resources and our rich heritage. The churches, temples, monuments, forts will tell us the story of history. The beaches, wildlife and national park will introduce us to the natural magic of Goa. The carnival and cuisines of Goa adds the extra flavour to the eco-visitors. Goa is making keen efforts to develop ecotourism by developing interior green spots like waterfalls, sanctuaries and lakes.

Himalayas: The whole mountain range of North India will give the tourists a perfect picture of an eco-tour. Several places like Kulu, Manali, Ladak, Dharmashala, Dalhosi etc are specially known for its natural beauty to the nature lovers. The eco-visitors can witness the magical glow of sunrise and sunset from the different corner of mountain range. Himalaya ranges are famous for trekking and camping. In different colours, shapes and heights, valleys of mountains impress the eco-visitors by their inherent qualities.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands: The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the garden of natural beauties and an attractive spot for nature lovers. The animals, marine life, plants make themselves alive in the deep water of the Bay of Bengal. The fresh and clean environment, well-maintained road attract all the eco tourists from all over the world to this place. These Islands are covered by dense jungles and surrounded by several coconut trees. Here adventure plays the key role to buildup the relation between the nature lovers and nature.

Coorg: The scenic beauty of this hill station is unmatched. Exploring this hill station and its natural possession, world famous waterfalls, Iruppu and Abbey and Nagarhole National park are worth making one's ecovacation extremely enjoyable.

Garhwali: Snow capped mountains, beautiful meadows, serene lakes and dense forests offering amazing wildlife view are some of the embedded geographical features of this Northern region of country.

Kodaikanal: The whole beauty of this small place is assembled in its beauty of untouched serene and virgin lakes and caves, which are full of offering diverse range of eco-adventure. This place is situated in Tamilnadu. Sikkim With the joy of trekking in the second highest peak of the world, Kanchenjunga, exploring the Rhododendron trek and beautiful land of orchid.

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Corbett National Park: Corbett National Park is the first of its kind in India. This beautiful sanctuary at the foothills of the Himalayas is a flourishing place for the flora and fauna. The Corbett National Park is only 145km away from Lucknow and 51km from Ramnagar. This 201 sq. mile Park is plenty of deer and wild boars. With 110 species of trees, 50 species of mammals and 580 species of birds, the park is the ultimate ecotourism destination for all the animal lovers across the world.

Chennai Crocodile Bank: Chennai Crocodile Bank shelters seven species of crocodiles. Occupying an area of 3.2 hectare, this is also the largest crocodile-breeding centre in India. Located 42km away from the coast of Chennai, the sanctuary plays host to a number of Indian and African crocodiles and alligators. This bank has produced more than 6000 crocodiles. There is also a large reserve of venomous and non-venomous snakes. These fearsome predators need the wilderness to flourish and this is just the place that is perfect for their habitation. The crocodile bank is 35km south of Chennai and is situated besides the scenic East Coast Highway.

Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary: Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary also called Ghana Bird Sanctuary is spread over an area of 232sq.km.The place is a fantasy in feathers. The best time to visit this place is between the months of August and October.

Gir National Park: Home of the Asiatic lion, this beautiful place on the west of India in the state of Gujarat is one of the most popular tourist destination. It is a big game watchers paradise. Home to one of the rare species in the world, Gir holds a position of great importance in the ecotourism map of India because the fearsome predators that it hosts. Sprawling over 3386 sq.km, Gir National Park has a remarkable mix of deciduous forest along with teak acacia and banyan. This is a protected area.

Keoladeo National Park: Keoladeo National Park is situated in Bharatpur district in eastern Rajasthan that lies in Indus-Ganges monsoon forest biogeographical province with a total area of 2,873 hectares. The park is an unrivalled breeding site for herons, storks and cormorants and an important wintering ground for large number migrant ducks. There exist varied tourist facilities at the park. It includes visitor center, forest lodge hotel, picnic areas, food services, rest room facilities, boating platform etc. The picnicker, casual tourists, adventure tourist, ornithologists and photographers constitute the major types of the tourists. More than one lakh tourists visit the park annually.

6. CONCLUSION

Considering the wide geographical and biological diversity, the scope of ecotourism in India is very high. If these resources are tapped successfully we can transform the face of ecotourism industry in India. Ecotourism in India has flourished because of the immense bio-diversity that exists nowhere else in the world. Well-managed ecotourism can be hugely beneficial for biodiversity. There are some factors that have promoted ecotourism in India to a great extent. Looking at the tremendous potential the ecotourism industry offers in the field of its employment generation and foreign exchange earning capacity, it is the time that Government pays urgent attention to the needs of the ecotourism industry. It is believed that by 2020, tourism industry would be a single biggest industry in the world. In this way, the ecotourism in India requires to be developed by amending laws for attaining the objectives of sustainability.

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