

조경/산림/원예-P3 Exploratory Study on Ecotourism Assessment of India

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1. Introduction

India is one of the oldest civilizations with a kaleidoscopic variety and rich cultural heritage. It has achieved multifaceted socio-economic progress during the last fifty years of its independence. India covers an area of 3,287, 263 sq. km, extending from the snow covered Himalayan heights to tropical rain forests of the South. As the seventh largest country in the world, India is well marked off from the rest of Asia by mountains and the sea, which gives the country a distinct geographical entity. Bounded by the Great Himalayas in the North, it stretches southwards and at the Tropic of Cancer, tapers off into the Indian ocean between the Bay of Bengal on the east and the Arabian Seas on the west. India comprises 25 States and seven union territories.

India has a land frontier of about 15,200-km. The total length of the coast line of the mainland, Lakhsadweep Islands and Andaman and Nicobar Islands is 7,516 km. The mainland comprises four regions, viz., the great mountain zone, plains of the Ganga and the Indus, the desert region and the southern Peninsula. Possessing a tremendous diversity of climate and physical conditions India has great variety of fauna numbering 81,251 species, which represent 6.65% of the world's fauna. Of these insects constitute about 60,000, molluscs a little over 5,000 mammals 372, birds 1,228, reptiles 446, amphibians 204 and fishes 2,546.

2. Major Issues in Ecotourism - India

Majority of the ecotourism resources are to be managed on internationally accepted principles which ensures ecological sustainability of natural areas with adequate provision for learning process for the visitor with strong component of local participation. Economic benefits should accrue to the local population so as to develop stake in the conservation of the natural resource of that area. These need a lot of policy and institutional changes in the decision-making systems. Since majority of the potential ecotourism sites are not with the Tourism Department, the interdepartmental

coordination and cooperation is crucial for the success of the ecotourism development. The community awareness, issues related to the empowerment of the local people and the creation of adequate ecotourism interpretation models are some of the major challenges involves. Establishment of scientific parameters of sustainability, continuous monitoring and making available these findings to the stakeholders needs transparency in actions and approaches. There needs to be a lot of attitudinal changes among the policy makers, the private entrepreneur, tour operators, destination managers, the visitors, and the local community in order to make the ecotourism happen the way it should be. Government of India, the state Governments, the trade bodies and the NGOs are all fully aware of the problems and issues of resistances for change. Earnest efforts are being taken to formulate strategies to overcome these and to prepare India to attract large portion of this fastest growing segment of the international tourism sector.

3. Executive Summary

India is one of the oldest civilizations with a kaleidoscopic variety and rich cultural heritage. India covers an area of 3,287,263 sq. km, extending from the snow covered Himalayan heights to tropical rain forests of the South. India is a distinct geographical entity and possesses tremendous biodiversity and diversity of climate and physical conditions.

India is an emerging economic power in the world. For the last ten years the average GDP growth rate was about 6.5% per annum and had been among the ten fastest growing economies in the world. India has initiated large scale of reform process, which has its impact on all spheres of economy. This has also got definite implications for the development of the tourism sector.

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, is the nodal agency for tourism development in India. There are various State Tourism Departments, Public Sector Tourism Corporations, other related Departments to support the efforts of the Central Tourism Ministry. Apart from this, there are various travel and Tourism bodies involved in tour operations, hotel and resorts business etc. and Non Governmental Organizations to support to the efforts of Government. A chain of training institutes were also established to meet the needs of the human resources development of the sector.

Ecotourism policy has already been evolved and many State Governments have taken initiative to give special thrust to this segment of tourism. Growing environmental awareness among the public and the realization that continued

sustenance of the natural resource is necessary for the long term viability of the ecotourism projects, help to keep these programs in right track.

India has got 529 Protected Areas including 446 wildlife sanctuaries and 83 national parks with a wider distribution all over the country. In general, ecotourism is mostly confined to wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, the mountainous regions of the Himalayas and the islands. Recently various steps have been taken to develop new ecotourism products on the lines of the internationally accepted principles of ecotourism.

Thenmala Ecotourism Project, by the Government of Kerala, is a unique project, which is planned on these lines. Tiger Trail is an innovative and successful trekking program, which utilized erstwhile poachers of forests as local guides thereby changing the destructive dependence of these local people to positive one. Another corporate effort in this regard is the experience of Jungle Lodges and Resorts corporation of Karnataka State.

Ecotourism management calls for greater attention to the ecological sustainability, provision for the learning process for the visitor and local community participation. To achieve this, attitudinal changes on the part of the stakeholders are an essential prerequisite. Success of ecotourism lies in successfully addressing these issues, ensuring local participation in decision making process and dealing with equity considerations. These need sincerity and transparency in approach.

The planners, policy makers and the industry are well aware of these issues and India is poised to utilize its full ecotourism potential in coming years. The mutual sharing of information among the participating countries will definitely benefit each other. Such ecotourism programs will definitely support the conservation of our planet. If we achieve this, it will be the biggest tribute we offer to Mother Earth.

4. Conclusion

India with its range of unique tourism products offers excellent opportunities for tourists. Even in the narrowly defined ecotourism niche market India offer a lot. In this emerging *Twenty-first Century ecotourism in India* is expected to gain momentum in view of the policy and institutional support provided by Government. The roles of the private entrepreneurs, trade bodies, the local communities, non-governmental organizations and all other stakeholders are well recognized in these efforts. Such an effort will help to utilize the potential of this region in the sphere of ecotourism and ultimately will lead to creation of visitors/ecotourists who may become ambassadors for conservation of our valuable natural resources. If we achieve this, that will be the biggest tribute we can offer to Mother Earth.

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