



ECOTOURISM IN INDIA

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Abstract: India is a geographically diverse country. The topography of the country is incredibly varied, with terrain that includes deserts, plains, hills and plateaus in addition to snow-capped mountain ranges. Due to this geographical diversity, the country is blessed with natural beauty and varied species of flora and fauna. This makes India a very suitable country for promoting Ecotourism. Ecotourism means travelling to the places of ecological importance to contribute to conservation and preservation of the species of flora and fauna without causing any adverse impact to the area. Ecotourism helps to provide employment opportunities and better livelihood to the local communities of the area. The paper deals with the discussion about the Ecotourism sites in India and also exploring the sites having potential for being developed as global Ecotourism sites as notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India in the guidelines released in October 2021. The paper also tries to provide few suggestions for promotion and further development of Ecotourism in India.

Index Terms- Ecotourism, Tourism, Tourism in India, Ecotourism in India, Global ecotourism destinations

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is one of the emerging areas of tourism. ‘**Ecotourism**’ is the practice of tourists who visit various tourist destinations protecting the environment. Ecotourism is a sustainable kind of travel that enables visitors to see Mother Nature in her most pristine state. Travelers are encouraged to spend time in nature through ecotourism. Ecotourism promotes the preservation of untouched landscapes and natural habitats. Natural resources like forests, minerals and land that may be used for agriculture are frequently what make poor nations wealthy. When these resources are used, stunning natural landscapes and wildlife habitats are frequently damaged or destroyed.

The term 'ecotour' was first recorded in the year 1973, followed by the term 'ecotourism' in 1982, according to The Oxford English Dictionary. Since the middle of the 1980s, the word "Ecotourism" has gained popularity, and it has grown the quickest of all the tourism industry's sub-sectors. The popularity is evidence of shifting tourist perceptions, greater environmental consciousness and a desire to enjoy the outdoors.

In ecotourism, visitors engage more in activities that are less invasive or harmful to the environment and more sustainable and helpful in supporting the residents' traditional culture. This aims to protect the endangered species of flora and fauna (plants and animals) that depend on nature for their survival. In order to maintain the sites' beauty and appeal, this is primarily done by visitors. Since the outcome benefits future generations and establishes a reliable source of government income, the exercise itself is worth investing in. The idea of ecotourism is likely related to both the pervasive and growing interest in nature and the associated understanding of the significance of protecting natural environmental quality. It is increasingly becoming normal and commercially viable to visit and enjoy high-quality natural surroundings while also safeguarding them from negative effects.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study undertakes the following objectives into consideration-

- 1) To study some of the popular ecotourism destinations of India.
- 2) To explore the sites having potential to be developed as global ecotourism destinations.
- 3) To provide suggestions for promotion and further development of ecotourism in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Guha & Ghosh (2007) The Sundarbans are degrading due to the dependence of local community on the mangrove forests. It was suggested that the tourism related jobs need to increase. Apart from this, improvement of infrastructural facilities most importantly, electricity, need to be done to attract more tourists and for increasing the participation of local people. Also, proper dissemination of information of Sundarbans needs to be done and new avenues like tree houses and forest walks, etc. need to be explored to attract more visitors in the region.

Ramaswamy & Kumar (2010) The present tourism industry is moving towards ecotourism. The concept of ecotourism and sustainable development are now being taken into consideration by both the tourism service providers and the tourists as it helps in conservation of biodiversity. There is a need to de conduct exercises such as developing naturalist guides doing ecotourism related marketing research, developing and overseeing ecotourism projects, etc. So as to deliver products which would be helpful in setting standards for ecotourism or ecotourism by the policymakers.

Arunmozhi & Panneerselvam (2013) discussed about ecotourism in India which has been developed in the recent years. They discussed that Indians have been aware of protecting and conserving nature and its resources as they have been worshipping nature since ages. This makes the growth of ecotourism in the country as natural one.

Singh (2016) argued that ecotourism should focus on ecology part and not on economy otherwise it can lead to serious impact on the environment due to overcrowding and activities that harm the

environment such as pollution, generating waste which is non-biodegradable, etc. Apart from this, ecotourism if practiced properly keeping in mind its ecological impact, can provide opportunities like employment and empowerment to local tribes of the area.

Sharma & Sarmah (2019) Ecotourism plays a very important role in attracting tourists in the Meghalaya state. Ecotourism initiatives require less amount of capital and highly educated personnel. It plays highly an essential role in generating income for the developing countries and for the well-being of the local community. They have also found in their studies that the tourists help the local communities of Mawlynnong to maintain cleanliness and also helps in infrastructure development of the village indirectly. Improved infrastructure leads to a better experience to the tourists, satisfies them and encourages them to visit the place again.

Sahani (2019) developed methodology for conducting potentiality analysis for ecotourism. The study was an integrated and systematic approach for the revival of strategic marketing planning for ecotourism.

I.ECOTOURISM SITES IN INDIA-

In recent years, India has advanced the idea of ecotourism. Indians have long been passionate in praising and preserving the natural world. Ecotourism's development and growth in India are so inevitable. Across addition to this, the Indian government has made a number of efforts to advance ecotourism in the nation. The Ministry of Tourism and Culture was established with this objective in mind. The 13-member Ecotourism Society of India was founded by the Indian government to promote ecotourism and assist in the creation of legislation.

Following are some of the popular ecotourism sites in the country-

(1) Thenmala Hills - The first ever planned ecotourism destination in the nation is Thenmala, which is located in Kerala's Kollam district. The word "Thenmala" has been derived from the Malayalam language, meaning "honey hills." The location is renowned for having a diverse spectrum of biodiversity. It offers a wide range of adventurous and recreational activities, such as boating, rock climbing, overnight camping, tree houses and hiking through the forest. As a result, visitors to the site from all over the world are becoming more and more accustomed to it. It is organized into three sections: the cultural section, the leisure section and the adventure section.

(2) Sundarbans National Park - The Sundarbans National Park in West Bengal is a mangrove habitat and is also a biosphere reserve, tiger reserve and national park. It is situated on a sizable Sundarbans delta that connects Bangladesh and India. Additionally, UNESCO designated it as a World Heritage Site in 1987. It possesses a distinctive range of flora and wildlife. It serves as the Royal Bengal Tiger's home. The reserve offers ecotourism options without endangering the local flora and animals. It also offers a variety of wildlife vacation packages, such as the Tigers and Rhino Tour and the Best of East India Wildlife Tour.

(3) Chilika Lake - Chilika Lake in Odisha is one of the nation's biodiversity hotspots. It has received recognition as a "Ramsar Site." It is a lake with brackish water and is thought to be one among the world's biggest lagoons. It is unfolded over the three districts of Puri, Khurda and Ganjam within the state of Odisha. The lake draws tourists from all around since it is home to an unlimited range of flora and fauna, including migrating birds, dolphins, fishes and to some rare and threatened species that are recognized on the IUCN Red List.

(4) **The Ranthambore National Park-** The park is situated in a region within the southeast of the state of Rajasthan. Many variety of species of birds and wild creatures, including mammals and reptiles, call it home. It is a preferred ecotourism destination that attracts tourists and animal photographers from round the globe. For gypsy safari and canter safari, it offers packages. For visitors to the park, there are hotels and resorts available.

(5) **Jim Corbett National Park-** It is India's first national park founded in 1936. The park is situated in Uttarakhand's Nainital district. It had been the primary park to be included within the "Project Tiger" plan. Tigers and other wild animals call the park home. It also provides resorts, numerous specialized wildlife travel packages, wildlife safari, tiger photography safari, and nature and birding tours. To safeguard the park's flora and fauna, the park has also created a collection of guidelines for ecotourists about what they can and can't do there.

(6) **The Kaziranga National Park-** It is a protected area situated within the Golaghat and Nagaon districts of the state of Assam. It is also a World Heritage Site of UNESCO. Additionally, it's a "Project Tiger" Reserve. Other wild animals that board the park include the sole ape species present in India, the Hoolock Gibbons, Indian One-horned Rhinos, Sambars, Swamp deer, Asiatic Elephants, Wild Asiatic Water Buffaloes and Asiatic Elephants. Additionally, it's an Important Bird Area (IBA). The park includes a large array of floral diversity also. Tourists can have elephant and jeep safari at the park. At Kaziranga, there are many alternative hotels, guest homes, tourist lodges, affordable lodges and splendid resorts.

II. SITES HAVING POTENTIAL TO BE DEVELOPED AS GLOBAL ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS IN INDIA-

In addition to the ecotourism destinations already discussed above, there are a number of other places with the potential to grow into major global ecotourism destinations. Guidelines for Sustainable Ecotourism in Forest and Wildlife Areas, 2021, published in October 2021, were recently announced by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India, including the list of Ninety such potential sites.

A few of these sites have been discussed below:

(1) **Morni Hills in Haryana** – Morni Hills is situated in the Panchkula district of Haryana. It is located at 4,000 feet above mean sea level. Both locals and visitors use it as a picnic area. It provides chances for thrilling activities including hiking, kayaking, rock climbing, rope climbing, rappelling and birdwatching. There are several species of both flowers and animals there.

(2) **Pong Dam Lake in Himachal Pradesh-** The Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh is home to Pong Dam Lake, sometimes referred to as Pong Reservoir or Maharana Pratap Sagar. In 2002, it received recognition as a 'Ramsar Site'. It is one of Himachal Pradesh's most significant lakes for fishing. The reservoir is home to a wide range of plants and animals. Water sports like sailing, water skiing, canoeing and rowing are all possible at the reservoir. A local water sports facility has been established in the reservoir for this reason.

(3) **Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary in Jharkhand-** Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary is a well-known wildlife sanctuary in Jharkhand, 10 kilometres from Jamshedpur. It is located in the general area of Dalma Hills. Elephants, sloth bears, barking deer and porcupines are some of its most prevalent residents.

There are also many other animals there, including the pangolin, the Indian giant squirrel and other birds. The sanctuary is home to a number of tourist attractions, including a temple to Lord Shiva, a Hanuman temple, a bamboo house, etc. For the accommodation of tourists, there is a forest guest house. There are also bamboo cottages and forest rest houses available for them.

(4) Thane Creek Flamingo Wildlife Sanctuary in Maharashtra- established in 2015—is the country's first flamingo sanctuary. It is situated close to Mumbai, Maharashtra. It is a critical habitat for birds. Thane Creek is home to several bird species, including flamingos, grey herons, avocets, sandpipers, etc., as well as lush, green mangroves. The creek's natural pathways and flamingo safari are among its main draws for tourists. For visitor lodging, there are resorts, five-star hotels, villas, hostels, etc. nearby.

(5) Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park in Tamil Nadu - The Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park is a protected region made up of a collection of 21 beautiful islets. It is one of the locations with the greatest marine biodiversity on the entire planet. There are three different kinds of coastal ecosystems present here, including coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds. The park serves as a habitat for almost 3600 different plant and animal species. There, tourists can take peaceful boat rides. The park also provides visitors with access to other attractions, such as Ram Setu, Dhanushkodi, Rameshwaram Temple and Pamban Island. The park also offers volunteer opportunities to help protect the local wildlife and natural environment. In the area, there are many hotels where visitors can stay.

(6) Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka- Chamarajanagar in Karnataka is home to the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary, a protected region. The river Cauvery, which originates in the area, served as the inspiration for the sanctuary's name. Some of the endemic and threatened species of flora and fauna in the nation have habitat there. The sanctuary and neighbouring locations like Mekedatu, Bheemeshwari Nature Camp, Sangama (confluence of the Cauvery and Arkavathy rivers), and the Hogenakkal Waterfalls are great spots to undertake ecotourism activities. For tourists, there is also the option of a forest safari. Tourists can reserve jungle lodges and resorts in Bheemeshwari for this.

(7) Silent Valley National Park in Kerala- It is a national park that is situated in the Nilgiri Hills close to Mannarkkad in the state of Kerala. It stands in for the state's last remaining intact rainforest. Additionally, it is one of the world's hotspots for biodiversity. The national park offers visitors the chance to go on a jungle safari. Additionally, it offers ecotourism packages for them, such as the Sairandhri Trip, Boommiyampadi trekking routes, forest camps (Keerippara Camping), etc.

(8) Neora Valley National Park in West Bengal- Neora National Park is situated about 81 kilometres from Darjeeling in West Bengal. The Neora Valley National Park is home to threatened species like the Red Panda and Black Asiatic Bear. The services of government-approved tour guides are also accessible to tourists. The option of trekking is available to visitors. However, in order to enter the park, a permit is required.

(9) Sukhna Lake in Chandigarh- Sukhna Lake is one of the city's prime tourist destinations. It is a man-made lake situated in Chandigarh's Shivalik Hills. This location offers free entry. The lake offers visitors the chance to participate in enjoyable sports including boating, skiing, camel riding, sailing and enjoying watching sunsets. Sukhna Lake Park, Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary, Butterfly Park, Shikara Ride, Garden of Silence, CITCO Cafeteria, Le Corbusier Sketches and the Souvenir Shop are a few of the lake's top tourist destinations.

(10) Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary in Goa- It is the largest wildlife sanctuary of Goa. It is a habitat to numerous varieties of flora and fauna. A popular tourist destination, it offers hikers and environment lovers access to trekking paths. The Dudhsagar Waterfalls, Tambdi Falls, Devil's

Canyon, Tambdi Surla Temple, as well as other historical and religious sites, are all included in the wildlife sanctuary.

(11) Keibul-Lamjao National Park in Manipur- It is situated in Manipur's Bishnupur district. It is the world's only floating park and plays a significant role in the Loktak Lake ecosystem. It is the brow-antlered deer's natural habitat (Sangai). In addition to these, the national park is home to migrating birds, hog deer, waterfowl and otters. The Forest Department of the state of Manipur is responsible for maintaining watchtowers and rest areas.

(12) Beas Conservation Reserve in Punjab- In September 2019, Beas Conservation Reserve was designated as a 'Ramsar Site.' It is situated in Punjab's northwest, over the Beas River. It provides habitat to the vulnerable smooth-coated otter, the critically endangered gharial, the endangered Indus river dolphin and the endangered masheer. The Punjab Department of Forests and Wildlife Preservation has been working on locations where visitors can view and take pictures of gharials in the wild, making the river popular for "Gharial Tourism."

(13) Thattekad Bird Wildlife Sanctuary in Kerala- Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary is a well-known attraction at Thattekad Bird Wildlife Sanctuary, which is situated on Njjiyapilli Hill. The bird sanctuary offers a chance for bird and wildlife enthusiasts to have a close-up look at a variety of species and their environments. Bolgatty, Wellington Island, Nadukani, Malayattor, Kodanad, Bhoothathankettu, Kalady, etc. are among of the tourist destinations close to the bird sanctuary. Tourists have a variety of lodging alternatives, including the Forest Department's "Hornbill" inspection bungalow, dormitories, homestays in Kothamangalam, three-story watchtowers, lodges, tents and camping facilities.

(14) The Valley of Flowers National Park in Uttarakhand- It is situated in the Chamoli district. It has a wide variety of species of flora and fauna. The location is a popular tourist destination because of the unusual and uncommon endemic alpine flowers that thrive there. The region is also home to several endangered species of animals, including the grey langur, red fox, flying squirrel, lime butterfly, snow leopard and Himalayan weasel. Tourists can take pleasure in the hike to the national park and take in the breathtaking vistas of waterfalls and untamed streams.

(15) Thol Lake Wildlife Sanctuary in Gujarat- In 1988, the area was designated as a Thol Bird Sanctuary. It is situated in Gujarat's Thol village, close to Kalol. The sanctuary is home to more than 320 different bird species and more than 110 different waterbird species. Lothal, the Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary and the Indroda Dinosaur and Fossil Park are some of the neighbouring tourist attractions. Additionally available facilities to travellers are lodging options, tour guides and tour operators.

III. Suggestions for the promotion and further development of ecotourism in India-

(i) The Government of the country should develop the infrastructure of and around the area(s) of ecological importance so as to encourage people from around the world to come and visit it.

(ii) On our part, social media can be used as an important channel to create awareness of the ecological sites of India and to promote ecotourism in the country.

(iii) The transportation and accommodation facilities should be further developed so that tourists can easily visit and comfortably stay in the ecotourism destination.

- (iv) Locally made traditional crafts and souvenirs should be promoted so that the local tribes could get financial benefits and their livelihoods could get improved.
- (v) Wastage of products especially those having plastic packaging, plastic water bottles in such areas should be avoided and people should be encouraged to bring reusable water bottles and not to litter waste there, thereby causing pollution.
- (vi) Tourists should be made aware not to engage in any such activity in that area that could have adverse impact on the environment and the plants and animals living there.
- (vii) Last but not the least, tourists should provide respect to the wildlife. They must not purchase such items which are made from wild animals and birds and also avoid touching and feeding the animals of that area.

CONCLUSION

India is one of the world's most geographically diversified nations in terms of varied topography which makes the country full of opportunities for Ecotourism. India's Ecotourism industry is growing because the nation has preserved its stunning natural beauty. Also, the nation is home to various zoological parks, tea plantations, wildlife sanctuaries, bird sanctuaries, majestic mountains and verdant rainforests. India is known for its natural beauty and diverse tribal population which makes it one of the best place of the world to visit for witnessing Ecotourism. India is a place having world's one the best Ecotourism destinations and gradually the country is developing infrastructure for Ecotourism without harming the natural environment. Ecotourism will also help in contributing towards livelihood of the local communities of the area.

The Indian government has established the Ecotourism Society of India, a 13-member group that promotes ecotourism and aids in the formulation of regulations. The people of India can also promote the Ecotourism destinations of India with the help of social media so as to make people living around the world aware of all these destinations and encouraging them to visit these places, thereby, developing these sites as 'global ecotourism destinations' and developing India as a popular destination for Ecotourism.

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