



Ecotourism Development Strategies for Coastal Towns.

Case of Dahanu, Palghar, Maharashtra.

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Abstract: Ecotourism is a tool for the conservation of natural places and places of scenic beauty. This concept spreads awareness among people to travel with a responsible mind and care for nature. Tourism has become a major industry nationwide and globally. This has led to the economic growth of the nation. It is a major industry that is gradually growing at full pace in India. This impacts the overall development of the place where people visit and destinations that interests Tourist. Major factors such as Environment, Climate, Flora and Fauna, local communities, the infrastructure of the tourist sites, and others are diversely affected. Therefore, responsible travel is the best way to take care of all the facets of nature. Ecotourism planning and management increase the potential and bring about balance to the region. Various approaches have to be adopted to increase responsible Coastal Tourism.

Dahanu is a coastal town of Palghar District in the state of Maharashtra. It is located at 19.97°N 72.73°E and has an average elevation of 9.89 meters. It is known for its beautiful beaches and the famous Mahalaxmi temple. It is also known for Warli Paintings and local handicrafts. This study mainly focuses on promoting Ecotourism in Dahanu taluka. Also, Various policies are to be formulated that help local businesses and local communities as a source of employment. This could improve the overall standards of living in the Town.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Environment Conservation, Eco-Friendly activities, Sustainability, Employment, Planning and Management.

INTRODUCTION:

Traveling to places with different moto and perspectives is tourism. People travel to various places for leisure and entertainment to free their minds and refresh themselves from daily chores. Some people Travel to places from their workplace and for Businesses. So it can be said that the movement of a person with a certain aim and purpose for a certain period is Tourism. Various purposes of tourism define forms of tourism. Therefore, these forms of tourism are educational tourism, Adventure Tourism, Hiking, Agritourism, Ecotourism, Cultural Tourism, Religious Tourism, and many others. These forms have various destinations like Temples and pilgrimage sites, Hill stations and mountains, riverfronts and beaches, and many others.

India is a fast-growing country with a population of more than 1.4 billion, and according to the United Nation's (UN) report, it has recently surpassed China as the world's most populated country. India has also been predicted to overtake Germany to become the world's third-biggest travel and tourism country by the World Travel and Tourism Council's Economic Impact Research. India attracts the most tourists every year, and it is one of the popular tourist destinations with its landscapes, culture, Heritage, and scenic beauties.

Tourism is an industry that enhances the development of local people. It is nature-based, with many untouched Rural areas, Cultural and heritage places in many cities and villages. This has the identity and touch of local communities that add flavors to every region. This also helps boosts the recreational activities in the tourist sites. Government bodies are also taking initiatives for tourism development in different parts of the country. This initiative enriches the economy of the region and states. The Ministry of Tourism is the Governing agency that formulates the policies and works to promote tourism. It also manages the activities of state and central governing bodies for the tourism sector.

CONCEPT OF ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people (TIES,1990). It is mainly based on nature and is a tool for the conservation of the ecosystem that eventually helps improve the social as well as cultural values of the region. This boosts the growth and development of people and communities in different aspects. It Promotes employment opportunities for the local people. Ecotourism is the best way for an individual to connect with nature. This impacts the mental and psychological thoughts of a person and also develops concern towards nature which helps a person to explore new places with natural beauty. Different places like Mountains, Beaches, Forests, Lakes, and Rivers are the most visited places by tourists. These places of attraction are significant places to promote ecotourism and nature-based activities. This is the way forward to conserve nature and evolve with sustainable and responsible tourism.

ECOTOURISM IN COASTAL REGIONS

India is blessed with a long coastline of about 7516.6 KM. It shares the prominent shores, namely, the Arabian Sea in the West, the Bay of Bengal in the East, and The Indian Ocean in the South. Tourism development for Coastal regions is an extensively important sector for the development of the nation and also the community that lives there. This impacts the development of lifestyles and improves the economic factors of the region. Coastal ecotourism or Marine ecotourism help build a conservative atmosphere for tourist. It is best to promote tourism alongside the beaches and coastal periphery as it attracts visitors. Various beach activities like boating, sightseeing, Sunset views, etc., where Ecotourism plays a vital role in protecting the natural elements and positively impacting the natural environment.

Beaches and oceans have a very scenic vibe that attracts people. Nowadays, people are fascinated by natural places and tourist destinations like Hill stations, mountains, Desserts, various Water bodies and shores, and Socio-Cultural Heritage sites. These places have significant aspects that attract visitors. This impacts the Carbon footprint of these destinations. This also affects the local communities and their livelihood, infrastructure, lifestyle, and atmospheric elements like air quality, Water, and soil. All these factors are responsible for the Planning and management of Tourism Sites. The Ministry of Tourism has formulated certain policies and guidelines for the proper functioning and management of Tourism in India. It also aims to promote sustainable tourism with other governing bodies like the state government and Rural development bodies. “Beach Shack Policy” also got approved recently. According to this policy, people staying nearby beaches may open shacks and eateries. These shacks may be open from 7 AM to 7 PM. Presently this policy applies to the selected 8 beaches on the Konkan Coastline.

STRATEGIES OF THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM TO PROMOTE ECOTOURISM (National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism 2022).

Some of the strategic pillars have been identified for the development of sustainable tourism:

- Promoting Environmental Sustainability,
- Protecting Biodiversity,
- Promoting Economic Sustainability,
- Promoting Socio-Cultural Sustainability,
- Scheme for Certification of Sustainable Tourism
- IEC and Capacity Building
- Governance

COASTLINE OF MAHARASHTRA

Konkan is a beautiful stretch of the Western coastline in the State of Maharashtra, India. It has a 720 km long sea face that extends from Dahanu and Bardi in the North up to Vengurla in the south of Maharashtra. It includes 7 districts, namely Mumbai City, Mumbai Suburban, Thane, Palghar, Raigad, Ratnagiri, and Sindhudurg. This Region boasts several places of Geographical, Cultural, and Architectural interest. The coastline is dotted with palm grooves, mango trees planted in the agricultural fields, temples, creeks, sea forts, harbors, hot water springs, and Caves. It is one of the most visited tourist regions of Maharashtra. The beautiful beaches, greenery, world-famous Warli art, and sea forts of Konkan magnetize a constant flow of visitors and tourists. Various Identified Tourist locations are Beaches such as Dahanu- Bardi, Alibaug, Kihim, Tarkali, Tondavali, Harihareshwar, Ganpatipule, and many more. Some of the Forts, like Raigad Fort, Sindhudurg Fort, Vijaydurg Fort, Vasai Fort, Kolaba Fort, and others, are also visited frequently. Four major Hill stations in this region are Jawhar Hill Station, Matheran, Amboli Hill Station, and Malshej Ghat. This region is also endowed with Temples and other spiritual places that most people visit every year.

CASE OF DAHANU, PALGHAR, MAHARASHTRA.

Dahanu is a Coastal Town in the Palghar District of Maharashtra. It has the Arabian Sea to the West and Sahayadri ranges to the East with beautiful scenic nature. It is Situated about 145 Km away from Mumbai. It has a long sea- coast that stretches about 17 Km. It is a Prime Tourist attraction in the town. People also visit the Pilgrim site, i.e., the famous and old Mahalakshmi Temple built in 1306. A fair and Yatra is organized for 15 Days every year starting from Hanuman Jayanti. It is at a distance of 25 km from the main Dahanu Railway Station. There are multiple other Temples and places that are frequently visited by People. Dahanu is a weekend destination for visitors from Mumbai and Around the town.

“Dahanu Festival” is also organized in the month of March for 2 days every year. This fest has multiple programs and various displays and exhibitions. It also has food stalls and eateries where local people come forward and Participate every year. People from Mumbai and all around the district visit this place. This is one of the initiatives taken by governing bodies of Dahanu taluka to elevate local communities and promote tourism. Dahanu is governed by the Dahanu Municipal Council, which is responsible for all the civic infrastructure and administration of the town.

Dahanu is located 65 Km North of Virar on the Western railway line of the Mumbai Suburban Railways. It is 22 km North of Boisar on the Western Railway line. Trains are available from Mumbai and Virar for Dahanu Road. The nearest airport is Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport, Mumbai, which is almost 2hrs drive from Palghar. The nearest National Highway, NH-48, connects Dahanu Road at Charoti Junction at a distance of 24 km. Dahanu Beach is at a distance of 3.8 Km by road from the Railway station. It takes 6-7 mins to get there. Transportation Facilities like auto rikshaws and busses are available.

The climate in Dahanu is majorly warm and Humid. This region observes High rainfall during the monsoon season, and the temperature reaches 30°C. Summers are hot, with the temperature around 40°C. Winters are mild, with 28-30°C, and the weather remains cool and dry during the season. Dahanu has pleasant weather that can calm a person's mind.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR COASTAL TOWN/DAHANU.

- Planning and Management Policies for Beach.
- Provision for Stay/ Homestays in an eco-friendly way.
- Development of Beach Infrastructure.
- Proper Maintainance of Coast and Beaches.
- Provision of recreational zones, Parks and Gardens, and spaces for public gathering.
- Development of Transportation infrastructure facilities.
- Provision of Public Transport Facilities.
- Provision of various Infrastructure Facilities like Gathering Halls etc.
- Management of Waste and Garbage- Provision of Dustbins
- Provisions for Health Hygiene and Safety of Individuals at the Coasts.

CONCLUSION

A place with natural beauty and ecologically significant features can help promote ecotourism in Dahanu. It has Beaches, lakes, and best restaurants that serve the best cuisine. It also has proper Transportation Facilities and Good Connectivity in all forms. It is also known as a spiritual pilgrim place, prominently known for the old Mahalakshmi Temple. There is a lot of scope in promoting ecotourism that will give rise to development and revenue generation. This concept will help Tribals living in the areas and also upgrade their standard of living. This concept helps reduce the Carbon Footprint of the area. It will bring job opportunities for local communities. Ecotourism is the best way to promote tourism in Dahanu. There are many scopes of development in this region. Proper Planning and management will enhance the growth of Development in Dahanu.

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