



PROMOTION OF ECOTOURISM – A VITAL NEED OF THE SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

'Tourism' basically means travel for "Leisure's sake". But for some people, there is something irreplaceably satisfying about journeying to a new place: the sense of being in completely novel situations and surroundings; seeing things never before seen; engaging in new and different activities. "Ecotourism", a fast growing segment of tourism started catching up in the last quarter of the 20th century with a new reason to travel i.e., to see natural habitats and their harbored wild life before they vanish from the face of the earth. Ecotourism encompasses travel to usually exotic places with specific purposes of enjoying and admiring wild life and to have first-hand experience of encountering undeveloped, relatively undisturbed natural areas as well as indigenous cultures. The increasing popularity of ecotourism is a clear indication of increasing concern and commitment for conservation of world's natural resources and biodiversity. Thus ecotourism is a nature-based and responsible travel involving education, interpretation of the natural environment and management of ecological sustainability, with a holistic purpose of conservation and promotion of welfare of the people. In a nut shell, ecotourism is "Saving the Environment and Preserving the Natural luxuries and Forest life".

How to Start Ecotourism?

With the realization of the imperative need for environmental protection, efforts were made in this direction by way of identification, declaration and/or adoption of areas with unique, natural environmental conditions and biodiversity and their development as National Parks and Sanctuaries. Presently, in India, there are about 75 National parks and 425 sanctuaries located across the length and bread of mother India. To minimize the human interference, legislations have been made and attempts were made for their strict enforcement. But all these efforts did not prove to be as effective as they were expected to be. This necessitated the development of novel strategies like "Ecotourism" which has latent potential for integrating conservation with development, especially of local people who were actually responsible for the disturbances in the environment just for the sake of earning their livelihood.

Principles of Ecotourism

Activities of Ecotourism are based on simple principles like they must be nature-centered, ecologically sustainable; provide education and benefits to local people etc.

Purpose of Ecotourism

This is twofold: provide exciting, challenging educational trips to exotic locations like wet tropical forest, wind-blown deserts, high mountain passes, mid ocean coral reefs for admiring for admiring and enjoying the scenery, the animals and the nearby located culture; conserve the vast, natural habitats and wild life; the second purpose is unconsciously promoted by Eco- tourists through small deeds like paying for park admissions, engaging local guides, staying at local lodges and dormitories, eating at local restaurants, using local transportation services etc. These small activities of Eco- tourists do significantly contribute to the economic development of local people also because their needs are satisfied with the income earned in serving the Eco -travellers and hence do not resort to "harvesting" the



habitats for short-term benefits like cutting down forests for lumber, hunting animals for meat or any pet trade.

Why at all Conservation?

Protection of the prevailing wild areas that are left after extensive and intensive use by humans for satisfying their greedy and luxurious needs is essentially important for humans' own best interests. Keeping aside the moral responsibility to "Live and Let Live" of our fellow other species living on this planet, the continued existence of these species is very essential for human race as they provide innumerable valuable products including "wonder drugs" from plants. Several drugs are obtained from flowering plants of tropical rain forests and many more are to be discovered to check some of the dangerous diseases inflicting human population.

Conservation of the existing wild life at least from now will help the human race to have sound mental health besides physical and materialistic benefits. The emerging concept of "Biophilia" (the term coined by Harvard biologist, E.O. Wilson) suggests that the co-existence of other species in their natural habitats is essential to fulfill the instinctive, emotional attachment of human beings to wildness, without which the humans harm themselves because they lose things essential to upkeep their mental health.

Success story of Ecotourism

The first best example of ecotourism stems from the east African nation of Kenya which is the land of African Savannah and of charismatic, flagship mammals such as Elephants, Leopards and Lions. Presently, more than a half million people per year travel to Kenya to view its tremendous wildlife and spectacular scenery. Local people and businesses profit more by charging eco-tourists to see live elephants and rhinos in natural settings than they could by killing the animals for the ivory and horns they provide. As ecotourism stands out as a steadily growing source of revenue when compared to other industries, the local people have strong economic incentive to preserve and protect their natural resources. Costa Rica is the most popular ecotourism destinations in the world.

Tourism Summit

15th Annual Tourism Summit was held on 19 Dec 2019 at New Delhi, people from hospitality industry and Environmentalists stressed strongly on Eco-tourism & rural tourism. Vikram Kirloskar, Chairman of the confederation of Indian Industry (CII) stated that ecotourism is the call of the day for the global warming is spreading its deadly tentacles on the globe. It is well comprehended by speaker George Cao. All who were just listening to lectures and campaigns will not change the attitudes of people towards conservation that easily and therefore it is better to enforce ecotourism education so as to inculcate the thought of conservation deep into the psyche of human particularly the youth who are the future hope of our country. Some of the measures to foster the "feel for favored nature" are:

- i. Educate policy makers on environmental issues by lectures, workshops, conferences, public demonstrations, movements, enactment of theme-based ballets etc.
- ii. local communities in rural and tribal areas should be involved in environmental protection
- iii. Empowering local communities for earning their livelihood through ecotourism.

**Components in the Ecotourism**

The various components which delicately balance the successful operation of "Ecotourism Web" are Eco- tourists, the ecotourism destinations, local communities, businesses, government and non-govern-mental organizations. The components are by and largely dependent but at times may operate in a conflicting way. There are chances for the ecotourism activities jeopardizing conservation and that should be taken care of.

Growth of Ecotourism

It is difficult to estimate the growth of ecotourism industry which has two components viz., "Nature based" and "Sustainability based". The average, annual growth rates are projected to be steady at 10% to 25% over the past few years. The steady growth of ecotourism could be attributed to reasons like increase in environmental awareness, interest and sensitization, increased media exposure to natural areas around the world, desire to see and enjoy the serenity of natural areas before they become manipulated and destroyed, desire for educative and challenging vacations etc.

Economic significance of Ecotourism

Ecotourism industry is presently India's third largest foreign exchange earner after textile and jewelry. It generates large scale employment opportunities particularly in remote and underdeveloped areas. Special feature of this industry is that more employment opportunities are provided for women. Economic benefits are offered to the population in terms of abundant natural resources for utilization like landscapes, mountains, beaches, rivers etc. Ecotourism adds value to a multitude of human-made attractions such as monuments, palaces, forts and the unique rural and urban environments. In the larger democratic country of the world like India ecotourism offers to provide National Integration and social transformation of the economic lives of people.

Major constraints in Ecotourism

Inadequate infrastructure including lack of adequate air travel facilities, surface transport systems, basic amenities like accommodation, restaurants, shopping and recreational facilities, trained labor-force resources, support services and facilities. Visa restrictions as well as high expenditure are some of the impediments for the growth of ecotourism.

Role of Education in Ecotourism

Education plays a pivotal role in promotion of ecotourism. Any meaningful developmental activity requires scientific and in depth education of the concepts and consequences. Hence, for sustainable eco-logical development, proper education should be offered to all sections of the society.

More particularly, exposure of student community to the practical situations of ecological imbalances created by human interference will leave strong impression on the young minds and this in turn would lead to effective conservation efforts. Educational trips to natural, protected habitats come a long way in reinforcing the concept of conservation and hence must be made compulsory to students in the age group of 18-25 years so that they appreciate the beauty and serenity of our rich heritage. Once they are sensitized to become possessive of our biological diversity, they would make all efforts to conserve them and also use the resources to an optimal level for the benefit of mankind. Promotion of trekking activity will prepare the youth for adventures and inculcate the sense of exploration of the wild environment. Educational tours to eco-touristic destinations will satisfy the urge of young minds for acquisition of knowledge of our natural wealth. "Education" through "Ecotourism" will sow the seeds for scientific investigation of the environ-mental problems and search for viable, appropriate biological solutions.



Conclusions

Going with the proverb “Child is the Father of Man”, it is rightly recognized and emphasized that providing environmental education to the students of all levels i.e., from schools to professional colleges will promote awareness of the crying need for conservation. Once the young minds are ignited with the alarming rate and consequences of nature's degradation, it will lead to rapid propagation of the message like a forest fire and consequent increase in public participation for conservation movements. It is imperative that every individual's contribution for the protection of our environment is essential and count worthy. “Conservation” is not the ‘responsibility’ of government and/or voluntary organizations alone but it is also the humble ‘duty’ of every individual human living on this planet. It is high time that “Deeds replace Words” and “Care and Concern” replace “Recklessness and Greed”. We should realize that the earth is our only home and any damage to it is detrimental to human race. Let us all pledge to leave the habit of living in fantasies but live in reality. Let us learn to respect, prospect and protect our mother nature and shoulder the responsibility of handing over this green planet to the next generation in the safe and purest form.

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