

## Ecotourism : An Emerging Concept

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### ABSTRACT

*Ecotourism is derive from two words - Eco means environment and tourism means travelling and staying outside of natural environment. In sum total ecotourism means travelling to the place of natural beauty. The concept is gaining much more importance in this rapidly expanding industrialized world. Such concepts not only create environmental awareness among the masses but also aids in accomplishing the goal of sustainable development. The present research will tend to highlight the growing importance, significance and relevance of ecotourism, issues associated with it. The paper will also shed a light on the marketing aspect of ecotourism along with, study the growth of this concept in India.*

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, environment, sustainable development, marketing.

### INTRODUCTION:

In the recent years there has been a continuous increasing trend in ecotourism instead of traditional tourism. Many tourists now prefer to visit natural places that are blessed with the beautiful, pleasant and stress reliever environment. Ecotourism is a word that made its sound in the year 1980s and is the oldest and most commonly used word meaning visiting/travelling to natural places. Ecotourism is also known with various names like green tourism, ethical travel and conscious travel. Adoption of environment friendly practices, protection of natural resources and cultural heritage are the three important principles/objectives of ecotourism. Ecotour was first recorded in Oxford English Dictionary in the year 1973 , followed by ecotourism in 1982. Ecotourism concept was first come into the limelight during the Sierra Club's Outing program which was launched in 1901. These annual expeditions took hikers into the Sierra Nevada's backcountry in order to show members natural wonders, "so that those persons could become active workers for the preservation of the forests." Some of the sources suggest that it was Hector Ceballos-Lascurain, an environmentalist who coined the word 'ecotourism' in 1970s. Now over the past 50 years, this concept has become one of the important component of tourism industry. It is a ecotourism which brings various stakeholders together for the long term sustainability. The main goal of ecotourism is to help travelling industry, flora fauna, the local people and various other stakeholders. One of the key and vital initiatives of ecotourism is education i.e. creating awareness among the travelers, local community, sensitizing people towards environmental issues, etc. Ecotourism is a much broader concept and it includes the following types :

- Ecolodging – It means building of hotels, resorts, etc by considering environmental aspects. In simple words, these are the accommodations that build with environment awareness.
- Agrotourism – It involves travelling to agricultural areas, rural farms, etc. Some Agrotourism venues encourage and protect agrarian communities in disadvantaged countries. Some venues often demonstrate sustainable and modern farming practices.
- Community Development – It focuses on community protection i.e. protecting the communities which are threatened by the negative aspects of modernization. Community development takes place through interaction

of tourists with the local community. Such types of projects also help in providing financial aid to marginalized section.

- Eco Treks – It involves travelling to exotic or appealing locations like swimming, caving, rafting, bird watching, etc for the purpose of creating environmental awareness.

The concept of ecotourism has now become an important part of tourism industry and is also important for the sustainable growth of a country.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

(Nripendra N Sharma, 2000) assesses the ecotourism structure in north east India and finds lack of adequate infrastructure and strategic outlook stalls its capabilities of offering ecotourism products. Adoption of ecotourism model and its sustainable development can add additional feather on its hat. (Po-Hsin Lai and Scott Shafer, 2005) enlists the marketing communication strategies adopted to promote eco lodges operators via content analysis of the marketing information available on the websites. Researcher finds that most of the operators align with the principles of eco tourism being primarily natural resource oriented, supported with various natural regional activities. While only few eco lodgers addressed biological conservation and sustainable eco tourism. Recommended social marketing and ecolabelling for online ecotourism marketing. (Aswin Sangpikul, 2008/2010) examined the marketing content of ecotourism business. Author also adopted content analysis to study the marketing practices in the digital era. Researcher finds that majority of travel companies provide insufficient marketing information and also suggested measures to improve the communication aligned with the ecotourism principles. (António Cardoso, 2014) runs exploratory analyses to understand the current situation and progress in eco tourism based on review of existing literature. It envisages huge growth possibilities for ecotourism in Moldavian. Better strategic decisions, marketing and creating awareness can fill the existing gap. (Madhumita Das and Bani Chatterjee, 2015) finds that ecotourism has led to the economic wellbeing of people in Odisha through creation of employment opportunities. But lack of education and skill development were the key ingredients contributing to its slow growth. (Dr. A. Bhavani, 2016) suggested that ecotourism provide abundant opportunities by filling the leakages existing in the structure. Strategies for conservation and improvement in the ecotourism structure can successfully alleviate the poverty and leads to economic development of nation. Researcher also highlights the challenges to ecotourism. (Mahi Puri, Krithi K. Karanth and Brijesh Thapa, 2017) envisages the potential of ecotourism through benefit sharing and socio economic development of communities. Limited scientific approach to ecotourism was found to be a key factor deterring its growth in India. Appropriate legislation, attractive investment and customer awareness can act as striving force to change the landscape of ecotourism in India.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. To identify and evaluate the importance of marketing strategies adopted for eco tourism.
2. To evaluate the growing impact of Digital marketing on Eco tourism destinations.
3. To understand the growth of eco tourism in India and the steps/initiatives taken by the government to promote this emerging concept.
4. To explore the challenges and future prospects of ecotourism in India.

### **DIGITAL MARKETING AND ECOTOURISM:**

Using digital technology for the marketing of products and services is much common and emergent in the recent past years. Digital technology basically includes internet, mobile phones, display advertising and other digital medium. These digital transformations also have an impact on the tourism industry. Providing away from home experience by the transportation and accommodation companies through digital technologies / developments has become their necessity in order to survive in this competitive digital world. Many folks are unaware of the rising concept of MTA i.e. Mobile Travel Agency, a concept that links digital marketing and ecotourism. MTA (also called Online Travel Agency) offers facilities to travelers to book tickets using mobile apps. OTA provides best user customized experience to customer wherein he/she is allowed to book tickets as per his convenience and choice. This concept not only provides benefit to travelers but also to travelling agencies because of effort and time saving. Installation of in-flight entertainment system is another major initiative which allows the travelers to watch movies, TV shows, playing games, etc. All such digital initiatives makes journey of travelers much more pleasuring. Once you reach your destination place, the search for best places starts. Thankfully, planning of trip and locating various visiting places has now become much more

convenient and easy due to power of Wi-Fi. Recently Indigo launched its Neighborhood Guide in which customers are allowed to explore the neighborhood they are staying at. The Guide provides useful information about famous places, restaurants, hotel overview, etc.

There is a significant role of eco tourism in promoting eco tourism. Social media is helping in promoting ecotourism by establishing its presence on various social media platforms like twitter, facebook, etc. It is the social media which can help in understanding the tourist preferences on various issues like wildlife management. At one end eco tourism helps in proving support to protected area but at the other end it too can put pressure the protected area and might impact wildlife. Social media is much cheaper and have wide accessibility as compared to traditional surveys. Travel experience prior to visit that place, promoting and creating awareness among the tourist regarding eco tourist places, are some of the important benefits of social media.

### **STATE LEVEL INITIATIVES:**

Kerla is always an attractive destination for eco tourists in India and is the most popular among heaven for the nature lovers. Kerla which is in the heart of Western Ghat, is among the top 18 biodiversity hotspots in the world. One can find various endangered wildlife species there. In order to promote ecotourism and create environmental awareness in Kerla, frequent seminars and workshops are organized by Center for Ecotourism of Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies. Thenmala Ecotourism project is one of prominent development in South India as it is a first planned ecotourism destination in India. In order to promote ecotourism destination in India, a separate ecotourism wing has been created in Kerla.

Another state which is famous for its natural beauty among the tourists is Karnataka. In order to attract tourist in Karnataka and create awareness for ecotourism, various policies have been rolled out by the state government. Karnataka Ecotourism Development Board (KEDB) and National Tiger Conservation authority is continuously making various efforts to attract tourist in this state which is blessed with natural beauty, flora and fauna.

Sikkim is a famous destination for honeymooners. It's a state which experiences a large number of footfall. Directorate of Ecotourism in association with Forest Department of Sikkim has taken tremendous eco-friendly efforts to save the beauty of North east.

Tribes, their attractive tradition and remote places make Assam an exciting destination for ecotourism in India. Various workshops take place in the city for creating eco-tourism awareness. These workshops are generally organized by Ecotourism society of India in partnership with Assam Ecotourism. Assam Tourist Development Corporation has also been taking various initiatives by setting eco-camps. These camps are generally managed by the deprived youth of that region and are the huge boost to foreigners.

Meghalaya is an unexplored paradise of Northeastern state with a rich cultural diversity and natural beauty. Nongblai is a famous attractive destination among the tourists. The village has 16 living root bridges which are a form of tree shaping. Few organizations have taken by the responsibility of these living root bridges in the city.

Arunachal Pradesh is a crown of northeast. In order to encourage ecotourism in the city and encourage home stays there, organizations like Future Generation Himachal and Green Pastures have been focusing on various projects. Arunachal Pradesh is an ideal place for sightseeing and for games like trekking, climbing, etc.

Apart from these states, Uttrakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh are the attractive ecotourism destination in India. For the promotion of sustainable society in Ladakh, Leh Nutrition Project and Ladakh Ecological Development Group are continuously making efforts for the overall upliftment in Ladakh.

### **GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE ECOTOURISM:**

India is known for its culture, nature worship and conservation ethics since ages. India's rich tradition always taught the importance of nature and environment. India has a rich forest and biodiversity area. India, being a land of varied geography offers various tourist destinations that not only reduces stress but also rejuvenate us. Some of the treasurer places of India that are blessed with pleasant environment and attractive tourist destinations are Himalyan region, Northeast region, Kerla, Andaman and Nikobar and Lakshdweep island. The first planned ecotourism destination in India created to attract nature lover is Thenmala in Kerla. The importance of ecotourism can easily be understood from the fact that ecotourism is one of the vital industry that generate foreign exchange earnings. Tourism activities also help in promoting and stimulating infrastructural and economic activities. There are various underdeveloped regions in the country that are blessed with the natural and pleasing environment. These backward area, if develop for tourism industry then it will bring lot of prosperity to the nation, thus leading to balanced regional growth. Creating appreciation and awareness of other

country's culture and nature is also an important benefit which can be availed through ecotourism industry. Taking into these considerations, Indian government has taken various measures to boost ecotourism industry in India. Significant initiatives have been taken by the government to develop infrastructure facilities in Northeastern states. Rich flora and fauna in the eight northeastern states are the most precious resources for the development of ecotourism in the country. The Government of India has laid down the guidelines for ecotourism in and around protected area. The main aim of these guidelines is to ensure sustainable ecotourism growth which will have a positive impact on environment protection and community development. Government also initiated projects in various parts of country that will help in making India an ecotourism destination. Various states of India like Rajasthan, Karnataka, Kerala, etc have designed special policy on development of ecotourism laying special involvement on local community involvement. Recent initiatives by Modi government like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Namami Ganga project has also helped in accelerating the growth of ecotourism industry. All these small initiatives can help on making India as one of the prominent and most important ecotourism hub.

### **CHALLENGES:**

Ecotourism plays a very important role in the sustainable development of tourism worldwide. But it also suffers from six key challenges that limit its scope. These are:

- The biggest challenge is to deliver the practically sustainable ecotourism. There is not enough advice and suggestion to convert a theoretical concept into the practical one. Up to date technology, procedures, economically viable initiatives are necessary to practically popularize this concept.
- There are different styles/types of ecotourism so one needs to understand the requirement of each style, the extent of involvement, desired environment setting, etc. There must be a perfect match between eco tourist and eco product otherwise it makes it difficult to implement key principles of ecotourism. Tourists need to be well educated and aware and eco products like parks, sanctuaries, etc needs to be well maintained and preserved.
- There must be a long lasting economic contribution to conservation which itself poses a biggest challenge. There must be the moral responsibility of tourism industry to make efforts for the ongoing protection and management of areas because most of the ecotourism activities occurs in the government controlled areas. In other words there must be a financial return to a body( which are managing and taking steps to protect the natural places) by these industries.
- There is need to ensure that ecotourism delivers effective interpretation of environment, cultural and resource management values. It must enhance the folk action and attitude towards their environment.
- Ecotourism industry needs to be strongly committed to value culture and beliefs of the local community. There is a great challenge to have cultural harmony and integrity between communities and eco tourism industry. The industry's operations much deliver positive benefits to the local communities. These benefits could either be in the form of community education programs, job creation, etc. All these will lead to a long lasting and sustainable relationship between public and private sector.
- Since much of the resources is under the control of government so the future of ecotourism industry is also in the hands of government only. Government bureaucratic nature and their lack of appreciation on modern business practices will generally leads to high level of distrust between government and private sector. For the success of ecotourism industry, government and private sector must work together in order to have a right policy framework.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The concept of ecotourism in India is on its rising trend and will definitely be more impactful and vibrant in the near future. New government schemes of cleaner India will definitely create a sense of awareness among the masses to protect the nature and its beauty. At the same time it will attract the local and the foreign tourist to visit and explore the natural beauty of our country. One should learn and adapt the principle of ecotourism by heart. All these principles are the green laws which everyone is expected to follow. In the past few years, successful projects and initiatives have been taken in the country for promoting ecotourism. The future of ecotourism in India is very bright because many projects like Gir Lion park, Houseboat cruises in Kerala, etc which were started few years back are running successfully. Thus, we can say that ecotourism is necessary for the ecological sustainable development of a nation.

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