

ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES TOURISM IN INDIA -ECO TOURISM AND HOME STAY

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Abstract

Home stay eco tourism is an emerging tourism concept evolved lately in the tourism world. India can be a model homestay for its multi faceted potentialities. Natural gifts, man-made heritages ethno- cultural richness, innocent social settings, pleasant hospitality and many more unexplored treasures that are dreams for experts of tourism. Homestay tourism cannot prosper sans the convergence of needs of the affluent and the needy based on the premise of demand driven mechanism because it is a need base concept. India can harness the boon of tourist potentiality rampant at the rural areas where government has pro-poor programs. This form of tourism is based on three aspects namely service, facility and attraction. India has a strong position only in attraction whereas it is lacking in facility and services. Sustainable tourism takes place if home grown resources and natural settings are effectively served to the tourism as well as also preserved. Promotion of tourism thus is highly dependent upon the active participation of the private sector and communities where the role of government becomes that of a facilitator.

Introduction:

The world is changing. Previously insignificant and disregarded markets are booming, replacing former superpowers now tired and worn out. The balance of power has shifted. And perhaps nowhere is this as apparent as in India. Tourism in and from India is not only at an all time high but is growing faster than in any other region. Home to almost half of the globe's population, the potential of Indian as a tourist feeder market is beyond comparison. As the region builds up more economic muscles and its people become more affluent, Indian tourism is set to dwarf all other markets including today's giants Germany and the US. Commencing with a slow growth at the start of the millennium, the Indian tourism industry has performed quite well in the last couple of years. The Indian tourism industry has out performed the global tourism industry in terms of growth in the volume of international tourists as well as in terms of revenue. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) have named

India along with China as one of the fastest growing tourism industries for the next 10 to 15 years. In order to sustain this growth and meet the expectations, it is essential for the Government of India to invest in infrastructure such as transport and accommodations. The expected growth of the industry in future has provided its players with an opportunity to invest in new technologies such as CRM tools and latest security systems, and to venture into new market segments such as Cruise tourism where India has negligible share in comparison to world cruise tourism market. On the flip side, the growth in the Indian tourism sector is accompanied by the imminent destruction of local ecology and an increase in pollution, which, in the long run, is going to negatively impact the tourism industry of India.

ECO TOURISM:

Ecotourism is that section of sustainable tourism which is related to visitation of relatively undisturbed natural areas, including protected areas. It has been estimated that 15-20 % of all international tourism might be classified as ecotourism. The 15% per year rate of growth of ecotourism and other nature-based tourism activities is higher than most other tourism segments. By definition, ecotourism is a tool for conservation of natural and cultural resources (including biodiversity) and an instrument for sustainable development for local communities, especially in rural areas. There is no absolute distinction between ecotourism and other forms of tourism; rather the different types of tourism form part of a continuum. The challenges to biodiversity and tourism planners are to match the appropriate type of tourism with the aspirations of stakeholders and assimilative capacity of land, culture and communities.

Objectives of Eco-Tourism:

Objectives of eco-tourism cannot be met without a focused and concerted approach. The identified gaps are interconnected and consequence of the absence of a commonly accepted definition of ET. National policies and guidelines should be drawn for the proposed components of ET, within the purview of international environmental treaties and related Indian legislations, incorporating equity and fair Trade principles. State wise regulatory institutions and regulations can be based on these guidelines but should reflect grassroots ecological and cultural integrity.

DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM IN INDIA

1. Natural diversity of India

To be with nature and enjoy its creations in the most natural way without endangering it is known as ecotourism. It can take several forms: to be in a beautiful natural forest or landscape; to enjoy watching animals, birds and trees or corals and marine life in a sea; to engage in trekking, boating or rafting; and to wander into sanddunes. These are some of the common forms of ecotourism. Though the word ecotourism has gained importance only recently, India has been experiencing it through the ages.

2. Geographical diversity of India

India is a country of continental dimensions consisting of four distinct regions, namely, the great mountainzone, plains of the Ganga and the Indus rivers, the desert region and the southern peninsula. Almost two-thirds of the Himalaya is in the mountain zone of India, including large plateaus and valleys. The plains of the Ganga and the Indus are formed by basins of three distinct river systems, the Indus, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. The desert region consists of the great desert and the little desert. The great desert extends from the Rann of Kachchh and runs through the Rajasthan-Sind frontier. The little desert extends from the Luni River between Jaisalmer and Jodhpur up to the northern wastes. The peninsular plateau is flanked on one side by the Eastern Ghats and on the other by the Western Ghats. Between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea there is a narrow coastal strip, while between the Eastern Ghats and the Bay of Bengal lies a broader coastal area. India is thus endowed with every land form, mountains, plains, deserts and sea coasts.

3. Ecotourism resources

The geographical diversity of India has also given it a wealth of eco-systems which are being protected and preserved. They have also become the major resources for ecotourism. One specific element is bio-sphere reserves. These are multi-purpose areas protected in order to preserve the genetic diversity and integrity of plants, animals and micro-organisms in representative eco-systems. There are seven such reserves in India at present: Nilgiri; Nanda Devi; Nokrek; Great Nicobar; Gulf of Mannar; Manas and Sunderbans. A second element is mangroves, which are specialized forest eco-systems in tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world bordering sheltered sea coasts and estuaries. Major mangrove areas are: Northern Andaman and Nicobar; Sunderbans; Bhitarkanika and Mahanadi Delta; Coringa, Godavari Delta and Krishna Estuary; Pichavaram and Point Calimere; Goa; Gulf of Kutch; Coondapur; Achra/Ratnagiri; and Vembanad. The third element is coral and coral reefs. There are four coral areas identified in India so far: Gulf of Mannar; Andaman and Nicobar Islands; Lakshadweep Islands; and Gulf of Kutch. The fourth

element is the great and little deserts in the North-Western region of the country. This is a distinct ecosystem which has attracted the fascination of tourists. The fifth element consists of mountain and forests, including great Himalayas and other mountain ranges in the country. Along with their forests, rivers and snow, they have also become great attractions for eco-tourists. The country has an area of about 752 million hectares designated as forests, and of which about 406 million hectares are classified as reserve forests and 215 million hectares as protected forests. India's sixth element is the flora and fauna which are very abundant. There are about 45,000 species of plants, including shrubs. The country also has a great variety of fauna, numbering a little over 65,000 known species, including 1,228 species of birds, 428 species of reptiles, 372 species of mammals, 204 species of amphibians and 2,546 species of fishes. In order to protect and preserve these genetic resources, India has created 75 national parks and 421 wildlife sanctuaries in different parts of the country. Some have already become popular with tourists, such as Kaziranga and Manas in Assam; Jim Corbett Park in Uttar Pradesh; Bharatpur, Ranthambore and Sariska in Rajasthan; Kanha and Bandhavgarh in Madhya Pradesh; Bandipur in Karnataka; and Simlipal in Orissa.

4. Development of ecotourism

India has consistently included environmental and ecological safeguards in the development of ecotourism in order to avoid gross commercialism. Opening ecological areas for tourism is generally done after careful assessment of carrying capacity to ensure that nature's bounty is not destroyed. India has also always tried to ensure that tourism does not impinge on the culture and heritage. In general, a sound and sensitive environmental approach is adopted to tourism development planning and is integrated with other activities to ensure the following: a) Levels of development are to be compatible with the general capacity of the physical environment and resources. b) Sufficient facilities and services need to be provided to serve tourists and the local population. c) Hotel rooms must be distributed in such a manner that the natural characteristics and qualities of the area are enhanced. d) The three dimensional manifestation of tourism development should be designed carefully and with a sensitivity that merges with the surroundings and enhances the natural beauty. e) Architectural heritage sites and other areas of historic value are to be adequately protected. In the initial years of ecotourism development, greater emphasis was given to the development of tourism in the Himalayas and the deserts. One of the earliest projects was the Gulmarg Winter Sports Resort. However, the focus has been on the provision of basic minimum facilities for visits by eco-friendly tourists to the hills, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Forest lodges and viewing towers were provided in some of the important sanctuaries along with transport facilities in the form of jeeps and elephants. There are several interesting trek routes of varying difficulty in the Himalayas. Facilities like camping sites, trekkers' huts, tents and trekking equipment are provided to encourage the development of a few of these routes and promote trekking tourism. Several bodies of water including lakes, back waters and seas constitute major sources of tourist attractions. Facilities like houseboats, water sports equipment, glass bottom boats, hovercraft, etc. are provided to benefit tourists. Landscaping and

upgrading the environment of parks, gardens and other natural areas has been another stream of developmental activity associated with ecotourism. Creation of public conveniences and road side amenities was also given considerable importance in the development process. Some recent initiatives in the development of ecotourism include the establishment of a resort in 1988 with 70 beds at Bangaram Island in Lakshadweep with private sector participation. The crystal clear sea water, abundant marine life and corals provide an ideal setting for enjoying nature's beauty. The Coconut Grove at Kumarakam and Spice Village at Thekady in Kerala are some new additions to India's ecotourism resorts. These are private enterprises which specialize in providing experiences with nature in full measure. India has also been aware of the importance of preparing master plans for the sustainable development of tourism. A study on the sustainable development of tourism at Andaman and Nicobar Islands is now underway with the assistance of UNDP and WTO. Similar studies are also being considered in other areas identified for resort development.

5. Himalayan Tourism Advisory Board

The Himalayan Tourism Advisory Board (HIMTAB) was set up in 1987 as a voluntary consultative mechanism for cooperation among the states to promote Himalayan tourism. The Board meets at different places in the Himalayan states to formulate policies and programmes for the development of tourism in the region. Issues already considered by the Board in various meetings include development of alternative resorts to reduce over-crowding in the established tourist spots, use of alternative sources of energy, registration of porters and guides, coordination of mountain rescue operations, preservation of eco-systems, establishment of effective communication, garbage disposal systems and safety and security of tourists.

6. Publicity and promotion of ecotourism

As a major segment of Indian tourism, ecotourism is given considerable importance in publicity and promotion. The places being developed for ecotourism are given publicity through print and electronic media. A brochure listing some simple codes to follow in order to become an eco-friendly tourist has been published recently by the Department of Tourism.

7. Controls and sustainability

The Environment Protection Act, 1986 stipulates several measures for protecting and improving the quality of the environment and preventing, controlling and abating environmental pollution. Coastal Regulation Zones (CRZ) were gazetted by a notification under the Act in 1991 and a wide range of activities have been prohibited within 500 metres of the high tide line. In addition, the Department of Tourism has been developing a national policy and guidelines for the development of tourism in forests, deserts and marine systems. Once formulated, these guidelines would be implemented to ensure the sustainability of ecotourism development

.HOME STAY :

There's a saying in India , " Athithi Devo Bhava", which means " the guest is God". Indians consider it a huge honor to have guests in their home, and go out of their way to please them. There's nothing like Indian hospitality . sadly, most visitors who come to India and stay in hotels never get to experience true Indian hospitality. The good thing is that all this is changing as a result of the growing popularity of home stays in India.

Personalized service—In contrast to a hotel, a home stay usually only has a few rooms. The family who resides there runs it, and acts as host. This guarantees that guests receive plenty of individual attention. You can spend as little or as much time with the host family as you like. Some guests choose only to dine with them, while others spend hours chatting to them. Regardless, staying with an Indian family is the easiest way of finding out about Indian culture and way of life.

Local Knowledge – The wealth of information that the hosts have about their local area makes deciding what to see and do a breeze. Such local knowledge is extremely helpful in getting the most from your visit. Many hosts are delighted to show their guests around their local area, providing them with invaluable insights that simply aren't available from a guide book.

Home Cooked Food – There's a huge difference between the Indian food served in restaurants and hotels, and the food that's cooked in an Indian home. By staying at a home stay, you'll be able to taste authentic Indian home cooked food, made to order. It's a lot lighter, and has more variation and flavor than restaurant food.

Unique Activities – As a guest at a home stay, the focus is on you, and your likes and preferences. The hosts are usually very accommodating and will put a great deal of effort into arranging activities that are of interest to you. These activities will vary depending on location. Exploring a coffee plantation in Coorg, watching a polo match in Rajasthan, herding animals in remote Northern India, village visits, picnics, and temple tours are just some of the options. Guests are often invited to attend weddings, or other festivals that are happening, as well.

Present Status of Indian Tourism:

The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Assocham) have declared in a Tourism Committee report that the tourism sector would grow only five per cent in 2008-09, down from the anticipated 15 per cent. Assocham secretary general D S Rawat said in the report, "The number of inbound tourists from the US has already taken a hit and the situation would be worse next year as the global economic outlook remains grim. As the inbound tourism from the US would fall by 10-15 per cent, the number of tourists from Europe would go down by five per cent," further adding, "outbound tourism from

the country would fall to an extent of 5-7% due to the global meltdown. Its pinch was felt during Diwali of 2008 as leisure tourism did not witness much significant movement," The states that would be hit badly include Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir. However, the chamber, s foreign exchange earnings through tourism would not suffer as the loss from US and Europe will be compensated from other countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. On Nov 18 2008, Union Tourism and Culture Minister Ambika Soni said that all efforts are on to have inclusive growth in the tourism sector in the country. "Tourism is an important sector for employment generation and according to estimates available with the Government it provides 8.9 per cent employment in India. In 2007 tourism contributed 6.23 per cent to GDP and tourism generated 53.7 million employments," she added. Soni said Tourism Ministry has chalked out an elaborate plan for expansion and strengthening of capacity building infrastructure and its aim to establish 49 Indian Hotel Management Institutes (IHMs) and 31 Food Crafts Institutes (FCIs) by the end of Eleventh Plan. She said it has also introduced schemes of capacity building through rural tourism, Earn While You Learn, Certified Hospitality Trainer and Atithi Devo Bhavah schemes of the Ministry. "Most of the schemes for capacity building are devised keeping in view the increased tourist inflow in the country on a long-term basis," she added.

Conclusion :

Tourism industry contributes about 10 percent of the total GDP of the world. It is larger than the automobile or IT sector. It is an integrated industry covering wide range of both private and public sectors and provides huge employment opportunities. Considering economic benefit, employment opportunities and the possibilities that will benefit the communities in tourist areas, all Southeast Asian countries have noticed the rising potentials of tourism sector. From the western experiences, tourism has been viewed as an agent of development. Tourism should be therefore regarded as an industry comparable to other industries.

The basis of the rights-based approach in development of ecotourism is the 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India, which accords rights to local self government institutions, bringing into their jurisdiction matters related to land, water, socio-economic development, infrastructure development, social welfare, social and urban forestry, waste management and maintenance of community assets. Ecotourism development falls under the purview of these subjects and therefore decision making by the local self government institutions is important. The local self government institutions need to be involved in all level of ecotourism development from approval of the project, to planning, implementing, development, marketing, evaluating, monitoring, and research. The local self government institutions have the right to formulate regulatory frameworks and the onus of ensuring compliance from the tourism industry would rest on the state governments, and need to be drawn from the multilateral environmental agreements. The Amendments have also strengthened women's participation in decision-making in all

levels of the three-tier governance system. Their role in charting the course of tourism development in accordance with community aspirations needs must be reinforced.

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