

A Comparative Study of Eco-Tourism in USA and India

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Abstract: Tourism is a vital part of global economy and is increasingly becoming an option for wealth generation in many countries. While conventional mass tourism affects environment, other forms of tourism have emerged in recent decades that are more sensitive to their surroundings and offer tangible benefits to the local labor force. These newer forms of tourism have come to be known as ecotourism. The present paper is of a comparative study of ecotourism in USA and INDIA.

KEYWORDS: Tourism and Eco-tourism

“What is this life full of care

No time to stand and stare.”

The above lines of W.H.Davies reflect how people in the urban areas are caught in the rat race of earning money and find no time to enjoy, relax and feel the beauty of nature. It is tourism that provides respite to them from their tiredness.

People may travel for various reasons just to relax, to experience the beauty of nature, to meet people, to eat well, to have fun and entertainment, to engage in sports and games, to study, to improve health and above all to tell people

“I had been to-----“

Tourism: Tourism is a vital part of global economy. It is increasingly becoming an option for wealth generation in many countries. It is a global phenomena with a massive infrastructure and its influence penetrates the society, politics and culture of many countries.

Benefits of Tourism Industry:

- a) Revenue generated from tourism can be used for the protection and management of environmentally sensitive areas.

- b) Activities like hunting and fishing help to generate funds required to manage natural resources and maintenance of tourist spots.
- c) Sound Environmental management of tourism facilities, especially hotels can increase the benefits of natural areas.
- d) Tourism can provide an alternative to development that may help generate local employment.

Impacts of tourism:

Tourism impacts on protected areas can be broadly classified in to two categories: direct and indirect. Direct impact is caused by the presence of tourists, indirect impact by the infrastructure created in connection with Tourism activities.

Direct impact of tourism

The direct tourism impact on the environment depends on *Geographical location*, Climate regime, Economic conditions of the country, policy frame work within which the activities are planned and implemented. In general the impacts of tourism vary according to the number of tourists and nature of tourists and the characteristics of site. The individual tourist has a relatively small impact. Problems arise, however, if the number of tourists is large or the resources overused. It puts pressure on the area and leads to

- Impact on soil
- Increases pollution-air, water, noise.
- Increases vulnerability to forest fires.
- Degradation of attractive Landscape sites such as sandy beaches, lakes, riversides and mountain tops and slopes.
- Impacts on water resources, vegetation, sanitation, animal life.

Thus although tourism can be a lucrative source of revenue for protected area, it can also represent a major management problem.

ECOTOURISM: Ecotourism as a concept began in 1970's as a part of larger environmental movement. The concept and genesis of ecotourism evolved from a creative strategic view for conservation, promotion and protection. It evolved as reaction to many negative consequences of

tourism like prostitution, crimes, drug trafficking, cultural devastation, destruction of landscapes and natural resources. The movement grew to include cultural organization, educational groups and friendship tours. It has now grown into a significant section of tourism industry that is making a significant contribution to the environmental, social, cultural, economic well being of destinations and local communities around the world.

What is Ecotourism?

There are lots of names for these new forms of tourism: responsible tourism, alternative tourism, sustainable tourism, educational tourism and more. Ecotourism probably involves a little of all of them. It encompasses a range of activities including scientific tours, student internships, trips for nature lovers, bird watching trips and filming expeditions, is a relatively new phenomena.

DEFINITION: International Ecotourism Society defines Ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the well being of local people." For example a walk through the rainforest is not ecotourism unless that particular walk somehow benefits the environment and the people who live there. Thus ecotourism must

- Conserve the wild life and culture of the area
- Benefit the local people and involve the local community
- Be sustainable, that is make profit without destroying natural resources
- Provide an experience that tourists want to pay for.

Since ecotourism is about uniting conservation communities and sustainable travel therefore, those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following principles of ecotourism:

Principles of Ecotourism

- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and host.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment of local people.

Who is an Ecotourist?

An Ecotourist must be a “Friend” to the environment, so that relatively few people who are willing to sacrifice “luxury” for the environmentally friendly vacation are candidates for the ecotourism industry. Clearly all these terms for ecotourism are debatable. What one person calls “eco” another calls sustainable and so on?. The main distinction between these terms is the motives and ethics behind them. This raises a series of questions in our mind which all of us should ponder over.

- Is the environment being cared for?
- Is there a genuine effort to help the local people and economies?
- Are the resources being left intact for future generations?
- Is the local culture being honored and valued and not just photographed?

The present paper is a comparative study of Ecotourism in USA and INDIA

Yellowstone National Park

During my stay in USA ,I visited Yellowstone National Park which covers an area of 8983kms. The park is spread over three states that is Wyoming(96%), Montana (3%) and Idaho (1%). It is the world’s first national Park and one of the largest in USA. Sprawling across volcanic plateaus in the northwest corner of Wyoming, Yellowstone contains more than 2 million acres of steaming geysers, crystalline lakes, thundering waterfalls etc. It is a home to a variety of mammals, birds and fish. It is one of the world’s foremost wildlife sanctuaries.

During my two day visit, first day I visited the Old Faithful Geysers which is the best known out of the 10,000 hydro thermal features in the park. The geyser erupts on an average after every 90 minutes. Hydrothermal features are fragile rarities of nature and it is Yellowstone which preserves the largest collection of it. In order to protect the tourists and conserve the geysers for future enjoyment there are strict rules and regulations which are highlighted.

- Stay on board walks or trails in Hydrothermal areas that are officially marked and maintained for the safety of tourists and the fragile formations.
- Never throw objects into any feature like rocks, sticks, coins and other objects which can choke of water circulation and end all feature activity.

- Do not smoke in Yellowstone's hydrothermal areas.
- For the purpose of their safety pets are not allowed.
- It is illegal to collect any natural or cultural objects or to remove or deface or destroy any plant, animal or mineral in the Yellowstone National Park.

The above instructions are properly highlighted to protect the tourist and the nature.

Hot water Springs in India:

In India we have number of hot springs in the Western ghats and the Himalayan region. A hot water spring at Vajreshwari in Thane district, state Maharashtra and Manikaran in Himalayan region are unprotected and unguarded. There are no proper instructions nor any government authorities to protect these natural phenomena. People take bath, throw flowers etc in the water and thereby spoil the natural hot water springs. On the second day of my stay in Yellowstone National Park I visited the Wildlife Sanctuary. For the protection of Wild life Sanctuary and safety of the tourist there are a number of park regulations. Some of the park regulations are as follows:

- Fires: Campfires are restricted to designated camp grounds and picnic areas which require special permit. You must completely extinguish fire before leaving the area.
- Speed Limit: Those who travel by private vehicles maximum speed limit is 60 kms per hour or slower.
- Vandalism: It is illegal to deface, damage or remove any plants, animals, minerals, from this protected area.
- Wildlife: Feeding wildlife is strictly prohibited. Stay atleast 25meters away from most of the animals and hundred meters away from bears, wolves, bison (species in Yellowstone National Park).

While moving through this Wildlife Sanctuary the above rules are strictly implemented and followed by the visitors. There is a strict disciplinary action against the tourists who violate these rules.

National Parks and Wild life Sanctuaries in India

In Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra there are a number of National parks and Wild life Sanctuaries. Large number of tourists visit these areas out of curiosity about the forest and wild life. Most of the forests are destroyed by illegal cutting, uncontrolled forest fire and human encroachments over National parks and wildlife sanctuaries. This has destroyed the natural habitat of

number of animals and birds and biodiversity in the region. Number of National highways pass through the national parks, wild life sanctuaries. The Mumbai-Goa National highway passes through the Karnala Bird Sanctuary. Because of noise pollution by heavy traffic most of the birds have migrated. If you go there what you see is only the photographs of the birds. Such highways restrict the movement and migration of birds. In Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh there is free movement of wild life such as tigers, deers etc. Tadoba, Melghat, Pench-Kanha, Bandhavgarh are important Tiger reserves of India. National Highway-6 passes through Nagzira-Navegaon forest and National Highway-7 passes through the Pench-Kanha forest which breaks the continuity of this forest areas and increases the deaths of wild life. Other activities like coal mining and thermal power stations in this forest areas is a threat to wild life species. Day by day forest tourism and wild life tourism is increasing which has become dangerous to the wild life in the forest. There is an increase in the construction of resorts in the periphery of the forest areas and the tourists staying in these resorts throw trash of every form and in particular more of plastic trash. Recently illegal hunting of Tigers is also increasing. Thus in the interest of wild life ecotourism such human activities should not be neglected.

Ecotourism challenges before Indian Tourism:

Large scale tourist development produce considerable damage and pressure on the environment and local population on particularly in developing countries like India as mentioned earlier. Ecotourism by its very nature builds up expectations and raises the risk of damaging the nature. Planners and managers of tourism must be prepared and educated on the impacts of tourism.

Suggestions to help Sustainable Tourism

- Efforts should be made by the department of tourism to minimize negative impact on forest and wild life through making investments in awareness rising, education and training for tourists, tour operators, local guides, protected area managers, local communities and authorities. As said,

“LEARN TO TRAVEL, TRAVEL TO LEARN.

- Enhance International Co-operation, Foreign direct investment and participation.
- Support the conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of its component and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of utilization of resources in accordance with

commitments that countries have under biodiversity agreement like Conservation of Biological Diversity and the Conventional International trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

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