

ECO TOURISM IN INDIA

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Introduction

India offers a different aspects of her personality - exotic, extravagant, elegant, eclectic - to each traveller to the country.

The Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) was formed in 2008 as a non-profit organization by a group of environmentally sensitive professionals both from within and outside the tourism industry, with encouragement of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India to promote and ensure environmentally responsible and sustainable practices in the tourism industry.

The International Eco-tourism Society defines eco-tourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people."

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation forecasts that India will account for 50 million outbound tourists by the year 2020.

India's Biodiversity

India occupies only 2.4 % of the earth's landmass but has over 8 % of the world's known wildlife. The eastern Himalayas are endemic to 3500 species of higher plants, 20 species of reptiles, 25 endemic species of amphibians and a rich fauna of insects. Of the eight species of turtles found in the world, India is home to five species. Among the 20,000 species of fishes known more than 2,000 species are found in India. Of the 15,000 flowering plant species in India over 4500 are to be found in the Western Ghats. Biodiversity is our national heritage and treasure as valuable as the TajMahal. Because different species of plants and animals interact in complex ways to sustain life on earth, if we destroy biodiversity, we may destroy our planet.

Eco Tourism

Eco-tourism is more than a catch phrase for nature loving travel and recreation. Eco-tourism is consecrated for preserving and sustaining the diversity of the world's natural and cultural environments. It accommodates and entertains visitors in a way that is minimally intrusive or destructive to the environment and sustains & supports the native cultures in the locations it is operating in responsibility of both travellers and service providers is the genuine meaning for eco-tourism. Eco-tourism also endeavours to encourage and support the diversity of local economies for which the tourism-related income is important. With support from tourists, local services and producers can compete

with larger, foreign companies and local families can support themselves. Besides all these, the revenue produced from tourism helps and encourages governments to fund conservation projects and training programs.

Saving the environment around you and preserving the natural luxuries and forest life, that's what eco-tourism. A nature camp or organizing trekking trips towards the unspoilt and inaccessible regions, one should always keep in mind not to create any mishap or disturbance in the life cycle of nature.

Eco-tourism focuses on local cultures, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live. It is typically defined as travel to destinations where the flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Responsible Eco-tourism includes programs that minimize the adverse effects of traditional tourism on the natural environment, and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, initiatives by hospitality providers to promote recycling, energy efficiency, water reuse, and the creation of economic opportunities for local communities are an integral part of Eco-tourism.

Historical, biological and cultural conservation, preservation, sustainable development etc. are some of the fields closely related to Eco-Tourism. Many professionals have been involved in formulating and developing eco-tourism policies. They come from the fields of Geographic Information Systems, Wildlife Management, Wildlife Photography, Marine Biology and Oceanography, National and State Park Management, Environmental Sciences, Women in Development, Historians and Archaeologists, etc.

Eco-tourism is considered the fastest growing market in the tourism industry, according to the World Tourism Organization with an annual growth rate of 5% worldwide and representing 6% of the world gross domestic product, 11.4% of all consumer spending - not a market to be taken lightly.

Fundamentally, eco-tourism means making as little environmental impact as possible and helping to sustain the indigenous populace, thereby encouraging the preservation of wildlife and habitats when visiting a place. This is responsible form of tourism and tourism development, which encourages going back to natural products in every aspect of life. It is also the key to sustainable ecological development.

Eco Regions in India

The diverse geographical structure of the country brings great delight for eco travellers. Unlike other regions of the world, India with its thousands years old historical and cultural significance is full of eco places, amongst some are believed to be the best eco places of the world.

Eco regions of India are result of integration of different geographical structure and its varied topography. Like other regions in possession of single or less diverse geographical feature, India divides itself in many eco regions, each having their own climate and physical

structure. Whether it is Western Ghats, North-Eastern regions, Western Himalayas, Gangetic plains or Eastern Himalayas, each of the eco regions are different from one other. With their significant differences in their state and characteristic of natural resources, vegetation and wildlife inhabiting, the eco regions of India conceal in its lap great wonder to be viewed and offer to eco traveler.

Every part of the country is hoarded by heaps of eco regions full of natural sightseeing locations. The great Himalaya alone is home to many of world famous eco sites and let tourists avail eco excursion like trekking, wildlife viewing, orchid viewing, glacier viewing, birding, mountain-biking, nature walk and etc. Besides renowned hill stations like Munnar, Ooty, Manali and Darjeeling; popular wildlife parks like Corbett National Park, Ranthambore National Park, Kaziranga National Park and Periyar National Park; and famous rivers like Ganga and Brahmaputra are some of the richest eco places.

Aware of the Environment

Today the "Green Laws" of conservation are making people aware of how man and the environment can live symbiotically for more time to come and eco-tourism is the only way to maximize the economic. In India the movement is gathering momentum with more and more travel and travel related organisation's are addressing the needs of the eco-tourists and promoting eco-tourism in the country.

Eco-Tourism in India is still at a very nascent stage, but there are for sure conscious efforts to save the fragile Himalayan Eco System and culture and heritage of the indigenous people, which is probably the largest concentration in the world.

Tea Estate

Tea Estate located on Hills will tell you that it is truly solitaire. The tea produced here enjoys international repute commanding premium prices in world auctions. The last king of Sikkim initiated tea growing in Sikkim to provide employment for Tibetan refugees fleeing the Chinese invasion of their homeland. All this natural verdant beauty feeds into the tea giving it a subtle multi-layered fragrance that gives it the unchallenged reputation of being the champagne among teas.

Meditation and Ecosystem

Meditation relates to positive thinking. Since ancient times sages and saints of India have been practicing Meditation. Meditation is done to reach positive and holistic health. Meditation can be practiced to develop the awareness and the energy required to transform deep-rooted mental habit patterns. Meditation is an Eco-Friendly way to treat the body, mind and soul. Meditation is a form of treatment, which does not harm our environment and our ecosystem. Our Ecosystem remains intact, as Meditation require in biological system to produce treatment.

The Ayurveda & Our Ecosystem

Today we find a renewed interest in traditional medicine. In the recent few decades, it has been seen that people are becoming more inclined towards the Ayurveda, the green medicine. This renewal of interest in plant based drugs is mainly due to the current widespread belief that 'green medicine' is safe and more dependable than the costly synthetic drug many of which have negative side effects.

This return of interest in the plant based (Ayurveda) drugs have necessitated a growing demand of medicinal plants leading to over-exploitation, unsustainable harvesting and finally to the virtual killing of several precious plant species in the wild. Moreover, the biosphere degradation due to increased human activities (human settlements, agriculture and other developmental programmes), illegal trade in rare and endangered medicinal plants, and loss of regeneration potential of the degraded forests have further activated the current rate of extinction of plants particularly the medicinal plants.

In this extremely difficult situation the country has to implement its commitment to the conservation of bio-diversity and its sustainable use. Considering that, at present 90% collection of medicinal plants is from wild, generating about 40 million man-days employment current practices of harvesting are unsustainable and responsible for depletion of resource base. To reverse this process Forest Departments have to initiate following actions -

Identify forest areas rich in medicinal plants (about 200 in number having an area of about 5000 ha) formulate a management plan for intensive management and sustainable harvesting of herbal products.

Establishment of 200 "Vanapati Van" in degraded forest areas where medicinal plants exist or existed. Each "Vanapati Van" should have an area of 3000-5000 ha, with irrigation facility and managed by a registered society headed by Divisional Forest Officer.

It should effectively regulate extraction and transport of medicinal plants from wild. Department should maintain a list of petty traders, private agents, wholesale dealers and final consumers of medicinal plants. It should organise training and awareness campus on various aspects of medicinal plant development

Conclusion

Eco tourism, being one of the best form of travel, conceals many of the benefits touching directly to tourists and local community. The benefits of ecotourism are transmitted not only to tourists taking the tour, but also to local community and the whole ecosystem.

- The very first thing that tourists can benefit from their eco tour is to enjoy plenty of excursion. Recreational eco activities like wild animals spotting, birding, angling, trekking, rock-climbing, mountain-biking, river rafting, para-gliding, hills and lakes

viewing, boating, nature walk and etc are worth making one's getaway full of unforgettable fun.

- During the tour, there is immense possibility that you get wider opportunity to learn from the local culture and historical significance of the places you are traveling. Exchange of cultural, historical and geographical information is quite enriching during one's eco tour.
- More the footfalls better the condition of resources are Increase of eco traveler brings funds to resources/places where one is visiting, which definitely helps making the condition of resources (wildlife places, beaches, forests, and other eco places) better.
- The innate intention of ecotourism is to involve the local business in itself. Involvement of local business provides employment to local people, which ultimately lead to building the nation's economy better.
- Ecotourism helps motivating the conservation policy of government and local bodies. Better fund due to more eco traveler will tend to make government and local bodies understand the true value of resources, which, consequently, will demand better protection and strong conservation policy helping resources to live long.

Reference

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