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**IMPACT OF ECO TOURISM IN SUSTAINABLE  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract**

Tourism in India is the largest service industry with a contribution of 6.23% to the national GDP and 8.78 % of the total employment in India. India's tourism industry is experiencing a strong period of growth, driven by burgeoning Indian middle class, growth in high spending foreign tourists and coordinated government campaigns to promote "incredible India". Tourism is a luxury and a voluntary concept. Improvements and advancements of infrastructure enable more people to partake of tour and the growth of inclusive tours and other forms relatively cheap and other opportunity to travel for pleasure. Eco tourism appeals the people who wish to interact with the environment and to varying degree, develop their knowledge, comprehension and appreciation of it. In this context, an attempt has been made in this study to analyse the problems faced by tourist sector. Secondary data have been collected to study the growth of this industry from journals, books and magazines etc., SWOT analysis were analysed to improve the growth of Ecotourism industry in India."Let every individual and institution now think and act as a responsible trustee of Earth, seeking choices in ecology, economics and ethics that will provide a sustainable future, eliminate pollution, poverty and violence, awaken the wonder of life and foster peaceful progress in the human adventure."

**-John McConnell, Founder of International Earth Day**

**Keywords:** Eco tourism, incredible India, GDP, environment, spiritual tourism, heritage trains

**Introduction**

Tourism is the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence. India is a country known for its lavish treatment to all visitors, no matter where they come from. Its visitor-friendly traditions, varied life styles and cultural heritage and colourful fairs and festivals held abiding attractions for the tourists. The other attractions include beautiful beaches, forests and wild life and landscapes for eco-tourism, snow, river and mountain peaks for adventure tourism, technological parks and science museums for science tourism; centres of pilgrimage for spiritual tourism; heritage trains and hotels

for heritage tourism. Tourism has emerged as an instrument of employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development.

### **Eco Tourism**

Eco tourism is relatively a small segment of the overall tourism sector. At the same time it is one of the fastest growing tourism segments and further rapid growth is expected in the future. Eco tourism has evolved as a concept in tourism. Simply stated ecotourism is environmentally responsible tourism which must be: 1.environmentally, socially, culturally, and economically sustainable 2.educational and 3.locally participatory. The community based eco tourism has the following aims:

1. To help preserve ecosystems and natural areas (usually already within protected areas) with a high tourism potential;
2. To cultivate environmental consciousness among the local population by educating them about the dangers of overexploiting resources and unrestricted number of tourists;
3. To foster a feeling of pride and community through a revival or preservation of traditional practices and cultural techniques.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of the present study are to

1. Analyse the arrivals of tourists to India.
2. Study the socio economic and environmental impact of ecotourism in India and
3. Suggest suitable measures to strengthen tourism based on nature tourism. The study is based on secondary data collected from Websites, books and journals

### **Arrivals of Tourists**

Eco tourism can provide benefits to local communities and promote the conservation of environmentally sensitive areas while offering unique cultural or nature travel experiences. It is also seen as a desirable economic activity because it educates people about sustainable ways to travel and channelize their expenditures. The number of arrivals increased year by year and the level of foreign exchange and state revenue also increased correspondingly.

**Table 1 Number of tourist arrivals**

Year	Domestic Tourists (No. in millions)	Percentage change	Foreign Tourists (No. in millions)	Percentage change
2002	269.60	14	2.38	
2003	309.04	14.6	2.73	14.3
2004	366.27	18.5	3.46	26.8
2005	391.95	7	3.92	13.3
2006	462.31	18	4.45	13.5
2007	526.43	13.9	5.08	14.3
2008	563.03	7	5.28	4
2009	668.60	18.8	5.17	-2.2

Source: India Tourism Statistics, 2010.

Table No.1 shows that both domestic and international tourist's arrivals have increased over the years with varying percentages except 2009. The domestic tourists arrivals increased tremendously due to pleasure, recreation, holidays, visit etc., India has attractive natural and cultural tourist attractions such as Taj Mahal, Kashmir, Darjeeling, Ooty, Kodaikanal and Munnar in Kerala. International tourists are attracted by Himalaya Mountains, lush valleys, plains and desert, white sandy beaches and islands.

**Table 2 State wise tourist arrivals (in number)**

Year	Delhi	Maharashtra	Tamilnadu
2007	20,18,848	19,33,189	17,53,103
2008	23,39,287	20,56,913	20,29,140
2009	19,58,272	19,99,320	23,69,050

Source: Data bank -Tourism Department

Table No.2 shows the arrivals of tourists to top 3 attracted destinations of India namely Delhi, Maharashtra and Tamilnadu, of which Maharashtra and Tamilnadu are known for their nature based tourist spots. Besides, many new sites are emerging as popular domestic destinations. In the west of the country, for example, the Konkan coast has turned into a tourist magnet and promises to compete with Goa as a holiday spot for the traveller. In the east, the beach towns of Mandarmani and Raichak may offer an exciting gateway to already popular hotspots like Darjeeling. Some of the vacation hotspots of India are given in Table No.3

**Table 3 Vacation hotspots of India**

Favourite holiday destinations		Most frequented States		Popular gateways	
Destinations	Tourists (%)	States	Tourists (%)	Gateways	Tourists (%)
Gangtok(Northeast)	38.78	Maharashtra	16.31	Mountain	41.61
Darjeeling(East)	35.53	Uttarkand	12.48	Beach	13.94
Mahabaleshwar (West)	14.94	Tamilnadu	11.58	Wildlife	5.06
Ooty (South)	12.62	Karnataka	8.86		
Manali (North)	8.89	Himachal Pradesh	8.12		

Source: Times of India, October 2, 2011.

### **Sustainable tourism**

The concept of sustainable tourism is being an outcome of the earth summit at Rio de Jeniro in 1992, the countries around the world are now conscious about sustainability and steps have been initiated to ensure its implementation. Sustainable development in relation to tourism means “developing the tourism product in such a way that it contributes to the economic, social and environmental growth of a region or local community, rather than destroying and degrading the resource on which it is based”. Sustainable tourism is based on four key objectives:

- Social progress reflecting the needs for everyone.
- Effective protection of environment
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.
- Prudent use of natural resources

#### **Principles of sustainable tourism development**

1. Conserve the diversity of nature and ensure that all resource imparts are sustainable.
2. Minimise the depletion of non renewable resources.
3. Promote long term economic development.

#### **Impact of Ecotourism**

- It could stimulate local industry i.e., hotel, restaurants, transport systems souvenirs and guide services. It generates foreign exchange
  - It diversifies the local economy, particularly in rural areas where agricultural employment may be sporadic or insufficient
- Some Negative Impact of Ecotourism is:
- Tourism may cause degradation of the habitat by polluting waterways, accumulation of garbage, overharvesting of flora etc.
  - Unregulated tourist activity may cause disturbance to the flora and fauna e.g. Visitors may disturb nesting birds, use of spotlights shocks and disconcerts animals.

#### **SWOT analysis of Ecotourism in India**

##### **Strengths**

- Good number of domestic and foreign tourists visiting India.
- Unique culture of the local people.
- Already existing tourism infrastructure.

##### **Weaknesses**

- Poor accommodation facilities
- Unhygienic environment
- Terrorism

##### **Opportunities**

- Proper eco tourism package development involving local people in decision making and planning
- Diversification of eco tourism products like stay in country boats, trail walks etc.

##### **Threats**

- Potential negative environmental impacts
- Pollution by sewage, dumping of the wastes in river..

**Suggestions to strengthen the tourism industry**

- The department of Tourism and Ministry of Tourism must provide information about the tourist spots and authorised licensed guides.
- Accommodation facilities must be improved in better manner.
- Proper sanitation facilities should be provided.

**Government Responsibilities for Ecotourism**

- Establish and enforce standards, building codes and other regulations.
- Specify environmental, physical and social carrying capacities to limit development.
- Recognise and award quality by accreditation of ecotourism operators.

**Conclusion**

Sensitization about the environment as well as environmental education is best achieved through ecotourism. The livelihood opportunity component of ecotourism is considered to be a means of poverty alleviation of the local people. There is a need to develop a proper ecotourism package which should be different from the existing mass tourism packages. Focus should be on more involvement and participation of the local people in ecotourism. This will help in maintaining a social balance in terms of income generation of the local people. This will also reduce their dependence on the forest to a great extent thereby aiding the conservation process. Attention should be given so that the majority of the income from tourism is retained with the local people. Only then the local will people get an impetus to conserve the environment.

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