



ECOTOURISM -ONE MEANS OF ATTEMPTING TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract: Ecotourism is a part of nature-based tourism and most of the activities of ecotourism are carried out in the natural environment. Nature is the primary element of ecotourism along with the people and culture of the place. The unique features of ecotourism include the direct interactions of the visitors with nature and culture for the purpose of enjoying, studying and admiring the natural beauty and its typical interdependences. Ecotourism activities are broadly divided into soft or hard, low-impact or high-impact, participatory or non-participatory, exploitive or active or passive, consumptive or non consumptive, and voluntary or non-voluntary. The involvement of eco-tourists in the various activities largely generate direct demand for the rooms, vehicles, guides, foods, handicrafts, etc and indirect demand for supporting services to meet the direct demand of eco-tourists. In this process, visitor expenditures induce the income of the local people and in turn, the local economy gets strengthened. Apart from the positive impacts, there are negative social, economic, cultural, environmental and ecological impacts. However, ecotourism activities create both positive and negative impacts for which maximum precautionary measures should be taken to ensure sustainable ecotourism development.

Key words: Ecotourism, Sustainable Development, Protected Areas.

Introduction: The origins of the term 'ecotourism' may be traced back to the four pillars or principles of responsible tourism by Hetzer in 1965, who conducted the first eco-

tours in the Yucatan during the early 1970s. Ecotourism, or ecological tourism, has been a growing phenomenon since the 1950s and 1960s. The term Ecotourism gradually took shape around **1970** and mid **1980** in USA in response to the overcrowded, unpleasant conditions in nature based destinations.

The term Ecotourism was coined in 1983 by "**Hector Ceballos-Lascurian**" a Mexican environmentalist, and was initially used to describe nature-based travel to relatively

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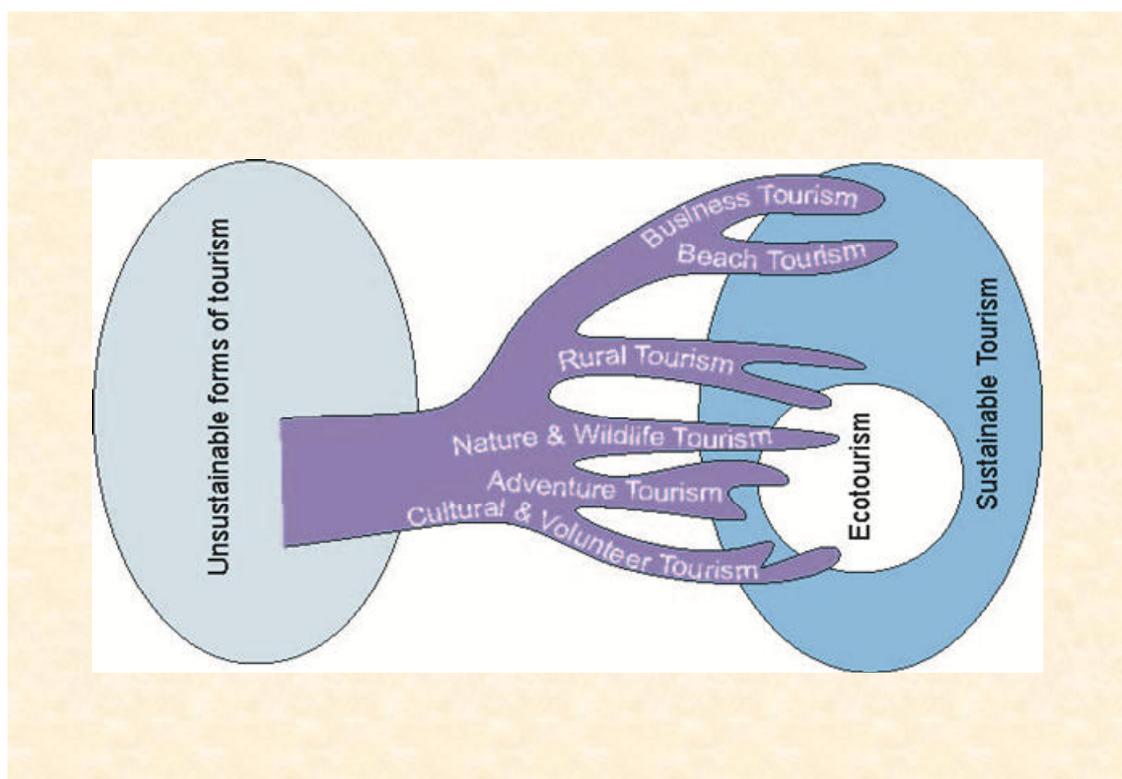
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undisturbed areas with an emphasis on education.

Concept of Ecotourism

- Is a form of tourism that generally involves visiting to fragile, pristine and protected areas.
- The activities of ecotourism have low negative impact on the ecology and it is often a small scale alternative form of tourism as against mass tourism.
- To provide an interactive environment for both the host and guest to understand each other and the travel to the ecotourism sites can educate the visitors, raise funds and create belongingness for conservation of ecology and ecosystem.

- Intended to offer tourists insights into the impact of human beings on the environment and to foster a greater appreciation of the natural habitats and their relationship.
 - To emancipate the downtrodden people in and around the sites through political, social and economic empowerment.
1. Involves travel to natural destinations
 2. Minimizes impact
 3. Builds environmental awareness
 4. Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
 5. Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
 6. Respects local culture
 7. Supports human rights and democratic movements.”



Definitions: “Ecotourism is traveling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations found in these areas”.

- **The International Ecotourism society (TIES- 1991)**
- Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people.

- **Ecotourism Association of Australia (1992)**
- Ecologically sustainable tourism that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.
- **National Ecotourism Strategy of Australia**
- Ecotourism is nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable.

World Conservation Union (IUCN):

- Environmentally responsible travel to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visit or impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples."

Guiding Principles for Ecotourism:

- Tourist activities must not degrade the resource.
- Visitors should be offered educational first-hand experiences
- All stakeholders (host community, government, non-governmental organizations, industry, and tourists) must be involved.
- Tourism must respect the intrinsic value of natural resources.
- Tourism cannot overtax the resource supplies of the local region.
- Stakeholders must be encouraged to develop partnerships.
- Tourist revenue must provide conservation, scientific, or cultural benefits to the resource, local community, and industry as a whole.
- These benefits must be long-term.

Pam Wight (1993)

Profile of Ecotourists:

1. Most are between 31 and 50 years of age, equally divided by gender, and physically active.
2. They tend to be better-educated professionals or businesspeople, often from dual-income families who have a genuine interest in learning something about nature.

3. They are discriminating, and they recognize quality and are willing to pay for it.
4. Many belong to environmental organizations or profess an interest in conservation.
5. Many are also socially-minded and interested in the culture, history, and people in developing countries.

Key players in Ecotourism

Government at levels, the local authorities, the developers and operators, the visitors and the local community. Nongovernmental organizations and scientific and research institutions also play a key role in the development of ecotourism. Some organizations are Asia Pacific Ecotourism Society, World Tourism Organization, The International Ecotourism Society, Eco-India etc.



Eco-Friendly Strategies for Sustainable Tourism Development

1. **Proper Garbage Disposal and Ensuring Cleanliness of the Environment.**
2. **Better Infrastructure and Capacity Building amongst the Local Community.** Better infrastructure facilities, like, road lines, air ports, accommodation facilities, drainage and sanitation facilities etc. need to be created with immediately for faster tourism development.
3. **Private Sector Participation through PPP (Public-Private Partnership) Model**
4. **Easier Entry/Immigration Facilities are Vital.**
5. **Enhanced Level of Services and Utilities to the Tourists-clean public utilities (sanitation,**

drainage etc.), hassle-free arrivals, improved hygienic conditions in tourism sites and surroundings, clean air ports and railway stations

6. Complete Co-operation and Support from Local Population.

Ensure that construction and maintenance of eco-lodges follow environmental protocols to avoid degrading the very areas that tourists value for their pristine qualities.

7. Keep the enterprise to a manageable scale.

Small-scale grass-roots development that incorporates the desires and opinions of local people tends to be the best policy.

8. Education for host communities and for the tourists who plan to visit them is key to providing both with a good experience.

Ecotourism Activities

Bird watching, Hiking, Downhill Skiing, Camping, Sight seeing, Swimming in natural water, Wildlife photography, River rafting.

The Core Areas of Ecotourism Centres: The core areas, apart from the research, consultancy, training and development, in the pipeline of Center for Ecotourism are as follows;

- Evaluation of Ecotourism Destinations
- Developing unique and theme based Ecotourism Villages (The Ecotourism Corridor)
- Creating Community Lead Ecotourism Practices and Enterprises
- Ecotourism Learning Programme for Professionals and Community Members
- Developing GIS enabled Integrated Ecotourism Destinations Management
- Eco Certifications and Fixing Standards for Eco destinations

Efforts are being taken by the Center for Ecotourism of KITTS to develop model ecotourism villages in the State of Kerala and integrate them under *Kerala Ecotourism Corridor* and extend the same in other parts of India as well as Asia Pacific Regions.

Center for Ecotourism is also in the process of bringing innovations for transforming the concept of Community Based Ecotourism into *Community Lead Ecotourism* which ensure long term financial assistance for conservation

and economic benefits to community members involved in ecotourism activities.

1. Keep the enterprise to a manageable scale. Small-scale grass-roots development that incorporates the desires and opinions of local people tends to be the best policy.
2. Ensure that construction and maintenance of ecolodges follow environmental protocols to avoid degrading the very areas that tourists value for their pristine qualities.
3. Education for host communities and for the tourists who plan to visit them is key to providing both with a good experience.
4. Prioritize conservation over short-term profit.
5. Gain local enthusiasm by doing as much as possible to ensure that benefits are shared fairly and that no one shoulders a disproportionate share of the cost.
6. Develop an economy that does not rely on tourism as the sole source of income for the community. Follow principles of common sense.
7. Gain necessary government support to provide financial backing for rural and indigenous people who lack the resources to acquire education or start up business initiatives, to provide organization and coordination of ecotourism efforts, to give small communities access to knowledge about sustainable development, and to prevent abuses. But do not allow government control to overshadow local interests.
8. Strive for local ownership and 80% local staffing.

Conclusion: Ecotourism is an offspring of nature-based tourism with defined objectives of practicing sustainable development. Needless to say much of about the benefits of ecotourism as it is one the best means of managing the natural resources for the present and future generation. There is an urgent need to engage local communities in eco development and ecotourism through participatory, consensus-building approaches that would enable them to improve their livelihoods in ways that reduce their dependencies on forests. Importantly, in the

longer term, the integration of biodiversity conservation requirements with the livelihood needs of village communities within these PAs will help to pave the way for sustainable coexistence of people and wildlife in and around protected areas.

Ecotourism can live up to its promise if it follows the principles of wise development, adequately monitors and protects its resources, and ensures fair distribution of profits within the host community; and avoids the pitfalls of unsustainable or unregulated tourism that damages the resources we all value.

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