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ECOTOURISM: PROSPECTS & PROBLEMS

ABHINAND CS

Assistant Professor

Department of Tourism Studies

JPM Arts & Science College, Idukki, India - 685511

Abstract: Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing tourism area in world tourism sector. The paper reveals that the prospects and problems of ecotourism. Interestingly, this paper finds that the problems in conserving environment is very difficult. Also ecotourism provides economic and social benefits to the local areas. Recommendations are provided to promote responsible ecotourism business.

Index Terms - Ecotourism, Environmental conservation, flora & fauna, Mass tourism, Habitat loss

INTRODUCTION

The ecotourism concept is originated after the 1980s, and now it is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the tourism industry. The growth of ecotourism represents the change of tourist mindset with improved environmental awareness. Environmental firms largely support ecotourism because ecotourism is nature-based, sustainably managed conservation oriented. Also, ecotourism is considered as environmental education to tourists. The tourism industry considers ecotourism as the basis of environmentally friendly tourism. Now eco-tourism has many sub forms like Nature tourism, ethnic tourism, green tourism, bio tourism, responsible tourism. Ecotourism can't be defined simply, but it should be nature-based. We can define ecotourism as "the practice of low impact, educational, ecologically and culturally sensitive travel that benefits local communities and host countries". The tourism activity which involves travel to natural areas or areas of ecological interest, for the purpose of experiencing wildlife and learning about the ecology and environment is termed as Eco tourism. Awareness must be created among travelers. The ultimate aim of ecotourism should be while attaining happiness by experiencing various environmental factors and cultures without creating any negative impacts. Ecotourism must be considered as a role model in the tourism industry and it should help the visitors for learning the idea of environmental conservation.

Features of ecotourism;

- Normally focuses on small groups
- Aimed in promotion of environmental awareness
- Focused on preservation of an area
- Focused on strengthening local communities

The international ecotourism society is a major promotor of ecotourism throughout the world and defines it as a responsible journey to natural areas that improves the well-being of local people and conserves the environment. Worldwide, ecotourism makes up about 15% of international tourism and has a rapid growth rate. Many countries have developed their principles to manage and distinguish ecotourism from other types of tourism. These principles can be models for other countries throughout the world to use to develop their industries. As tourism is becoming the largest economic activity in the world in the 21st century, ecotourism principles and practices have more relevance than ever. The ecotourism system exercises tremendous financial and political influence. Ecotourism provides the opportunity for tourists to learn more about the ecosystems, biology, and geology of a specific location. Knowing the components of an ecosystem can lead to a better understanding of how to conserve natural formations. Ecotourism provides an impactful firsthand experience about sustainable living and eco-friendly practices.

Ecotourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the global tourism industry. Ecotourism markets are expanding faster than any other tourism market segment. Ecotourism is inherently limited in the extent to which it can be developed and promoted. As capacities include qualitative as well as quantitative aspects, there is consequently no correct or empirical figure for an area. In general terms, the impacts of ecotourism on the environment are diverse, as these also reflect visitors' activities and behavior. Certain research showed that the response of wildlife appears to be dependent upon the particular behavior of tourists who have contact with wildlife. Cases have demonstrated differential impacts to plant and animal species with some species exhibiting high sensitivity and others showing low sensitivity to tourist presence. Impacts were also noted in cases where certain species that are more sensitive altered their behavior and activities to completely avoid contact with visitors, resulting in potential long-term existence. Ecotourism tries to improve environmental awareness by exploring ecology and ecosystems and by providing environmental type experiences.

Practitioners of serious ecotourism has to develop a separate mind set other than normal ecotourism professionals as ecotourism practitioner has to look into the possibilities of always choosing for the right things. Normally ecotourism is offered for small groups. Ecotourism activities are may create environmental issues because they might disturb flora and fauna. Even the perfect form of ecotourism still may create disturbance for flora and fauna. Human practices like industrialization and agriculture will affect the environment negatively. Sometimes ecotourism is playing a role in this process. Even the number of tourists consuming ecotourism activities increasing day by day, but that affects the environment negatively as it creates pollution problems and makes disturbances to flora and fauna. For example, the number of motor vehicles crossing the park increases as tour drivers search for fauna. With will results in environmental pollution. Most forms of ecotourism activities normally own by local people. In some cases, the resettlement of natives for an eco-tourism project may result in environmental degradation. Eco-tourism works to create simplistic images of local people and their uses and understanding of their surroundings. Clearly, eco-tourism as a trade is not empowering only 20% of local people.

Generally, ecotourism claims that it conserves local cultures. But evidences show that establishment of conservation areas like sanctuaries, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries have illegally lost their homes and most commonly with no compensation. This brings peoples onto marginal lands with insufficient lives stock and poverty. The local people may struggle for cultural survival while observed by tourists. The infrastructure development for tourists likes lodges, homestays, hotels and parking grounds bring environmental degradation. Although ecotourism is specifically designed to counter environmental degradation, it can sometimes be its cause. Ecotourism specifically takes tourists to ecosystems relatively untouched by humans. Introducing a foreign element to these delicate systems can disrupt a number of factors: human presence can scare off prey and disrupt hunting patterns for predators, an increased number of travellers can lead to soil erosion and habitat loss, and higher demand of resources like food and water for travellers creates a stress on the environment in order to accommodate for more people. However, experts say that the fascination to conserve only the biodiversity and ecosystem or to improve the environmental administration of the places for ecotourism without pay attention to people's paramount subsistence or the ecotourism benefit diffusion would lead to an unflagging failure of ecotourism drive in destinations. It is settled that smuggle might be committed by individual natives who have low education and limited access to common property resources as well as to participating in local development. It might be unequivocal that those who would feel as if their rights to engage in or their chances to receive extra revenue from ecotourism development are not given might be discouraged. Provided they feel or would feel in this way, they would continue to harm the environment in ecotourism places. From a social point of view, some defendants did not view this as the only result of local discontent, but also the results of people's scarcity, subsistence shock and loss, and the way ecotourism developers or planners would curtail the problems they encounter. Of all the participants in the ecotourism activity, the ecotourism activity, tourism industry is perhaps the most important and least appreciated by conservationists. The number of ecotourism business is also growing as new companies are established. Many of these developed from the outset with an understanding of and commitment to the principles of sustainability, whereas the many of the older, more established nature tourism companies have seen slow to integrate all the principles of ecotourism into their activities. Implementation ecotourism can be a very challenging and costly venture. If the tourism industry is part of this process from the creation, costs can be greatly reduced and success made more likely. Including the experience of a private tour operator in the ecotourism planning and design process would be valuable and could not be duplicated by conservation non-governmental organisations.

SWOT Analysis of Ecotourism

Strength

- Promotes preservation of natural areas
- Provide economic benefits and improves the living standard of local people
- Conserve wildlife
- Provide unconditional experience
- Creates environmental awareness

Weakness

- Lack of involvement of local communities
- Creates problems with livestock
- Might create problems for the environment
- Disturbance towards wildlife Opportunities
- The rising number of visitors
- Promoting the creation of wildlife parks and national parks

Threats

- Presence of mass tourism
- May create man-animal conflicts
- Overutilization of resources
- Infrastructure development creates environmental degradation

CONCLUSION

While authorities entrusted in with the administration and imposition of natural protection, they often lack the guarantee or capability to manage eco-tourism sites adequately. The regulations for environmental conservation may be redefined in view of local people's wellbeing. It is concluded that the tourist or tourism-related firms have a self-interest in limited environmental deterioration because tourists will pay more for intact environments, which translates to higher benefits. However, theory indicates that this practice is not economically appropriate and will decline to manage the surrounding. Ecotourism is an important economic activity in natural areas. Whilst there is a general support for a symbiotic relationship between the two, i.e., tourism and environment; the situation is that the local residents lay more stress on tourism development though the tourists concentrate on environmental protection. It encourages sustainable use of natural resources and diminishes risk to biodiversity and is proves to be economically profitable.

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