



e-ISSN:2582-7219



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

Volume 6, Issue 6, June 2023



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 7.54



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Ecotourism - Present Scenario & Its Impact on Indian Economy

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ABSTRACT: Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving responsible travel (using sustainable transport) to natural areas, conserving the environment, and improving the well-being of the local people.^[1] Its purpose may be to educate the traveler, to provide funds for ecological conservation, to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, or to foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. Since the 1980s, ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavor by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention.^[2] Ecotourism may focus on educating travelers on local environments and natural surroundings with an eye to ecological conservation. Some include in the definition of ecotourism the effort to produce economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources financially possible.^[3]

KEYWORDS: ecotourism, scenario, Indian, economy, conservation, generations, sustainable

I. INTRODUCTION

Generally, ecotourism deals with interaction with biotic components of the natural environments.^[4] Ecotourism focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth, and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Ecotourism is intended to offer tourists an insight into the impact of human beings on the environment and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats. Ecotourism aims at minimal environmental impact on the areas visited. Besides fostering respect towards the natural environment, ecotourism also helps in creating socio-economic benefits for the communities of the area visited.¹

Responsible ecotourism programs include those that minimize the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, an integral part of ecotourism is the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and creation of economic opportunities for local communities.^[5] For these reasons, ecotourism often appeals to advocates of environmental and social responsibility.²

Many consider the term "ecotourism", like "sustainable tourism" (which is a related concept but broader), an oxymoron. Like most long-distance travel, ecotourism often depends on air transportation, which contributes to climate change. Additionally, "the overall effect of sustainable tourism is negative where like ecotourism philanthropic aspirations mask hard-nosed immediate self-interest."³

Ecotourism is a sub-component of the field of sustainable tourism. Ecotourism must serve to maximize ecological benefits, while contributing to the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of communities living close to ecotourism venues.⁴

Potential ecological, economic and sociocultural benefits associated with ecotourism are described below.^[7]

Potential Ecological Benefits

A primary challenge is to make sure that ecotourism does not compromise the ecological integrity of protected areas and welfare of local communities. Although ecotourism is not supposed to have negative ecological outcomes,^{5,6} these may occur regardless. Ecotourism is widely assumed to have many positive ecological consequences, and some of them are listed as follows:



Direct Benefits

- Incentive to protect natural environments
- Incentive to rehabilitate modified environments and lands
- Provides funds to manage and expand protected areas
- Ecotourists assist with habitat maintenance and enhancement through their own actions
- Ecotourists serving as watchdogs or guardians who personally intervene in situations where the environment is perceived to be threatened¹³

Indirect benefits

- Exposure to ecotourism fosters a broader sense of environmentalism
- Communities experience changes in environmental attitude and behavior
- Areas protected for ecotourism provide environmental benefits

Potential Economic Benefits

For many decision-makers, economic factors are more compelling than ecological factors in deciding how natural resources should be utilized. Ecotourism economic benefits are presented below:¹²

Direct Benefits

- Generates revenue (related to visitor expenditures) and creates employment that is directly related to the sector
- Provides economic opportunities for peripheral regions

Indirect Benefits

- High multiplier effect and indirect revenue employment
- Supports cultural and heritage tourism, sectors that are highly compatible with ecotourism.

Potential Socio-Cultural Benefits

A holistic approach on ecotourism must promote socio-cultural as well as economic and ecological practices. The direct and indirect socio-cultural benefits are outlined as follows:

Direct and Indirect Benefits

- Foster community stability and wellbeing through economic benefits and local participation
- Aesthetic and spiritual benefits and enjoyment for locals and tourists
- Accessible to a broad spectrum of the population

When assessing potential positive impacts of ecotourism, it is necessary to mention that ecotourism can have unintended negative effects as well. Negative impacts can be mitigated through regulations and codes of conduct that effectively and persuasively impart messages about appropriate visitor behavior.^[8]

Ecotourism is a late 20th-century neologism compounded eco- and tourism. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ecotour was first recorded in 1973 and ecotourism, "probably after ecotour", in 1982.^[9]

- ecotour, n. ... A tour of or visit to an area of ecological interest, usually with an educational element; (in later use also) a similar tour or visit designed to have as little detrimental effect on the ecology as possible or undertaken with the specific aim of helping conservation efforts.



- ecotourism, n. ... Tourism to areas of ecological interest (typically exotic and often threatened natural environments), esp. to support conservation efforts and observe wildlife; spec. access to an endangered environment controlled so as to have the least possible adverse effect.

Some sources suggest the terms were used nearly a decade earlier. Claus-Dieter (Nick) Hetzer, an academic and adventurer from Forum International in Berkeley, CA, coined ecotourism in 1965, according to the *Contra Costa Times*,^[10] and ran the first ecotours in the Yucatán during the early 1970s.^[11]

The definition of ecotourism adopted by Ecotourism Australia is: "Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation."^[12]

The Global Ecotourism Network (GEN) defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and creates knowledge and understanding through interpretation and education of all involved (visitors, staff and the visited)".

Ecotourism is often misinterpreted as any form of tourism that involves nature (see jungle tourism). Self-proclaimed practitioners and hosts of ecotourism experiences assume it is achieved by simply creating destinations in natural areas. According to critics of this commonplace and assumptive practice, true ecotourism must, above all, sensitize people to the beauty and the fragility of nature. These critics condemn some operators as greenwashing their operations: using the labels of "green" and "eco-friendly", while behaving in environmentally irresponsible ways.^[13]

Although academics disagree about who can be classified as an ecotourist and there is little statistical data, some estimate that more than five million ecotourists—the majority of the ecotourist population—come from the United States, with many others from Western Europe, Canada and Australia.^[14]

Currently, there are various moves to create national and international ecotourism certification programs. National ecotourism certification programs have been put in place in countries such as Costa Rica,^[15] Australia, Kenya, Estonia, and Sweden.^[16]

II. DISCUSSION

Ecotourism is entirely a new approach in tourism. Ecotourism is a preserving travel to natural areas to appreciate the cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care not to disturb the integrity of the ecosystem, while creating economic opportunities that make conservation and protection of natural resources advantageous to the local people.¹³

In short, ecotourism can be categorised as a tourism programme that is - "Nature based, Ecologically sustainable, Where education and interpretation is a major constituent and Where local people are benefited."¹²

All this together can be called ecotourism. If a travel does not satisfy any one of these constituents, then it is not called a real ecotourism venture.¹¹

The Concern for Ecotourism Since ages, nature worship and the conservation ethics have been an inseparable part of Indian thought and traditions. Traces go back to ancient civilisations of India, when people used to nurture the philosophy of the oneness of life. The Indian tradition has always taught that, humankind is a part of nature and one should look upon all creation with the eyes of a love and respect.

It is tragic that since last few decades, the mad quest for the material end and economical progress in India and abroad has become identical with the exploitation of nature in all its appearances. Today, the entire world is facing a deep crisis and is in the danger of being doomed. The rich forest areas and biological diversities have been relentlessly divested to erect concrete walls. The continuous denuding of forest reserves has led to Global Warming



and Greenhouse Effects. Fortunately, this has led to some realisation, and now the world has awoken for new beginnings about human responsibility towards nature.¹⁰

Ecotourism in India

India, the land of varied geography offers several tourist destinations that not just de-stress but also rejuvenate you. There are several ways to enjoy Mother Nature in most pristine way. The few places like the Himalayan Region, Kerala, the northeast India, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and the Lakshdweep islands are some of the places where you can enjoy the treasured wealth of the Mother Nature. Thenmala in Kerala is the first planned ecotourism destination in India created to cater to the Eco-tourists and nature lovers. The India topography boasts an abundant source of flora & fauna. India has numerous rare and endangered species in its surroundings. The declaration of several wildlife areas and national parks has encouraged the growth of the wildlife resource, which reduced due to the wildlife hunt by several kings in the past. Today, India has many wildlife sanctuaries and protection laws. Currently, there are about 80 national parks and 441 sanctuaries in India, which works for the protection and conservation of wildlife resource in India.

There are numerous Botanical and Zoological Gardens in India, which are working towards the enhancement of the Ecosystem. Poaching has stopped to large extent. There are severe punishments for poachers, hunters and illegal traders of animals and trees. Tree plantation are taking place in several places. There are several animal & plant rights organisation, who fight for the rights of the animals and plants. Numerous organisations and NGOs are coming forward to provide environmental education to the common people at the grass root level.¹⁰

III. RESULTS

Eco-tourism is derived from two words - 'Ecosystem' & 'Tourism'. Together it is made Eco-tourism. To understand Eco-tourism we have to understand our Ecosystem first.⁹

Ecosystem

Ecosystem is the system in which we live - the system which include the earth, the water, the sky and ofcourse the living and the non-living objects in all these systems. It is a dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit.⁸

But, there is no such specific and particular spatial unit or scale to measure an Ecosystem. Thus, the term "ecosystem" does not, necessarily, agree to the terms "biome" or "ecological zone", but can refer to any functioning unit at any scale. It could, for example, be a grain of soil, a pond, a forest, the sea, the river, a biome or the entire biosphere.

And, tourism means - 'the practice of traveling for pleasure.' Thus, a tourism which contains a visit to an Ecosystem is known as Eco- tourism.

But, that is not all. Eco-tourism is not only travelling to such Ecosystems, but also conserving them. Basically Eco-tourism means – "Tourism involving travel to areas of natural or ecological interest, typically under the guidance of a naturalist, for the purpose of observing wildlife and learning about the environment and at the same time focus on wildlife and promotion of understanding and conservation of the environment."

This is a conscientious form of tourism and tourism development, which encourages going back to natural products in every aspect of life and help preserve nature. It is also the key to sustainable ecological development.⁷

We & Our Environment The race for becoming the most advanced and most developed state in the world, has led man to destruct the natural resource in our stock and our biosphere. Today, most of the underground and above the ground resources are on the verge of finish, resulting in abrupt climate, natural disaster and more. Now, man is facing two very extreme dangerous conditions - 'Global Warming' & 'Greenhouse Effects', both of which will lead to



the total destruction of the Planet Earth. It is now high time, we should (the entire Human Community) start our bit of job to save our Earth from complete destruction. It is now every man's duty to do as much possible to save our Planet Earth.

Today, there are "Green Laws" of conservation, which are making people aware of how man and the environment can live beneficially for more time to come and Eco-tourism is one way to maximise the environmental and social benefits of tourism, not forgetting the economic developments.

Everyone is a stakeholder in the process and we clearly need to avoid our past shortcomings and negative impact. In India too the movement is gathering momentum with more & more travel and travel related organisation's are addressing the needs of the eco-tourists and promoting eco-tourism in the country. Employing 260 million people and generating 10.7% of world's GDP, Tourism is the largest as well as the fastest industry of the world. Bigger planning and management is in dire need to control the tourism industry, and more important, to protect and conserve the biodiversity of tourist places. Dealing predominantly with such serious issues, sustainable tourism comes in great handy, as it is all about conserving the resources, valuing the local culture and tradition and, contributing largely in economy.⁶

What is Sustainable Tourism? Sustainable tourism is a kind of approach to tourism meant to make the development of tourism ecologically supportable in the long term. The very importance of sustainable tourism lies in its motives to conserve the resources and increase the value of local culture and tradition. Sustainable tourism is a responsible tourism intending to generate employment and income along with alleviating any deeper impact on environment and local culture.

Characteristics of Sustainable Tourism

- Sustainable Tourism tries its utmost to maintain the importance of local culture and tradition.⁵
- Sustainable Tourism is informatory, as it doesn't only let tourist know about the destinations but also it helps locals knowing about the culture and civilisation of tourists.
- This kind of tourism is aimed to conserve the resources of destinations where one is visiting to
- Sustainable Tourism seeks deeper involvement of locals, which provide local people an opportunity and make their living. Above all, Sustainable Tourism stresses pointedly upon integrity of the tourist places.⁴

Principles of Sustainable Tourism

With the increased footfalls of tourists, the deep need today is that tourism like other sector be planned and managed suitably. Sustainable development of tourism is possible only if its follows some of its guidelines and principles.³

- Tourism ought to be initiated at any location with the help of local community. The involvement of local community helps maintaining the appropriate tourism development.
- The local community has to meet the direct benefit of flourishing tourism in their area. Link between local business and tourism enable local people gain economically as well.
- To cause large growth in sustainable development, there is need that codes, ethics and some fair guidelines be appointed.
- In order to heighten the importance of heritage and natural resources, and manage them better, training and education programme should be instituted.²

Ecotourism basically deals with nature based tourism, and is aimed "to conserve the environment and improves the well-being of local people". On the other hand, sustainable tourism includes all segments of tourism, and has same function to perform as of ecotourism – to conserve the resources and increase the local cultural and traditional



value. Though the goals of ecotourism and sustainable tourism is much similar, but the latter is broader and conceals within itself very many aspects and categories of tourism.¹

The International Ecotourism Standard has been developed by the Ecotourism Australia in conjunction with the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Sustainable Tourism of Australia. The International Ecotourism Standard is based on the highly successful Australian Eco Certification Program, Agenda 21, and guiding principles for sound ecotourism certification (Mohonk Agreement) developed by a gathering of ecotourism certification experts at Mohonk Mountain, New York State, USA in November 2001. Green Globe 21 has the exclusive licence for the distribution and management of the International Ecotourism Standard. Green Globe 21 is the global Affiliation, Benchmarking and Certification program for sustainable travel and tourism. The Green Globe brand signifies better environmental performance, improved community interactions, savings through using fewer resources and greater yields from increased consumer demand.¹

The International Ecotourism Standard is based principally on the highly regarded Australian Eco Certification Program Standard combined with elements of the very latest Green Globe Benchmarking performance system. Criteria have been adapted to ensure their applicability in an international setting and both the Standard and Certification Program incorporate the fundamental principles for sound ecotourism certification identified in the Mohonk Agreement.

Eco-tourism : Definition and Key Principles

The Green Globe 21 International Ecotourism Standard has adopted Ecotourism Australia's definition of ecotourism :

"Ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation." However, a more definitive "definition" of ecotourism is the expansion of this statement into a core set of principles with specific performance indicators (i.e. the key ecotourism performance areas).²

The core set of eight principles for ecotourism products are :

Nature Area Focus

Focus on giving visitors the opportunity to personally and directly experience nature.

Interpretation

Provide opportunities to experience nature in ways that lead to greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment.

Environmental Sustainability Practice

Represent best practice for environmentally sustainable tourism.³

Contribution to Conservation

Contribute directly to the conservation of natural areas

Benefiting Local Communities

Provide ongoing contributions to the local community.

Cultural Respect

Be sensitive to, interpret and involve the culture/s existing in the area.

Customer Satisfaction

Consistently meets consumer expectations.



Responsible Marketing

Be marketed and promoted honestly and accurately so that realistic expectations are formed.

These principles have been used to develop the Standard criteria – with specific indicators for each of these eight performance areas. The criteria support the major principles and are based on a hybrid of 'process' (i.e. creating a documented procedure) and 'performance' (e.g. that sewage treatment meets certain effluent standards) standards.⁴

Although some criteria are relatively general and rely on a commitment by the operator to implement a process to meet a desired outcomes (e.g. provision of an interpretation plan in order to stimulate better designed interpretative activities, leading to quality experiences) there is distinct emphasis on specific performance indicators. These are technically prescriptive and deliberately target real environmental outcomes. These criteria include quantification of environmental performance for most of the key environmental indicators. This allows recognition and encouragement of ecotourism product that makes measured environmental improvements which result in a more sustainable world.⁵

IV. IMPLICATIONS

Adventure Tourism

It is a nature tourism that involves a degree of risk taking (Honey, 2002).

Best Management Practices

The Rainforest Alliance helps define and promote the use of best management practices that are a series of principles and concrete recommendations that can be implemented by different land-use sectors. These practices are based on the outcomes of impact assessments, scientific research, pilot testing projects, adaptation to local realities and multistakeholder discussions. These best management practices can be used as the basis for the development of policies, codes of conduct and public awareness materials, and for the implementation of technical assistance, training and certification (Rainforest Alliance).⁶

Best Practice(s)

Best Practice is used to designate highest quality, excellence, or superior practices by a tourism operator. The term is widely used in many award and certification programs, as well as academic studies, to designate the best in a particular class or a leader in the field. “Best,” however, is a contextual term. There is no set standard of measurement, and the term is often loosely or ill defined (Honey, 2002).

Certification

Certification is a voluntary procedure that assesses, monitors, and gives written assurance that a business, product, process, service, or management system conforms to specific requirements. It awards a marketable logo or seal to those that meet or exceed baseline standards, i.e., those that at a minimum comply with national and regional regulations and, typically, fulfill other declared or negotiated standards prescribed by the program (Honey, 2002).

Commercialization Chain

Commercialization Chain is a map of the direct and indirect interactions between consumers and local service providers including all intermediaries, sources of information, and means of communication (Honey, 2002).

Cultural Tourism

Cultural Tourism is travel for the purpose of learning about cultures or aspects of cultures (Honey, 2002).

Canopy Walkway

A constructed bridge walkway through the tree tops of a forest.



Conservation Enterprises

Income generating activities that focus on conserving natural resources and ecosystems.⁷

Ecosystem

A dynamic complex of plant, animal, fungal and microorganism communities and their associated non-living environment interacting as an ecological unit.

Ecotourism

Responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and sustains the livelihood of local people. (TIES website, March 6, 2003).

Ecotourism Activities

Activities included in a tour that are designed to entertain clients and are coordinated by a professional guide or interpreter. Over 80 activities have been listed for ecotourism, such as birdwatching, hiking, diving, kayaking, participating in cultural events, photography, and mountaineering.⁸

Ecotourism Product

A combination of resources, activities, and services, which are sold and managed through professional tour operators.

Ecotourism Resources

Natural and cultural features that attract visitors, such as landscapes, endemic or rare flora and fauna, cultural festivals, and historical monuments.

Ecotourism Services

Tourism services such as transportation, food, lodging, guiding and interpretation services which cause minimal damage to the biological and cultural environments and promote a better understanding of the natural and cultural history of an area.⁹

Endemism

The level of species that occur naturally only in a specific region or site.

Ecolabeling

Ecolabeling describes a scheme in which a product, company, service, or destination may be awarded an ecological label on the basis of its “acceptable” level of environmental impact. The acceptable level of environmental impact may be determined by consideration of a single environmental hurdle or after undertaking an assessment of its overall impacts. Ecolabeling sometimes refers to the natural environment only; sometimes it takes into account social and cultural environments as well.¹⁰ An ecoquality label marks the state of the environmental quality, such as water quality for beaches or quality of wildlife in national parks (Honey, 2002).

Ecotourism “lite”

Ecotourism “lite” involves a business adapting sensible but small, cosmetic, and often cost-saving practices that are typically marketed as major innovations (Honey, 2002).

Geotourism

Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place--its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.

Greenwashing

Greenwashing is a term used to describe businesses, services, or products that promote themselves as environmentally friendly when they are not (Honey, 2002).



Stakeholders

Individuals who have a vested interest in development, including community members; environmental, social, and community NGOs; natural resource, planning, and government officials; hotel owners, tour operators, guides, transportation providers, and representatives from other related services in the private sector.¹¹

Sustainable Development

Development that meets the needs and aspirations of the current generation without compromising the ability to meet those of future generations.¹²

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable Tourism is, according to the World Tourism Organization, “envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems” (Honey, 2002).

Leakages

Leakages are funds that do not reach the destination country. This occurs primarily when the tourism operators through which packages are purchased do not involve local businesses. In these cases, very few of the funds generated by the tour operators stay within the community being visited, remaining instead in the home country of the tour operator. Ecological imbalance: imperiling the whole Ecosystem

With the increased industrialisation and scientific approach to our life, the natural resources and rich natural heritage which were being preserved for centuries have begun dwindling greatly. Any kind of imbalance in nature results into severe danger to our ecosystem.¹⁴

Its treatment with nature has posed today many serious challenges and problems like climate change, vector-borne disease, decay in wildlife and its resources and food and water shortage. Exploitation of natural resources prevalent all over the world has erupted into severe ecological degradation, which is definitely the biggest threat to proper functioning of our ecosystem.

Need to restore and conserve the ecosystem

Restoring the ecosystem by establishing the finer balance between organism and environment is the best way that being a responsible human we can do. Until and unless, the steps to preserve the decaying charm of our ecosystem are not initiated, our ecosystem is not going to support us having a better and healthy environment.¹³

There is stark need today to assist nature by not disturbing its integrity, and help it gain its lost delicacy. By protecting our native natural resources like wildlife, rivers, forests, etc, one can contribute greatly in preservation of our ecosystem. The radical changes have to be born in our thoughts to save and accumulate the natural resources – the very root of our life.

Cultural and Heritage Tourism are older terms in comparison to Eco Tour, as it is about offering tourists a glimpse and exploration of its cultural and historical destinations. On the other hand, Eco Tour is different in sense that it might be broader than Cultural and Historical Tour, as an eco place might be naturally as well historically and culturally rich.

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.¹⁴

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 what only few regions on the earth have to show off.

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 known all over.¹⁵

How you should prepare for eco tour?

As an eco tour is different from other tour programme, it needs better planning and understanding of the places you are going to travel. Once you are there at your desired eco places, there are some certain guidelines you need to revolve in mind.

- Before you for leave for the destination, you ought to know your tour operator better about its affiliation, policies and awards. Besides, learning more about the destination you are going to visit will be of great use to you. It shall heighten your joy of sightseeing.
- Disposing the garbage and waste while you are on tour is must. It ensures that you are contributing greatly in conservation of the resources.
- As the golden rule of eco tour says, try to support the local people. You can do it by buying the local made eco friendly products like handicrafts items.
- Be ready to enjoy the cultural exchange while being at tourist places. By being interactive and respectful to local culture, you can gain a lot of information.¹⁶

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Eco travel, newly derived form of travel, is an ecology based travel which includes sightseeing of places rich in their natural, cultural and historical heritage. Fetching a deeper insight of stunning beauty of cultural and natural resources of a place, eco travel is meant specially for tourists willing to venture a vacation far from commotion of rest of the world and learn about the different cultural and geographical beauty of a place. Letting eco travellers enjoy the best possible joy of being in complete serenity and in stark harmony with the nature, eco travel is one of the best model originated by nature based modern tourism.¹⁷

Why Ecotourism

Fastest growing sector in tourism industry, ecotourism is said to be moving ahead with the growth rate of 15-20% every year. New in its concept, Eco travel or Ecotourism is about exploring places superfluous in their cultural, natural and historical richness. Witnessing and appreciating the beauty and significance of nature and culture of a place along with getting some time to spend it according to one's wish in stark peacefulness of nature are the very best characteristic of eco travel.¹⁸

Availing the splendid sightseeing of places affluent in their natural beauty put travellers at complete ease with surroundings and in accordance with mental and physical calmness. Eco travel is not all about beholding and surveying the nature based places, but it also let you indulge into various nature based 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. Experiencing these recreational and informative activities are the best treat that an eco tour, unlike other trips, can offer to tourists.¹⁹



Benefits of Ecotourism

Ecotourism, 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.²⁰

- 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.²¹
- 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.

How eco tour is different from Sustainable Tourism / Cultural Tourism / Heritage Tourism? Eco Tour, a nature based travel, is relatively a new term which aims to conserve the resources (environment) and improve the well being of local people. Sustainable Tourism, on the other hand, is broadly centred upon consideration of local people, culture, customs, tradition and economic condition of locals, along with protecting and preserving the resources. Unlike Eco Tourism, Sustainable Ttourism puts its faith in the fact that tourism has to benefit the host (local pople) and natural resources have to be preserved for long time.²²

Dos and Don't on Eco travel

Do's

- Wear clothes having forest friendly colours like green, brown and khaki.
- Follow the rules and guidelines of the place you are visiting.
- While enjoying adventurous activities like trekking, rafting, etc, follow the safety guidelines.
- Park vehicles only in the specified area.
- Use flash less camera in wildlife parks.
- Flashes may make animals go angry.
- Be always alert while being in wildlife parks.
- Try to be always with your tour guide.²³

Don't

- Never try to play with animals, insects and birds while being at parks.
- Don't litter. Dispose the waste properly.
- Don't smoke. Eco places are mostly no smoking zone.
- Don't wear bright coloured. It might infuriate animals in the park.
- Don't go swimming and boating in the lakes where these activities are restricted.



- Wearing strong perfumes and roaming in wildlife parks must be avoided.²⁴

Best time for Eco travel in India

The best time to take your eco trip to india depends upon the places you are willing to visit during the tour. As the country is famous for its diverse topography, many eco place have their own specific time to visit. Due to diverse climate factor, it is tougher to tell what time it is best for eco travel to India

The time between October and March are said to be the best time to visit India. And also for wildlife viewing, which is indeed the biggest eco delight in the country, these months are the best time to visit India. This is the time when most of the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries are open for visitors. Besides, most of the celebrations and festivals like Dussehra, Deepawali, Christmas, Eid, Holi, Camel fair at Pushkar and Chariot procession at Orissa occur during this time (October-March). Traveling during this season assures you having the best possible view of popular Indian eco places along with exploring its uniqueness of its diverse culture, tradition, custom and rich history.²⁵

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