



## Research Paper

### Scope and challenges in Ecotourism: a comprehensive study in Indian Context

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**Abstract:** Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries with an annual average growth rate of 5%, and numbers of international travel might nearly double until 2020 compared to 2006. Having experienced a growth of 25% between 1995 and 2005, tourism today accounts for 10% of the world's economic activity and is one of the main generators of employment. Tourism is also a major source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in many developing countries such as India, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka. The tourism industry ranks about 6th in international trade after trade in fossil fuels, telecommunications and computer equipment, automotive products, and agriculture. According to the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specified objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspect found in these areas is defined as ecotourism. An optimum number of environment friendly visitor activities, which do not have any serious

impact on the ecosystem and the local community and the positive involvement of the local community in maintaining the ecological balance are some of its key elements. In the present paper the authors have given a comprehensive study on ecotourism pertaining to Indian context and its scope and challenges in coming years. Ecotourism in India may take a very important role in unorganized sectors especially those who are not employed or are not doing any regular job.

**Keywords:** tourism; employment; environment friendly; unorganized sector.

### INRODUCTION

In the tourism business, natural resources are intensively used and consumed, and tourism has major impacts on environment, ecosystems, economy, societies and culture. If it is managed well, tourism can contribute significantly to develop significantly in different regions. Tourism is an industry which is bound to a territory. Other industries generally depend on natural resources and/or services. Furthermore

tourism depends on traditions, values, etc. These features are incorporated into tourism businesses and it becoming a part of the tourism industry. This in turn creates a cross-sectoral, dynamic approach to tourism with a corresponding management schema. Tourism is a service industry which means that it depends strongly on human resources at all levels (regional, national, international) and from many different service sectors, e.g. accommodation, food, travel agencies, travel writers & publishers etc. Each of these sectors is really an independent industry at its own. Human resources include all the people who work in the tourism industry at all levels, from the room cleaners to the individuals who manage tourism resorts. This dependence on human resources means that the quality of tourism fluctuates constantly. The people employed in the tourism industry are often those employed for a shorter amount of time than those in other industries. Skills learnt involving tourism often doesn't remain in one place for a very long time because of this high rollover rate. Combining these resources to produce well managed tourism that works well is often difficult. This also leads to the fluctuation in quality mentioned above. Tourism also undergoes a continuous high fluctuation in terms of its products. This is also a big difference in comparison with other industries. The tourism product market changes continuously, to keep pace with the tourism trends. Each year newer and better specialised products are introduced in the market. Variety of new products come in the market to replace the old products which are out dated in the current time. Each year many tourism companies fail to keep up with this change and go out of business.

## IMPACTS OF TOURISM

Tourism can be lucrative source of revenue, but there are some negative impacts of it. These impacts are not only physical, but also cultural. The impacts vary according to the number and the nature of tourists as well as the characteristics of the site at which tourism activities take place. These negative impacts can only be managed effectively if they have been identified, measured and evaluated.

### **Environmental impacts on ecosystems:**

Whenever the negative impacts on the natural environment are dealt with, it should be considered that these impacts rarely affect only one entity. The impacts on the natural environment do not only affect untouched nature areas, but also cultivated lands. Agricultural lands are an important part of the natural and cultural heritage of a region and ecologically valuable because it's the habitat of many species. Environmental impacts of tourism occur at the local, regional and global level. Climate change and the depletion of the ozone layer are the two major impacts on environment. Environmental impacts primarily affect the local and regional level and at the same time they affect the environment globally in the long run. Basically, the loss of biological diversity is a major consequence of these impacts.

### **Negative socio-cultural impacts:**

Tourism aids change and development and thus has major effects on the cultural development of a society. The reaction of societies towards tourism is diverse: some reject changes; others accept them into their tradition. Some will abandon their cultural roots altogether. While cultural change is unavoidable, natural part of human culture, the sudden and forced changes that tourism often brings can cause the complete breakdown of a society and may consequentially cause the loss of entire cultural tradition. Socio-cultural impacts of

tourism are often hard to identify or to measure. Tourism brings about changes in value systems and behavior of the people and cause changes in the structure of communities, family relationships, collective traditional lifestyles, ceremonies and morality. The ambiguity of socio-cultural impacts is due to the fact that tourism may have impacts that are beneficial for one group of a society, but which are negative for another.

#### **Negative economic impacts:**

The tourism industry generates substantial economic benefits to both host countries and tourists' home countries. Economic improvement is the primary motivation to promote a region as a tourism destination, because tourism can cause massive economic development. But it also has hidden costs with unfavorable economic effects. Rich countries usually profit more from tourism than poor countries. Large-scale transfer of tourism revenues out of the host country and the exclusion of local businesses and products reduce the revenues of tourism, which could otherwise benefit the local population.

### **NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE AS A BASIS FOR TOURISM**

Generally, the heritage of a region consists of its physical natural and cultural environment, its natural phenomena and its cultural traditions and immaterial cultural goods. Heritage is always affiliated with a region and/or a society (or a part of a society) and it is based on the region's history. It has its origin in the past; it has been passed over from one generation to the next and maintained until the present. Cultural heritage is directly related to the region's and society's history. Natural heritage has its roots in the past. Nature as it looks at present has been formed by former

vegetation and wildlife. In any case, it is most important to keep in mind that sustainable tourism is taking its sources from the region's own attractions and past. It is not something developed from abroad, like e.g. a fully air conditioned tropical greenhouse-landscape in a northern region or an indoor ski park in a region where there is never enough natural snow for skiing. The natural and cultural heritage of a region is the main motivation for a tourist's visit, this is especially the case for cultural or nature tourism, or provides at least an important complementary offer for other types of tourism, e.g. congress tourism, recreation and sports tourism. The outstanding natural and cultural features of a region are those which make a place "special"; and worth a visit.

#### **Natural heritage:**

Natural heritage consists not only of flora and fauna, but also of every other part of the natural environment, e.g. the inorganic nature such as rocks, geologic formations, rivers, lakes, mountains as well as the relation between these natural components as ecosystems. The main components of the natural heritage are vegetation and wildlife, geology, hydrology and natural phenomena. Also 'events', such as climate, volcanic or astrological incidents, the course of the year, evolution and the changes in the ecosystems are parts of natural heritage. Besides their importance as tourism attractions each component of the natural heritage may be the topic for educational and scientific interest.

#### **Cultural heritage:**

Cultural heritage comprises all existing cultural phenomena from material goods to immaterial goods. This includes immobile historical monuments (historical buildings, gardens, parks, industrial facilities, traffic related monuments etc.), movable historical monuments (paintings and sculptures,

religious artwork, historical handicrafts, crafts equipment, agricultural and industrial tools and machines; historical documents and objects), customs and culture such as festivals, rites, costumes, legends, behavior and habits, music, dances and culinary specialities. As the name already implies, cultural heritage is based on the past and it forms a part of tradition. However, contemporary culture like music, theatre; literature or fine arts and the like belong to cultural heritage as well.



### **Landscape:**

Landscape describes a region's shape and characteristics. It is primarily a part of the natural heritage as it is largely formed by geological, hydrological and botanical features, but it is also strongly influenced by mankind and the society's economic activities. The landscape is essentially contributing to the visitor's impressions of and feelings about a region. Landscape is usually not seen as a specific subject of interest - normally single features such as rock formations, geological phenomena or vegetation, e.g. forests or meadows are what attract the visitor. It is, however, experiencing these features in the context of the whole landscape of the area that makes visiting them special. Many tourist activities are based on the experience of landscape,

like all kind of nature tourism, and nature oriented physical activities as hiking, biking, swimming, etc.

### **Protection of heritage:**

The natural and cultural heritage is often vulnerable to the impacts of modern development, consumer lifestyles and globalization. In addition, the use of heritage in tourism, in particular in excessive or poorly managed forms of tourism, as well as the development of infrastructure related to tourism may directly threaten the integrity of the heritage. The lack of environmental awareness from part of both, local people and visitors, their cultural insensitivity, an improper management and/or insufficient legal framework and law enforcement can lead to the deterioration of physical and immaterial natural and cultural goods. Therefore, to provide the basis for tourism development not only in the present, but also for future generations, natural and cultural heritage must be protected. Considering protection and making use of tourism development as a means of conservation is a basic principle of sustainable tourism development.



### **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN INDIA**

In 1988, the United Nations World Tourism organization (UNWTO) defined sustainable

tourism 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’. Later in 1992, the ‘Earth Summit’ in Rio established the triple principles of environmental, economic and social sustainability. Since then, the principles of sustainable tourism have been adopted by the tourism industry worldwide. In India, the tourism sector is based on its unique endowments of biodiversity, forests, rivers, and its rich culture and heritage. The challenges in this sector lie in successfully preserving these in their original form, and making them accessible to domestic and international travelers, together with safeguarding the economic interest and heritage of local communities. The importance of Sustainable Tourism worldwide has increased significantly due to the impact of increased human activity on climate. Full advantage can then be drawn from tourism for inclusive growth, with livelihood support to the poor, most disadvantaged, women and youth.

Sustainable tourism implies minimizing the negative and maximizing the positive effects of all forms and activities of tourism on:

- (I) Environment ,
- (II) Local Communities,
- (III) Heritage (cultural, natural, built, oral, intangible) ,

Inclusive economic growth tourism is primarily driven by the private sector, with a multiplicity of stakeholders, whose sizes range from micro enterprises to large transnational corporations. The actions of these players, along with those of tourists and the local communities, determine the overall impact of tourism on the environment, whether positive or negative. Governments – Central, State and Local –

have a critical role in determining the policies for sustainable tourism. Moreover, many policies and much of the legislations surrounding sustainable tourism fall in the area of governance, such as land use, labour laws, environmental regulations and waste disposal. One of the primary functions of the government in enhancing Sustainable Tourism is, therefore, to create an environment that enables or influences the private sector to operate more sustainably, and influence patterns of visitor flows and behaviour to optimize the impact of tourism. Positive intervention by the Government is thus necessary, going beyond providing an enabling environment. Recognizing its role in promoting Sustainable Tourism, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, had extensively deliberated with the industry and other stakeholders to formulate the wide-ranging “Ecotourism in India – Policy and Guidelines”, as far back as 1998, covering:

- a. Ecotourism definition
- b. Ecotourism resources of India
- c. Policy and planning
- d. Operational guidelines for (i) government, (ii) developers, operators and suppliers, (iii) visitors, (iv) destination population / host community, and (v) NGOs/scientific & research institutions,

The following lists aims of an agenda for sustainable tourism:

- a. Economic Viability, b. Local Prosperity, c. Employment Quality, d. Social Equity, e. Visitor Fulfillment, f. Local Control, g. Community Wellbeing, h. Cultural Richness, i. Physical Integrity, j. Biological Diversity, k. Resource Efficiency, l. Environmental Purity.

Later, certain organizations grouped together, garnering the goodwill of UNEP and UNWTO, to promote the “Global Sustainable Tourism Council” and their “Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria”

(GSTC) for adoption by hotels and tour operators, drawn from criteria generated by a variety of sources. However, these criteria refer only to hotels and tour operators, and exclude several major constituents of the tourism industry such as local communities, destination management, transport, airlines, beaches and backwaters, wellness, as also operational focus which require indicators and governance coefficients, going beyond statements of intent. Against this background, it was considered necessary to define criteria for sustainable tourism to suit Indian conditions, specifically taking cognizance of India's attainments in sustainability, while also considering criteria generated by other sources, including GSTC. As several stakeholders in sustainable tourism such as airlines etc., fall outside the ambit of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, the Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India, at present include only tour operators and the accommodation sector that come directly within the Ministry's purview. Accordingly, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, convened a National Workshop on Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India, in July 2010. Based on the recommendations of this National Workshop on Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India, a sub-committee chaired by the Joint Secretary (Tourism), Government of India, and comprising expert stakeholders was constituted in 2010 for defining Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) and indicators.

The key concerns kept in mind by the Committee were:

- (i) Carrying capacity,
- (ii) Anthropogenic character, applying to all major human impacts on the environment.
- (iii) Local community participation, engagement and benefit.

- (iv) Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India guidelines.
- (v) Bio-degradable toilets.
- (vi) Water harvesting.
- (vii) Lessons from successes and failures, national & international.
- (viii) Institutional certification and viewpoints: ISO, BIS, BEE, LEED etc.
- (ix) Polluter Pays Principle.

The Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) and indicators, evolved by the Committee for the accommodation sector and tour operators sector, are annexed with this Report. The implementation of Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) will progress on the basis of:

1. Workshops to advocate sustainability by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, for all stakeholders across the country.
2. Extensive range of incentives for establishments complying with STCI, specially focusing on international market access, through the Ministry's Market Development Assistance scheme.
3. Ministry of Tourism, Government of India support proposals from all tourism sector associations for skill development, as in 'Hunar Se Rozgar' for unskilled, low-skilled and, semi-skilled and craftsperson categories.
4. Certification through innovative use of existing mechanisms, there is a need for appointing consultants or a project monitoring unit.
5. Training of Trainers for Sustainable Tourism through institutional arrangements.
6. School and college curriculum to incorporate sustainable tourism.

7. Advance calendar of participatory activities, displayed on the Ministry's website.
8. Capacity building in industry and government by identifying institutions for developing a pool of trainers, training of trainers, etc.
9. Evolving governance coefficients, using contemporary technology, for incorporation in the rating / approval mechanism, to enable realistic monitoring and evaluation of sustainable tourism implementation by all tourism industry constituents.

I. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CRITERIA FOR INDIA-APPLICABILITY TO ACOMMODATION SECTOR

**V.1. Effective Sustainable Management:**

1. The organization has implemented a long-term sustainability management system that is suitable to its reality and scale, and that considers environmental, sociocultural, quality, health and safety issues.
2. The organization is in compliance with all relevant national legislation and regulations.
3. All personnel receive periodic training in the management of environmental, socio-cultural, quality health and safety practices.
4. Customer satisfaction is measured and corrective action taken, where appropriate.
5. Promotional materials are accurate and complete.

**V.2. Design and construction of buildings and infrastructure:**

1. Comply with land usage and protected or heritage area requirements

2. Respect the natural, cultural and social surroundings. These are the heritage of India. This also includes land rights and acquisition in, so far as new construction, including additions and extensions to property, is concerned.
3. Use locally appropriate principles of sustainable construction, including local styles, skills and materials for new construction and additions or extensions to property.
4. Provide access and facilities for persons with special needs in accordance with principles of universal design.
5. Information about and interpretation of the natural surroundings, customs, local culture and cultural heritage is provided to visitors, as well as explanations of appropriate behaviour while visiting natural areas, living cultures and cultural heritage sites.

**V.3. Maximise social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts:**

1. The organisation actively supports initiatives for social and community participation and development, including among others, infrastructure, education, health, and sanitation.
2. Local residents are employed in management positions, wherever feasible. Training is offered, as necessary.
3. The organization encourages the means for local small entrepreneurs to develop and sell sustainable products that are based on the area's nature, history, and culture (including food and drink, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products).

4. A code of behaviour for activities in indigenous and local communities has been developed, with the consent of, and in collaboration with the community and/or neighbourhood.
5. The organisation has implemented a policy against commercial exploitation, particularly of children and adolescents, including sexual exploitation.
6. The organization should provide equal opportunities in recruitment and career growth to all segments of society, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, ethnicity and gender, while completely shunning child labour.
7. All employees, including contractual labour, are treated in accordance with national legislation and are paid a fair wage, with the minimum being in accordance with the law

#### **V.4. Maximise benefits to the environment and minimise negative impacts:**

1. The organisation implements a step-by-step plan to identify, and then quantify, sources of greenhouse gas emissions under its control, and activate measures to offset climate change in a time-bound manner.
2. Wastewater, including gray water, is treated effectively and reused, where possible.
3. A solid waste management plan is implemented, with quantitative goals to minimise waste that is non-biodegradable, not reused or recycled.
4. The use of harmful substances including pesticides, harmful chemicals, swimming pool disinfectants and cleaning material is minimised; substituted, when available, by innocuous products, and all chemical use is properly managed.
5. The organisation implements practices to reduce pollution from noise, light, runoff,

erosion, ozone-depleting compounds and air and soil contaminants.

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## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table-1(a): Foreign tourists arrivals in India (1997-2017) Table-1(b) Foreign exchange earnings from tourism in India (1997-2017) Tourism in India is now very much important economically and growing rapidly every year. The World Travel & Tourism Council calculated that tourism generated Rs. 15.24 lakh crore or 9.4% of the nation's GDP in 2017 and supported 41.622 million jobs, 8% of its total employment. The Tourism industry is predicted to grow at an annual rate of 6.9% to Rs. 32.05 lakh crore by 2028 (9.9% of GDP). In 2014, 184,298 foreign patients traveled to India to seek medical treatment which is quite astonishing. Over 10 million foreign tourists arrived in India in 2017 compared to 8.89 million in 2016, recording a growth of 15.6%. Domestic tourist visits

to all states and Union Territories numbered 1,036.35 million in 2012, an increase of 16.5% from 2011. In 2014, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh were the most popular states for tourists. Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Agra and Jaipur have been the five most visited cities of India by foreign tourists during the year 2015. Worldwide, Delhi is ranked at 28 by the number of foreign tourist arrivals, while Mumbai is ranked at 30, Chennai at 43, Agra at 45, Jaipur at 52 and Kolkata at 90. Tourism in India is economically important and is growing rapidly.

**Conclusion:** The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report for the year 2017, ranked India 40th out of 136 countries overall. The report ranks the price competitiveness of India's tourism sector 10th out of 136 countries. It mentions that India has quite good air transport (ranked 32nd), particularly given the country's stage of development, and reasonable ground transport infrastructure (ranked 29th). The country also scores high on natural and cultural resources (ranked 9th). Some other aspects of its tourism infrastructure remain somewhat underdeveloped however. The nation has very few hotel rooms per capita by international comparison and low ATM penetration. The World Tourism Organization reported that India's receipts from tourism during 2012 ranked 16th in the world and 7th among Asian and Pacific countries. The Ministry of Tourism designs national policies for the development and promotion of tourism. In the process, the Ministry consults and collaborates with other stakeholders in the sector including various Central Ministries/agencies, state governments, Union Territories and the representatives of the private sector. Concerted efforts are being made to promote new forms of tourism, medical and eco-

tourism. India is a vast country and there is tremendous scope in eco tourism. The young generations has lot of job opportunities in ecotourism. The top industrialists and Government of India should join hands to improvise ecotourism issues.

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