

Eco-Tourism: Origin and Development

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Abstract— Tourism all over the world is now a well accepted phenomenon. Eco-tourism is considered as the fastest growing market in the tourism industry. It focuses on local cultures, wilderness adventures volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live in the vulnerable planet. Eco-tourism is low impact nature tourism which contributes to the maintenance of species and habitats either directly through a contribution to conservation or indirectly by providing revenue to the local community sufficiently, for local people to value and therefore protect, their wildlife heritage area as a source of income. Eco-tourism appeals to ecologically and socially conscious individuals. One of the goals of eco-tourism is to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment and to foster a greater appreciation of natural habitats.

Keywords— Eco-tourism-nature conservation-economic opportunities for local communities-preservation of culture

Tourism all over the world is now a well accepted phenomenon. The scarcity of pristine environments, close to densely populated areas and demand for high quality environment has given birth to eco-travels. The expansion in the communication media and worldwide telecast of quality nature programmes are mainly responsible for awakening the environmental consciousness of the people and the resulting demand for nature based tourism. Eco-tourism is considered as the fastest growing market in the tourism industry.

'Eco-tourism' also known as ecological tourism is responsible travel to fragile, pristine and usually protected areas that strives to below impact and small scale. It is a form of tourism, that appeals to the ecologically and socially conscious individuals. Generally speaking, eco-tourism focuses on volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on the planet, typically involving travel to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Responsible eco-tourism includes programmes that minimize the negative impacts 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 eco-tourism is in the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation and creation of economic opportunities for the local communities. It focuses on local cultures, wilderness adventures volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live in the vulnerable planet.

ORIGIN OF THE TERM ECO-TOURISM:

The term 'eco' on tourism comes from the Greek word 'oikos' meaning 'house'. The immediate origin of the word comes from 'ecology' if it is to reclaim the term and support it with strength and precision. The term 'eco-tourism' simply means, 'ecologically sound tourism' or 'ecologically sensitive tourism'. All the attention and maintenance that a homeowner puts into a house should be the amount of care one has to put into tourism. The eco tourist must care for the place visited as much as she or he cares for and appreciates home. The word Eco-tourism first came into existence at a place known as Belize in Central America, which is famous for many natural beautiful places and scenarios.

Its evolution took place in Western society to experience wild nature. It started in 1872 in the US with Yellow Stone Park, in 1879 in Australia with Royal Park and in 1885 in Canada with Banff Park and Niagara Falls to set aside the natural areas for protection and recreation in the form of national parks.

Eco-tourism is a concept that evolved over the last 30 years, as the conservation community, people living in and around protected areas and the travel industry witnessed a boom in nature tourism and realized their mutual interest in directing its growth. Eco-tourism has got wide ranging acceptability cutting across the countries, whether the state of the environment and ecology are partly or wholly affected. It developed 'within the womb' of the environmental movement in 1970's and 1980's.

It is the trend towards the commercialization of tourism throughout the nation, which has become one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry growing 10-15% worldwide. Eco-tourism was first introduced in Africa in the 1950's with the legalization of hunting. This need for recreational hunting zones led to the creation of protected areas, national parks, and game reserves. Today, these areas have become important revenue earning venues with the establishment of lodges and tourist campsites.

One of the first to use the term appears to have been Hetzer (1965) who identified 'four pillars' or principles of responsible tourism – minimizing environmental impacts, respecting lost cultures, maximizing the benefits to local people and tourist satisfaction. The first of these was held to be the most distinguishing characteristic of ecological tourism.

Hvenegard(1994)Orams(1995) write that the term can be traced back to 1980's while others(Higgins1996) suggest that it can be traced to 1970's through the work of Miller on Eco-development.Hector Ceballos-Lascurian was the first to coin the phrase in early 1983.The term was used to describe the nature based travel with emphasis on education, management and development of sustainable tourism product and activity.

Eco-tourism began to have its prominence in 2002, when the United Nations celebrated the International Year of Eco-tourism. A world summit was organized in Quebec in Canada from 19th to 22nd May 2002, in connection with the International Year of Eco-Tourism. One important aspect of International Year of Eco-Tourism was to analyze and promote eco-tourism potential to improve the environmental performance of tourism.

The summit was an initiative of the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It was hosted by Tourism Quebec and the Canadian Tourism Commission. The purpose of the summit was to bring together governments, international agencies, NGO's, communities, academic institutions and individuals with an interest in eco-tourism and enable them to learn from each other and identify some agreed principles and priorities for the future development and management of eco-tourism.

Eco-tourism has emerged as a platform to establish partnership and to jointly guide the path of tourists seeking to experience and learn about natural areas and diverse culture. The Declaration of the Year of Eco-tourism has provided an impetus to the government and provide entrepreneurs to initiate a plan of action for eco-tourism development both in the protected areas and other nature-based areas with direct support and participation of the local community.

Eco-tourism, responsible tourism, jungle tourism and sustainable development have become prevalent concepts since 1980's and eco-tourism has experienced the fastest growth of all sectors in the tourism industry.Thus, eco-tourism has developed from the traditional nature tourism and sustainable development concepts.

DEFINITION:

One of the popular definitions of Ceballos – Lascurain on eco-tourism, elaborated by Blamey in 1997 (in his research paper) is that 'eco-tourism is traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas'. It is nature based, environmentally educated and sustainably managed.

World Tourism Organization has defined eco-tourism as "tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with specified object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects found in these areas". In 1992, the definition about eco-tourism given by the Eco-Tourism Association of Australia explains, "ecologically sustainable tourism that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation".

In simple terms, eco-tourism can be said as the management of tourism and conservation of nature in a way so as to mean a fine balance between the requirements of tourism and ecology on the one hand and the needs of local communities for jobs, new skills, income generating employment and a better status for women on the other.

Eco-tourism is low impact nature tourism which contributes to the maintenance of species and habitats either directly through a contribution to conservation or indirectly by providing revenue to the local community sufficiently, for local people to value and therefore protect, their wildlife heritage area as a source of income.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF ECO-TOURISM:

Eco-tourism appeals to ecologically and socially conscious individuals. One of the goals of eco-tourism is to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment and to foster a greater appreciation of natural habitats. Three eco-tourism objectives, such as generation of financial support for protected area management, generation of local economic benefits and generation of local support for conservation need to be emphasized.

PRINCIPLES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ECO-TOURISM:

According to The International Eco-Tourism Society (TIES) in 1990, eco-tourism is "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of local people". Martha Honey expands the TIES definition by describing the seven characteristics of eco-tourism, which are:

- involves travel to natural destinations
- minimizes impact
- builds environmental awareness
- provides direct financial benefits for conservation
- provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people

- respects local culture
- Supports human rights and democratic movements.

Eco-tourism or sustainable tourism primarily focuses upon indigenous people, land eco-systems and culture. Eco-tourism should not only look at protecting the environment or the bio-diversity, it must also take into account protection of the cultural diversity and other important views of the indigenous and local communities, operating in the cultural context of the community.

BENEFITS OF ECO-TOURISM:

Benefits of eco-tourism are concerned with small scale locally owned, built, managed facilities. Eco-tourism has three important benefits for developing countries:

- Facilities and infrastructure are simpler and less expensive.
- Being locally owned and operated, eco-tourism can have higher impact of local products, materials and labour, which means greater multiplier effects in the local economy and also reduces import leakages.
- Profits accrue locally, instead of flowing back to the parent country.

CRITERIA FOR ECO-TOURISM:

Ideally, eco-tourism should satisfy several criteria's, such as:

- Conservation of biological and cultural diversity through ecosystem problem.
- Promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity by providing jobs to local population.
- Sharing of socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous people by having their informed consent and participation in the management of eco-tourism enterprises.
- Tourism to unspoiled natural resources with minimal impact on the environment being a primary concern.
- Minimization and lack of waste in the form of luxury.
- Local culture, flora and fauna being the main attractions.

Thus, eco-tourism is a component of the field of sustainable tourism. It aspires in all cases to achieve sustainable development results. It is of special interest for its relationship with conservation, sustainability and biological diversity. Eco-tourism makes a model to conserve nature and natural resources, which brings economic support and strength, which in turn provides encouragement to accelerate conservation of resources and the environment.

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