

## Chapter 6

# Concepts of Ecotourism

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# CONCEPT OF ECOTOURISM

### 6.1 Definition of Ecotourism

The activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual place of residence for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes constitute "Tourism". Such visits for being close to nature to enjoy its enormous creations, both biotic and abiotic, in a most environment friendly manner, without any adverse impact on the ecosystem, is particularly known as 'Eco-Tourism'.

According to the WTO, "tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed natural areas within the specialized object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (both of the past or the present) found in these areas" is defined as eco-tourism. It is distinguished from mass tourism or resort by having a lower impact on the environment and by requiring less infrastructure development

Most common definition of Eco-Tourism is nature-based tourism (visitors are mainly interested in observing and appreciating nature and traditional cultures in natural areas) that has following attributes:

- Contributes to Biodiversity Conservation;
- Supports the well-being of local people;
- Involves responsible action by both tourists and local people to minimize negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts;
- Requires the lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources;
- Stresses local ownership, as well as business opportunities for local (especially rural) people.

Eco-tourism tends to be modest in scale (e.g. tour groups of not more than 25 people, hotels with fewer than 100 beds). It is also likely to be operated by small or medium sized companies that specialize in leading and providing accommodation for small groups in natural areas. These companies may furnish guides from the local population. Visitors may be given extensive information concerning ecosystems, local cultures and their relationship to the environment and sustainability issues. The key elements of eco-tourism include a natural element as a prime attraction, an optimum

number of environment-friendly visitors, activities, which do not harm any ecosystem and the positive involvement of the local community in maintaining the ecological balance.

Eco-tourism can take many forms and magnitudes. For example, 'losing' oneself in a beautiful natural forest or landscape - watching animals, birds and trees in a forests, corals and marine life in sea, engaging in trekking, boating or rafting, wandering amongst sand dunes—these are some of the common forms of eco-tourism. Though the concept has gained importance only recently, India has been experiencing various forms of eco-tourism all through the ages.

## **6.2 Principles of Ecotourism**

Ecotourism comprises number of interrelated components all of which should be present for authentic ecotourism to occur. Ross K. Dowling pointed out that there are five key principles that are fundamental to ecotourism. They are: I) ecotourism is nature-based, II) ecologically sustainable, III) environmentally educative, IV) locally beneficial and V) generates tourist satisfaction. The first three characteristics are considered to be essential for a product to be considered 'ecotourism' while the last two characteristics are viewed as being desirable for all forms of tourism.

### **I) Nature Based**

Ecotourism is based on the natural environment with a focus on its biological, physical and cultural features. Ecotourism occurs in, and depends on, a natural setting and may include cultural elements where they occur in a natural setting. The conservation of the natural resource is essential to the planning, development and management of ecotourism.

### **II) Ecologically sustainable**

All tourism should be sustainable - ecologically, socially and environmentally. Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism undertaken in a natural setting. The challenge to ecotourism in any country or region is to develop its tourism capacity and the quality of its products without adversely affecting the environment that maintains and nurtures it. This involves ensuring that the type, location and level of ecotourism use does not cause harm to natural areas.

### **III) *Environmentally Educative***

The educative characteristic of ecotourism is a key element, which distinguishes it from other forms of nature-based tourism. Environmental education and interpretation are important tools in creating an enjoyable and meaningful ecotourism experience. Ecotourism attracts people who wish to interact with the environment in order to develop their knowledge, awareness and appreciation of it. By extension, ecotourism should ideally lead to positive action for the environment by fostering enhanced conservation awareness.

Ecotourism education can influence tourist, community and industry behaviour and assist in the longer-term sustainability of tourist activity in natural areas. Education can also be useful as a management tool for natural areas. Interpretation helps tourists see the big picture regarding the environment. It acknowledges the natural and cultural values of the areas visited as well as other issues such as resource management.

### **IV) *Locally Beneficial***

The involvement of local communities not only benefits the community and the environment but also improves the quality of the tourist experience. Local communities can become involved in ecotourism operations, and in the provision of knowledge, services, facilities and products. These benefits should outweigh the cost of ecotourism to the host community and environment.

Ecotourism can also generate income for resource conservation management in addition to social and cultural benefits. The contribution may be financial with a part of the cost of the tour helping to subsidise a conservation project. Alternatively it could consist of practical help in the field with the tourists being involved in environmental data collection and/ or analysis.

### **V) *Tourist satisfaction***

Satisfaction of visitors with the ecotourism experience is essential to long-term viability of the ecotourism industry. Included in this concept is the importance of visitors' safety in regard to political stability. Information provided about ecotourism opportunities should accurately represent the opportunities offered at particular ecotourism destinations. The ecotourism experience should match or exceed the realistic expectations of the visitor. Client services and satisfaction should be second only to the conservation and protection of what they visit.

### 6.3 Ecotourism and its emerging forms

In planning and management of ecotourism it is also important to be aware of a number of different styles of ecotourism. They may vary considerably in regard to a range of factors including:

- The types of natural settings they require
- The extent of direct contact and involvement with the natural environment
- The group sizes involved
- The use and extent of personal interaction with tour guides
- The reliance on mechanized means of transport and supporting infrastructure, and
- The type of visitor satisfaction and experience realized.

Tourism experts have so far identified three broad styles of ecotourism. (McCotter, 1995). They include Frontier Ecotourism, Small Group Ecotourism and Popular Ecotourism.

#### *Frontier Ecotourism*

Frontier ecotourism involves individuals or small groups of generally ten or less people who utilize non-motorized forms of transport (e.g. walking or canoeing) to visit relatively remote and lightly used natural areas. Visitors are generally very self-reliant and have few demands for supporting services and infrastructure. There is a very special and unusual 'first-hand' experience that often requires a high degree of challenge and some knowledge of outdoor survival skills. Examples include trekking, rafting and kayaking.

#### *Small Group Ecotourism*

This type of ecotourism involves individuals or relatively with small groups (approximately 15 or less) who utilize motorized forms of transport such as buses or large boats. There are low requirements for self-reliance and the degree of challenge is generally 'off the beaten track'. This type of ecotourism operation may involve moderately high levels of challenge and self-reliance but is generally suitable for participants from a wide variety of age groups who do not necessarily require any special outdoor skills.

### ***Popular Ecotourism***

This type of ecotourism involves the transport of large numbers of visitors to, through or across a country's best and most popular natural attractions. It relies on high-capacity mechanized form of transport such as buses or large boats. There are low requirements for self-reliance and the degree of challenge is generally low. There may be sustained requirements for supporting infrastructure and services (e.g., visitor centers, food and drink outlets, boardwalks and toilets). This style of ecotourism is available to all visitors irrespective of age or physical capability.

There are also other tourist activities, which are closely related to the ecotourism but are not within the strict definition of ecotourism. Examples of such activities include aquaria, botanical gardens, zoos which displays native fauna, and visitor centers and displays of native flora and fauna in locations which are remote from their natural setting. While all of these examples can have substantial educational and interpretive components and similar objectives to ecotourism, they do not occur in and depend on a natural setting and are therefore not exclusively the subject of ecotourism.

### **6.4 Application of Ecotourism**

Ecotourism, the idea that nature based tourism could contribute social and environmental benefits burst into public consciousness in the late 1980s and became virtually a phenomenon in 1990s. In many countries, it became a substantial focus of debate, generating numerous conferences, new courses and challenging policy development at all levels of government, the tourist industry and the environment movement.

It is not too difficult to explain the extraordinary rise of interest. The publication of the Brundtland Report, "Our Common Future" in 1987 by the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development (UNCED) was the catalyst that saw a major worldwide rise in environmental consciousness. The report identified the concept of "sustainable development" as the answer (Wearing and Neil, 2000). It focused on the greatest dilemma of life of over 5 billion people as to how to meet the needs and demands of humans without destroying the very ecological fabric of the planet that underpins all life and human well-being.

While conceptually there was broad agreement, it was not easy to find a clean, green industry that were truly environmentally benign or had positive out comes over the long haul. This was especially true in developing countries where nature had its strong

holds, but where short-term economic drivers often saw natural lands and wildlife disappearing fast to satisfy both the needs of survival of resource industries.

Scientists and environmentalists could see that there was little hope of saving these lands unless they could generate income from their natural state to meet the needs of their people. Ecotourism appeared to offer a sustainable development option for countries, regions and local communities, which would provide an incentive to retain and manage their wildlife and hence the crucial biodiversity of life. It could be an alternative to rapacious, resource extraction of logging and mining. It could earn the desperately sought foreign currency and bring in revenues to properly managed protected areas. A crucial component of the concept is that affected local communities need to be recipients of such benefits if this incentive is to work. However, beyond simply being an incentive to keep forests alive and keep dynamite fishing away from reefs, many saw that such tourism could actually foster an environmental ethic through both the experience and good interpretation. Most people who have swum on coral reefs would want that reef to remain protected for all time.

Wearing and Neil (1999) point out that Ecotourism also appeared to hold promise to ameliorate another dilemma of our age. The twentieth century has seen the traffic and rapid demise of the rich cultural heritage of the world's industrialized society. Environmentalists viewed this as both a human and ecological tragedy as "the wisdom of the elders" seemed doomed to disappear. Ironically, as the diversity and integrity of native culture and natural places were increasingly under threat, the educated and environmentally aware travelers sought contact with them. Low key tourism appeared to offer an economic return to such communities for conserving and celebrating their cultures.

Overall therefore the ecotourism concept was to some degree the right idea at the right time. Tourism entrepreneurs were looking for areas where their country had a competitive advantage and new angles to market their countries or regions. Environmentalists were looking for reasons why governments should conserve land as well as examples of green industries and an alternative to the rapacious model of mass tourism. Indigenous and rural communities were looking for alternatives to destructive industries, new employment opportunities particularly ones that could enhance their communities. Governments were looking for economic development, income from their protected area assets and lower costs in land management.

However in the decade of ecotourism we have found that these benefits are not always easy to deliver. Undoubtedly there are forests still standing, rivers still clean and wildlife alive because of ecotourism. It was found that ecotourism acts as the thin end of the wedge in allowing for development in protected areas and fragile environments. Spreading benefits to local communities is also fraught with problems and often inadequate to offset the appeal of short-term but more lucrative extractive industries. Tourism is after all an industry frequently locked into dynamic of short-term profit before long-term profit and social, cultural or ecological sustainability.

### *Ecotourism: An opportunity or threat?*

Ecotourism provides an opportunity to develop tourism in ways that minimize its negative impacts and be a means of preventing environmental degradation, while sharing economic benefit with the local people.

According to Panigrahi (2003:2), "Travel by individuals or small groups to relatively untouched natural areas- where they can experience the natural environment and encounter local people directly- has been increasing rapidly in the last two decades. Although this type of tourism ought to have positive environmental and social effects, it could be as damaging a mass tourism, if not properly organized".

### *Ecotourism: Is it an opportunity for the developing countries?*

Ecotourism is a fastest growing trend in the world-wide tourism industry. The term 'ecotourism' has been defined in many ways, and is generally used to describe tourism activities, which are conducted in harmony with nature, as opposed to more traditional 'mass' tourism activities. Comprehensively, ecotourism has been defined by the ecotourism society as:

"Purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources financially beneficial to local citizens" (Eco-tourism Society, 1992).

The role of the tourism is emphasized by Hector Ceballos-Lascurain, who states that the main point of ecotourism is "that the person that practices ecotourism has the opportunity of immersing him or herself in nature in a way most people cannot enjoy in their routine, urban existences. This person will eventually acquire a consciousness that



will convert him/her into somebody keenly involved in conservation issues" (Ceballos Lascurain, 1987).

The resource conservation role is emphasized by Karen Ziffer, who describe ecotourism as a "managed approach by the host country or region which commits itself to establishing and maintaining the sites with the participation of local residents, marketing them appropriately, enforcing regulations, and using the proceeds of the enterprise to fund the area's land management as well as community development" (Ziffer, 1989).

Eco tourism involves minimum density, low impact activities which can take place where there are natural sites of sufficient biological, cultural and geographical interest to attract tourists. The major factors contributing to the boom in eco tourism are an international awareness of global ecological realities, the desire between a rapidly growing and relatively affluent segment of the industrialized world's conviction that natural resources are finite and must be conserved for future generations.

Eco-tourism as a sector of tourism industry is still in its infancy, but an analysis of the markets where it has made strong inroads indicates that developing countries, with their abundant variety of physical attractions, have most of the natural qualities necessary to position ecotourism as a prime offering of their tourism industries (Donald E. Hawkins, 1995).

Eco-tourism is interrelated with the overall growth of tourism in the world today. In spite of recessions, civil disturbances and natural catastrophes, international tourism continue to grow. Indeed, travelers in the 2000s consider vacations as a basic necessity. Tourism is making a major contribution to the economic viability of many countries of the world today. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) tourism is now the world's largest industry, and a bigger industry than the auto, steel, electronics or agricultural industries. The travel and tourism industry employs 127 million workers (one of fifteen workers world wide). Overall, the tourism industry is expected to double by the year 2005 (World Tourism and Travel Council, 1992). Within this perspective, the World Tourism Organization has conducted forecasts of international tourism, which grew by more than 57 % in the past decade and is expected to grow by 50% in this decade.

The World Tourism Organization/ United Nations Environment Programme WTO/UNEP publication (1992) entitled *Guidelines/ Development of National Parks and Protected Areas for Tourism* reveals that natural destinations generate approximately 8% of all international travel expenditure and immediate upsurge in its share is expected to be

noticed by the turn of the century. A fairly large number of percentages of it prefer to go for eco-tourism. The World Tourism Organization claims that the industry looked after 594 million travelers in 1996 who spent \$ 42.3 billion. Even if this is a little less than advertised, eco-tourism seems to be fastest growing part of it. By the broadest measures (trips with some sort of nature of wilderness component), eco-tourism already account for perhaps a third of these travelers. Eco-tourism is especially prominent in fastest tourism growing markets: Southern Africa (which has attracted 18% more visits in 1996 since 1990) and Latin America (which is up by 6%). It even dominates some markets; Kenya estimates that eight out of ten visitor come for the wildlife, as do most of the Costa Rica's: these countries, along with Australia, are widely regarded as world leaders in eco-tourism, South East Asia has potential for eco-tourism. Campbell (1994) reports that in 1990 alone approximately 20% of all foreign tourists to Thailand visited nature tourists sites. In some countries, such as Australia, the percentage is even higher. Growth rate in the various countries in Asia and Pacific has been steady at 10% to 25% over the past few years, and many are projecting higher growth in coming years. Many observers believe that the growth rate for eco-tourism will be higher than for tourism generally. Thus, assuming that the WTO forecast of 229 million international eco-tourist arrivals for 2010 is accurate, an extremely rough estimate of Asia and Pacific region's international eco-tourism arrivals for 2010 would be 22.9 million. There are various explanations as pointed out by Lindberg, Furze, staff and Black (1997) for eco-tourism growth:

- Increasing environmental awareness and interest, including the desire to be perceived by others as environmentally sensitive;
- Increased media exposure to natural areas around the world;
- Related to the above two, a desire to see natural areas before they disappear;
- Increasing dissatisfaction with traditional tourism destinations and products and a desire for more educative and challenging vacations;
- Desire to go to novel destinations, sometimes as a way to "outdo" others (e.g., to be the first person who has been to Antarctica); and
- Easier access to remote eco-tourism destinations through developments of air routes, roads, and other infrastructure.

But one of biggest ironies of the society, as pointed out by Boo (1993), is that many of the world's poorest people live among the richest areas biologically. The rain

forest of Brazil which contain some of the highest levels of natural resources diversity on the world as well as some of the poorest indigenous population.

Eco-tourism is regarded beneficial for visiting areas as it appears to offer several potential advantages (Wesche 1996):

- It sells traditional environmental knowledge and the image of a symbiotic relationship with nature, an increasingly rare commodity experiencing growing demand, in which indigenous people enjoy a virtual monopoly,
- It can assist in revalidating indigenous environmental resources - including parks and nature reserves – which otherwise have limited market value.
- It permits the commercial utilization of environmental resources - including parks and nature reserves - which otherwise have limited market value.
- It can be combined with local food production, nature based handicrafts and medical products for the visitor market.
- It reduces the problem of market dustiness since visitors are willing to pay a premium to access “primitive and remote” destinations.
- It is based on the support of the environmental movement in the developed countries thus reducing intra-national dependency of indigenous minorities and strengthening their position in land and resource conflicts.

### 6.5 Appearance of Ecotourism

Eco-tourism is not widely discussed term. In some parts of the world eco-tourism is described as a wide variety of activities involving travel and the environment whereas for some people, eco-tourism is broadly defined as ecological - sensitive tourism or tourism that is friendly to the environment. Eco-tourism is more narrowly defined and relates to a particular kind of nature tourism. For them, eco-tourism is a form of tourism that contributes to the conservation of natural resources. Here, Eco-tourism itself becomes a strategy for protecting parks and promoting economic development in rural areas (Boo 1990). At present a number of regions commonly use the term eco-tourism for Agro-tourism, Rural tourism, Green Tourism and even adventure tourism. But the basic concepts of the foregoing types of tourism as enunciated by the European Center for Professional Training in Environment and Tourism (ECPTET) is sustainable development implying the pursuit of the optimum, but not maximum use of resources. Sometime people co-relate ecotourism with the concepts of green tourism. But the difference is more historical than conceptual in the sense that that green tourism is a term which has

been used earlier than ecotourism. It is similar to the term which has been used earlier than ecotourism and much less used today to a similar concept. It is similar to the terms of Wildlife Tourism and national parks. Wildlife tourism is in fact a product of colonialism whereas National Parks are a creation of the colonial mind (Mittler 1997). Ecotourists, too, differ greatly in several aspects (Lindberg, Furze, Staff, Black 1997), including:

- Distance traveled
- Length of stay
- Desired level of physical effort and comfort
- Importance of nature in trip motivation
- Level of learning desired
- Amount of spending
- Desired activities
- Personal demographics

Though the term eco-tourism appears to be recent, the concept of balancing tourists' use with resource protection was put forward many years ago. The original National Park Act of the United States in 1916 mandated a dual policy of resource protection and public. Samardon (1991) pointed out that Dickert and Sorensen (1974) and Gunn (1978) called for application of ecological principles for tourism planning several years ago. Eco-tourism originated in the developing countries during the second half of the 1960's in conjunction with the rise with of modern conservation movement (Celballos- Lascurain 1996). In the late 1980's eco-tourism was an unknown entity that was just beginning to emerge in the popular lexicon. Its growth was spurred by the ongoing debate over tourism and the environment and as direct result of the enthusiasm for ecological sustainable development (Ecological Sustainable Development Working Groups 1991). But the first example of eco-tourism business operation was in the process of adopting Kenya's Tree Tops hotel design to open up rain forests to tourists. Once the visitors discovered the delights of the rain forests by becoming as observant and sensitive as their nature guides, the concept of eco-tourism was born. In recent years it has been the most rapidly growing sector of the tourism industry (Giannecchini 1993). In the 1990's numerous indigenous groups in the wilderness peripheries of the less developed countries have adopted eco-tourism as part of their development strategy. Examples include groups of Amazonian Indians. Myans of Belize of Post- Apartheid South Africa, Sherpas of Nepal, Aborigines of Papua New Guinea and Soloman Islanders (Frank 1995).

## 6.6 Impact of Ecotourism

The environmental and ecological changes that may be brought by increasing tourist phenomena need to be taken in the right perspective from the very beginning. The impact of eco-tourism can be broadly classified under three headings:

I. Economic Impact

II. Ecological Impact

III. Socio-cultural Impact

### *I. Economic Impacts*

Economic benefits of eco-tourism in terms of foreign exchange earnings have a potential to support the ecosystem. Eco-tourism plays an important role in the establishment of a region such as small-scale industries, horticulture, ropeways, means of communication and hydel plants. For example (Sharma, 2000) the protected area of Montihyde Cloud Forest Reserve in Costa Rica is successfully creating a source of income for local community. There a Women Cooperative is earning over \$ 50,000 per year by selling handicrafts to the tourists. The economic benefits of Eco-tourism include the direct revenues from generation of foreign exchange and economic incentives through the establishment and protection of natural areas, Protected Areas and National Parks from entrance fees or donations. Generally, economic impact of eco-tourism is regarded as positive as it broadens and diversifies the economic base.

### *II. Ecological Impacts*

Ecological impacts of eco-tourism are as important as economic concern but they are not always positive, instead they have more negative impacts. The unregulated and unmanaged growth of floating population, for instance, in protected areas the lions and cheetah decreased their hunting activities when expansion of tourism mostly leaves behind a trail of litter and destroys the fragile forest environment brought about by a variety of constructive activities for recreation which leads to soil compaction and erosion, change in plant cover and species diversity, subsequently affecting the wildlife and habitat loss (Sharma, 2000).

In a report (1992) entitled *The Tourism Industry and the Environment*, the Economic Intelligence Unit argues that a growing number of disaster such as pollution of

beaches, degraded coral reefs, wildlife parks without wildlife and disappearing indigenous cultures, are the result of tourism and are "a part of an acceleration pattern".

### **III. Socio-cultural Impacts**

Eco-tourism holds the principals of preservation, therefore, it brings cultural consciousness, cultural re-awakening, cultural-social renovation and preservation. It restores the architectural monuments, building and preservation of important landscape. There are a few negative impacts too, for example, tourists bring a strong visible life style. Their life style sometimes tempts the local people to adopt the same.

#### **6.7 Expansion of Ecotourism**

Ecotourism activities have been expanding rapidly worldwide over the past two decades and further growth is expected in the future. There is growth expected in the future. There are increasing efforts to use eco-tourism's potential to support nature conservation and benefit local people especially in developing countries. This rapid growth, however, has also given rise to concerns about negative (both environmental, socio-cultural) impacts.

Eco-tourism came into prominence in the late eighties as a strategy for reconciling conservation with development in ecologically rich areas. Ecotourism could generate economic benefits at local levels and thus create incentives for action to conserve the resources on which it depended. Furthermore, eco-tourism was a tool to build public support for conservation and encourage private sector conservation efforts. Clearly, at a time when traditional conservation through enforced protection of natural areas was being questioned for its effectiveness and social impacts, strategies such as eco-tourism offered considerable potential for integrating conservation, community and tourism industry. Major eco-tourism initiative took place in the developing world, notably in Latin America, Asia, Africa and in Australia.

Since the time term was introduced, eco-tourism has become a buzzword in the lexicon of practitioners, academics, industry and the consumer. However, the term eco-tourism has different nuances and interpretations depending on the purpose and the user. Thus under the banner of eco-tourism one can find enterprises that are small scale, locally owned and managed initiatives to large segments of the visitor to areas of natural and cultural heritage. Community based tourism, rural tourism, village tourism, cultural

tourism and responsible tourism are some of the other terms that can confound the uninitiated.

Ecotourism is part of the general growth in tourism and reflects increased environmental awareness and the desire for more authentic natural and cultural experiences. With the advent of better transport, facilities and communication people are traveling further and taking more risks in the choices for a holiday from staying with local people in developing countries to adventure sports in some of the world's most remote, wilderness areas. Not surprisingly, various sections of the tourism industry have responded with customized itineraries and eco-friendly accommodation supporting local development efforts. Although the eco-tourism market appears to be financially attractive, eco-tourism products are characterized by high risk owing to market seasonality, high staff to client relations and need for specialized marketing.

#### **6.8 Successful Management of Ecotourism**

The successful management of eco-tourism depends largely on monitoring of environment. The importance of monitoring is widely recognized in highly environmentally sensitive zones.

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Business Charter advocates that environmental management should be recognized as one of the highest priority and as a key determinant to sustainable eco-tourism. They published a document in 1993, named *Total Quality Environment Management*, which outlines the methods of applying total quality management to corporate environment strategies.

Good Environmental Management has been acknowledged as an essential component for the successful planning and management of eco-tourism. In order to achieve good environmental management two approaches should be considered i.e., Environmental qualities and total quality management.

To achieve these goals a proper ecological study is required. Land management should be given due importance. According to Sharma (2000), on the basis of GIS and Remote-sensing techniques monitoring, inventorying and management of natural resources including flora, fauna and land as well as quality of environment can be improved to a great extent.

For the purpose of management and planning of tourism industry the land should be given importance as it is the sole source of sustenance of mankind, supporting the plants and animals.

To develop any kind of infrastructure Remote-sensing techniques can help in selection of infrastructural sites, which is possible only with the help of maps. During the past, conventional ground method and surveys were conducted for preparing land-use maps, which were labour-intensive, time consuming and biased. In the present context, need of the hour is to get reliable, accurate, time-bound and economical data for the preparation of land use maps for tourism development plan. These data are easily acquired by means of Remote-sensing techniques.

Remote-sensing techniques as a tool can provide timely and accurate data on environmental degradation i.e., impacts on flora and fauna, resource inventorying as well as data on change in infrastructure visual interpretation and computer analysis of land use maps is possible by remote sensing techniques and monitoring of land use for the management of tourism for optimal use in long-term basis is possible.

The most important thing about Remote-Sensing techniques is that, the study on the structure and dynamics of land use is possible because of repetitive coverage of the same area. The information acquired through Remote –Sensing techniques for the preparation of land-use maps will form a basic input in planning and management of Eco-tourism.

To operate Remote-sensing techniques for the planning and management of tourism industry there is a need of solid and comprehensive data base assisted by *Geo-Information System* which will further help in the identification of potential areas for tourism (Sharma, 2000).

To operate and to handle the GIS and Remote-Sensing techniques skilled, trained and knowledgeable staff is needed. Remote Sensing techniques can be of immense help in regulating tourist stream, lessening the impact of environment degradation, eco-effective management, planning as well as monitoring population of species and human activities concurrently, determining the changes in the number of species and vegetation cover over time for establishing cause and effect.

Land use planning in tourist areas is an urgent and important issue that needs to be looked into more carefully. The challenge of properly planned and managed tourism is the essence of eco-tourism, which holds the promise of non-polluting and renewable economical and ecological development.



## 6.9 Ecotourism in India

Eco-tourism is emerging world over as the most focused area of interest for the tourists and consequently, the private investors. Considering India's wealth of natural and rich cultural heritage, tourism can emerge as an important instrument for economic development and employment generation. In fact, according to a report by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), India could generate 25 million additional jobs in the tourism sector by 2010. Globally one in every twelve jobs is linked with travel and tourism generation expenditure, capital investment in tourism, total demand for travel and tourism and its share in the G.D.P., etc.

Despite rich natural resources and biological and cultural diversity, India's tourism earnings are US\$ 1.8 billion, while tiny Singapore's are US\$ 3.4 billion and Thailand US\$ 6.8 billion. Thus there is an urgent need to boost the tourism Industry in our country, which is also considered as 'passport to development'. As incomes rise and transportation systems improve, international or national tourism is bound to increase in qualitative terms. An increasing number of tourists now prefer to visit attractive natural environments or protected areas set aside for conservation instead of visiting traditional cities or taking beaches based holidays. Eco-tourism is the largest-growing sector with an estimated annual growing sector with an estimate annual growth rate of 10-15%. Amongst all international visitors, nature tourists comprise 40-60%, and of that 20-40% is wildlife related tourists.

By some measures, tourism-related activities make up the world's largest economic sector. World Tourism Organization (WTO) figures indicate that these activities account for over 4% of global GDP and that their combinations to global GDP are over 11%. Tourism-related activities provide over 200 million jobs today. Employment takes into it's fold not just the jobs in hotels, airlines and so on, but the entire food production and distribution segment, supply of crafts and shopping, entertainment, sports dining and related activities linked to tourism growth, as well as the sector of economy devoted to building highways, investing in national planning priorities.

Tourism is a major society, which has emerged as an economic activity of immense global importance. Perhaps there is hardly any other field of activities where so many people are involved. Tourism has found a niche for itself as an effective instrument for generating employment, earning revenue and foreign exchange, enhancing environment, preserving culture and tradition, thereby facilitating overall development. In addition, tourism is one of the world's largest growing industries and the eco- tourism is

the fastest growing segments of the expanding international tourism industry. Despite uncertainties following the destabilizing events in the last few months of 2001, the WTO estimates that there would be substantial growth not only in the number of international tourist arrivals (expected to exceed one billion by 2010) but also in the percentage of tourists, who choose to take part in eco-tourism activities. Cooperation and partnership among the tourism industry, government departments, local people and above all, tourists themselves is required to make eco-tourism economically more important and sustainable.

There has been strong growth in foreign travel to developing countries during recent years and this trend is expected to continue. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has estimated that "Nature Travel" – of which eco-tourism is one form generated about 7% of all international level expenditure in 1997. According to the World Resource Institute (WRI), at the beginning of the 1990s tourism overall was growing at a rate of 4% per year and nature travel at rate of 10-25%. Moreover, WTO estimates show global spending on ecotourism is increasing by 20% per year, about five times the average rate of growth in the tourism industry as a whole.

Economic diversification and technological improvements have created a conducive environment for tourism development in the present age of globalization. India has vast geographical spread and great historical and cultural heritage, which are excellent conditions for growth in this sector.

### *Development of Ecotourism in India*

India is a country of continental dimensions consisting of four distinct regions, namely, the greater mountain zone, plains of Ganga and the Indus, the desert region and the southern Peninsula. Almost two thirds of the great Himalayas are in the mountain Zone of India and it includes large plateaus and valleys. The plains of Ganga and the Indus are formed by the basins of three distinct river systems – the Indus, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. The desert region consists of the great desert and the little desert. The great desert extends from Rann of Kutch and runs through the whole of Rajasthan-Sind frontier. The little deserts extend from the Luni River between Jaisalmer and Jodhpur up to Northern wastes. The peninsular plateau is flanked on one side by the Eastern Ghats and the other by the Western Ghats. Between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, there is a narrow coastal strip while between the Eastern Ghats and the Bay of Bengal lies

a broader coastal area. India is thus endowed with all the landforms of mountains, plains, deserts and sea coasts.

In the initial years of development of ecotourism, greater emphasis was given for the development of ecotourism in the Himalayas and the deserts. One of the earliest projects in this regard was the Gulmarg Winter Sports Resorts.

In the last two decades India has opened its doors to international visitors and is now fostering tourism largely to gain an increase in foreign earnings to help its economy. In 1996, 2.2 million international tourists visited the country, an increase of 12.6% on the previous year. However, India's tourism infrastructure is barely keeping pace with the industry increase and problems are evident in the accommodation, transport and personnel sectors. In addition India has real problems with environmental pollution and tourist pressures causing substantial damages to its natural treasures (Gadgil and Guha 1994), wild life (Bolton 1994), historic sites (Singh 1991) and cultural relics (Verma 1996).

The case of sustainable development has already been put before India (Roy, Tisdell and Sen 1995). The authors advocate the adoption of Gandhian planning with its few cases of Indian Himalayas. In Himalayas, people live along with the mountains as a part of the heritage of the great Himalayan mountain eco-systems. The hill people and forest have got a symbiotic relationship and thereby they co-exist, supplementing to each other. Due to increase in population and their needs in the hills, the nature has also started witnessing little stress, especially in providing the shelter, food, fuel and fodder to these communities at large. Today sustainable use of our mountain resources and promotion of eco-tourism is probably the only answer to these problems in our hills.

In the coming decades, the future of tourism generally will be shaped by alternative forms of tourism, especially nature-based tourism and ecotourism. Ecotourism provides the opportunity for many countries and regions within them to promote an identity that is unique to that place. It can create new and exciting tourism experiences, promote excellence in tourism, present and protected natural areas, benefit local communities and encourage commercially successful and environmentally sound tourism operations. In India the prospects look bright for the development of sustainable tourism with a high-yield, international ecotourism niche market focused on the country's unique natural, cultural and historic features.

## 6.10 Conclusion

Ecotourism is an industry with many pros and cons. It can help sustain ecosystems and help degrade them, depending on implementation and management. Ecotourism can protect ecosystems by preventing erosion, preserving biological integrity, promoting conservation education and providing economic incentives for sustainable use. Working with communities affected by a protected area is paramount in achieving their support and cooperation.

Gradually, successful field models of community-based ecotourism are now the focus of ecotourism professionals. The Ecotourism Society (TES) is making effort to establish guidelines for local community involvement in ecotourism. A key ecotourism meeting in Ecuador in June 1997 provided an important opportunity to study a variety of community involvement scenarios, with the goal of providing more protective guidance to governments, NGOs, and the private sector. Both local and international experts were involved in the field, looking at these various community partnerships.

The idea behind ecotourism is to preserve the natural and cultural environment and benefit local communities. Conserving through developing is a globally accepted approach. Obstacles stand in the way but with good, established guidelines, many of these problems can be eliminated. Ecotourism professionals can limit their discouragement on economic options and the "right" ways to develop, and concentrate more on taking the time to talk with and learn about the communities involved- their lifestyles, their rituals, belief, traditions and most importantly their wants and needs. Developers, scientists and governments must forge a common language with local communities. Communities are part of ecotourism ecosystems, and these community residents should have the greatest voice in the conservation of their natural resources.

The concept of sustainable tourism development spans a very broad spectrum of issues, all of which have a bearing on the decisions developing countries' tourism policy-makers must address in the very near future both at the central and state level. At stake are not either- or growth-versus development issues, but something far more basic: how to provide opportunities for employment, income and improved local well being, while ensuring that all development decisions reflect the full value of our natural and cultural environment.

A policy that promotes sustainable tourism development will be created when the efforts and active participation of three groups are coordinated in one joint enterprise. A new political paradigm of developing countries requires that each sector play a well-

defined role in the planning and policy development process and that the combined efforts of all sectors be integrated into policy.

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