

Chapter Nine

Ecotourism in Kerala, India

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Introduction

India is one of the oldest civilisations with a kaleidoscopic variety of cultures which makes for a rich cultural heritage. It has achieved multifaceted socio-economic progress during the last fifty years since its independence. The nation covers an area of 3 287 263 km², extending from the snow-covered Himalayan heights to tropical rainforests in the south. As the seventh largest country in the world, India is well marked off from the rest of Asia by mountains and the sea, which gives the country a distinct geographical entity. Bounded by the Great Himalayas in the north, it stretches southwards, and at the Tropic of Cancer tapers off into the Indian Ocean between the Bay of Bengal on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west.

The mainland comprises four regions, viz., the great mountain zone, the plains of the Ganga and the Indus, the desert region and the southern peninsula. Possessing a tremendous diversity of climate and physical conditions, India has a great variety of fauna numbering 8 1251 species, which represent 6.65% of the world's total. Of these, insects constitute about 60 000, molluscs a little over 5000, mammals 372, birds 1228, reptiles 446, amphibians 204 and fish 2546.

India is an emerging economic power in the world. For the last ten years the average GDP growth rate has been about 6.5% per annum and it was among the ten fastest growing economies in the world. India has plans to double the per capita income in the next ten years implying a growth rate of about 9%. The country is moving ahead with a clear agenda for reforms in key sectors of the economy to achieve this objective.

Tourism

As per WTO statistics world wide, international tourist arrivals reached 657 million during 1999 with an increase of 3.2% over the previous year. Earnings from international tourism also rose by 3.2% during 1999 to reach US\$455 billion. The industry provides jobs to over 200 million directly and indirectly. The East Asia and Pacific region made a comeback during 1999

attracting five million more tourists than the previous records set in 1996. The growth was widespread with good results in Singapore (11%), Japan (9.6%), South Korea (9.6%), Malaysia (8%), China (7.9%), Hong Kong (9%) and Thailand (5.6 %). However, most of the South Asian region grew by only 3.7% in 1999. India (1.1%) and Pakistan (1.6%) showed slow growth and arrivals to Bangladesh fell by 2.3%; Sri Lanka (16%) and Maldives (10%) showed better performance.

As per the WTO long-term growth forecast, the global tourism sector will expand by an average 4.15% a year over the next two decades, surpassing a total of 1 billion international travellers by the year 2010 and 1.6 billion by the year 2020. It is useful to look at the Indian performance in this context. The total arrivals in India were 2.5 million during 1999, registering only a marginal growth. The employment generated by tourism in India is roughly about 17.7 million. Among the world's 60 most important tourism countries India's position was 46th. Out of the total of 657 million tourists, India was able to attract a small number and earned only US\$2600 million from tourism.

Institutional Framework For Tourism

In India, the Ministry of Tourism is headed by a Cabinet Minister. He is assisted by a Secretary of Tourism and in turn by a Director-General of Tourism and a set of professionals. The Department of Tourism is both a policy making and executive organisation and corresponds directly with the other ministries and departments of the central government and the state governments. There are four regional offices. In addition, there are seven sub-offices at the focal points of international tourist importance. To market the image of India abroad, the department has opened 18 offices outside the country. The India Tourism Development Corporation is the commercial arm of the department. The government has also established the Tourism Finance Corporation of India in order to provide institutional finance to the sector.

While culture and the variety of environments are the major attractions, wildlife tourism in India has gained importance during the last two decades. The protected areas are managed under the overall policy guidance of the Ministry of Environment and Forests. National Parks and sanctuaries are under management plans, which lay down guidelines for tourism in these areas.

At local level, various state governments have their own departments for tourism and there are state tourism development corporations to look after the commercial aspects. The departments provide policy support and concentrate on infrastructural development, human resource development, product development, marketing etc. The state forest departments have their own systems of management of tourism zones in National Parks and sanctuaries, in order to cater for the needs of wildlife tourism.

There are voluntary organisations working in the tourism sector, and they influence the policies of government. Key private bodies are the Indian Association of Tour Operators, the Travel Agents Association of India, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (Indian chapter), the Federation of Hotel and Resorts Association of India, the Tourist Transport Operators Association, and the India Convention Promotion Bureau.

The government has institutions for tourism training such as the Indian Institute for Tourism and Travel Management at national level, and five other regional institutes. Apart from that, a chain of hotel management and catering institutes exist. There are other smaller institutes. Recently the universities have started offering courses in tourism. Other national institutes of some relevance are the National Institute for Water Sports, at Goa, and the Indian Institute of Skiing and Mountaineering, at Gulmarg.

The Emergence of Ecotourism

In the last decade, ecotourism has emerged as one of the most important sectors in tourism. During 1998, the Government of India prepared a policy document on ecotourism. This identifies the ecotourism resources of the country and lays down the need for a specialised, participatory, policy-planning approach for the development of the ecotourism destinations. It also stipulates the roles to be played by the stakeholders such as the government, the tour operators, the destination managers, the tourists, the host community and the voluntary organisations.

The State of Kerala (“gods own country”) has taken a pioneering step in this regard by creating a separate directorate for ecotourism. Some other states have public sector corporations to promote ecotourism, for example, Jungle Lodges and Resorts Limited of Karnataka State. The Wildlife Institute of India, which is a national institute, has got a separate wing to consider various issues related to ecotourism. This institute and others like the Kerala Forest Research Institute, and the Indian Institute of Forest Management, provide technical support by way of consultancies in preparing environmental impact assessments for ecotourism projects.

Recently the national government has taken over eight sanctuaries for eco-development projects, with the support of the United Nations Global Environment Facility. In all, these eight “project tiger reserves”, ecotourism has been visualised as an important component to provide employment opportunities for the local people, without having adverse impacts on the delicate ecosystems.

The tourism destinations of India present a wide range of natural and cultural products. These include beaches, hill stations, wildlife sanctuaries, mountain regions, archaeological monuments, religious monuments, fairs and festivals, amusement parks etc. The government has taken several policy

initiatives including providing incentives for promoting tourism in these areas, and also for developing new destinations and products. The incentives are given by way of interest subsidies, allocation of funds to state governments for unique schemes, classification of hotels, and awards for the best hotels, tour companies, destination managers etc.

In the ecotourism program, the Government of India supports state governments in the purchase of trekking and camping equipment, and also helps projects which use renewable energy resources. Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) work as watchdogs to see that the tourism activities are managed on sustainable principles. NGOs also help the government and private sector in feasibility studies, development of strategies etc. Ecotourism lies mostly in the public sector and projects are being developed by government, but private sector support is expected by way of provision of accommodation, conduct of tours etc. There are not many ecotourism projects financed by international funding agencies.

The Kerala Initiatives

The varied nature of destinations provides comparative advantages for tourism in India. Most of these destinations, such as hill stations, archaeological monuments, and pilgrim centres had been developed historically. Several tourism-related studies are being undertaken in these areas in order to collect baseline data to support management plans. Environmental impacts are taken note of in the studies. In recent times, especially in the last two decades, keen interest is being taken to conduct environmental impact assessments for all new tourism development projects.

In general, ecotourism is mostly confined to wildlife sanctuaries and National Parks, the mountainous regions of Himalayas and the islands. New ecotourism destinations, under internationally accepted principles, are being developed as awareness about ecotourism is being created through the media, seminars and workshops. Recently the Ministry of Environment and Forests, in connection with the World Environment Day Committee, declared that ecotourism in National Parks, sanctuaries and other forests would be a major area for development.

The Tourism Department of the Government of Kerala, the organisation which I represent, has taken steps to give focused attention to ecotourism in the state. A separate ecotourism directorate has been created to give policy support for the development of ecotourism. Accordingly, a project for the first planned ecotourism destination (Thenmala Ecotourism Project) has been formulated in and around a wildlife sanctuary, with the cooperation of departments such as Forest, Irrigation and Tourism. In order to allow flexibility in the development of this destination, a separate organisation has been formed.

The major objectives of this project are: (i) to develop Thenmala dam and its surroundings as a major tourist destination; (ii) to promote ecotourism on the basis of the principles of ecological sustainability in the areas surrounding Thenmala; and (iii) to have a well-planned tourism destination with the emphasis on sustainable tourism development as a model for other destination development programs. The project envisages three major components: eco-friendly general tourism, ecotourism and pilgrimage tourism. Facilities and activities such as a garden, boating in the reservoir, a boardwalk, an elevated walkway, a walk-in aviary, amphitheatre, musical fountain and mountain biking will be provided.

As noted above, ecotourism is planned for the surrounding forest area. An environmental education centre and an interpretation centre will be set up. Activities will include bird watching, trekking, mountaineering, wilderness treks, staying in natural caves, studying flora and fauna, simple bushwalking, animal behaviour studies, ecological studies etc. A unique trekking package is being developed in the nearby Shenduruney Wildlife Sanctuary.

Before the start of the project, an environmental impact assessment was prepared by a research institution. A total of 15 local youths have been trained as guides. This is an obvious benefit from ecotourism. Strategies are also formulated to involve voluntary organisations to work among the local people to help them get involved.

The idea at Thenmala is to provide some sort of basic ecotourism exposure to those who are not very keen eco-tourists, and provide a better ecotourism experience in surrounding forest areas for those who really have a concern for nature and are real eco-tourists. This management strategy can ensure ecological sustainability of the destination.

An innovative trekking program with stays inside the forest in the Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala has been formulated as a part of the program being implemented in this wildlife sanctuary with assistance from the Global Environment Facility. The tour group size will normally be about six or seven, which is in line with expert opinion on group size for this type of environment and the experience being offered.

The team guiding the project consists of local people who were once involved in forest destruction. A destructive dependence on forest was their previous mode of existence, leading to severe conflict with Forest Department. This project provides them with an alternative means of livelihood, and turns their dependence on the forest into a positive one. Their excellent knowledge of the forest and the camping sites (which were essential in their former occupation) makes them the appropriate people to assist with this program. Further, their presence in the area, along with the forest officials and tourists, ensure its protection from poachers and other illegal encroachers.

An eco-development committee has been constituted for the project and a certain portion of the revenue earned will go to a fund held by this committee for common use. The forest department and private tour operators are cooperating on the development. All in all, it will ensure: (i) the conservation of the natural resources; (ii) that local people will benefit; and (iii) that authentic ecotourism experiences are provided.

Elsewhere

The Jungle Lodges Resorts Limited is a public sector corporation promoted by the government of Karnataka. This corporation has four destinations in the state which promote ecotourism. Each of these resorts has a unique specialisation. At K. Gudi there is a wildlife adventure resort with travel in the wilderness on elephant back and camping in the forest. Another resort is at Bimeshawri which is a Mahseer anglers' paradise, a fishing camp. There is also a resort called Kabini River Lodge in the Rajeev Gandhi National Park which offers a variety of ecotourism products. And there are similar resorts at Dandali and Karwar.

Major Issues In Ecotourism

As explained earlier, the majority of the ecotourism resources are to be managed on internationally accepted principles, which ensures ecological sustainability of natural areas, with adequate provision for learning by the visitor, and with a strong component of local participation. Economic benefits should accrue to the local population as local people develop a stake in the conservation of the natural resource.

To make ecotourism successful, there is a need for policy and institutional changes in the decision-making systems. Since the majority of the potential ecotourism sites are not with the Tourism Department, interdepartmental coordination and cooperation is crucial for their success. Community awareness issues related to the empowerment of the local people and the creation of adequate ecotourism interpretation are some of the major challenges.

Establishment of scientific parameters of sustainability, continuous monitoring and making the data available to stakeholders needs to be done, and in a transparent way. There needs to be significant attitudinal changes among the policy makers, the private entrepreneurs, tour operators, destination managers, the visitors, and the local community in order to make ecotourism happen the way it should. The Government of India, the state governments, the trade bodies and the NGOs are all fully aware of the problems and issues of resistance to change. Earnest efforts are being taken to formulate strategies to overcome negative influences and to prepare India to attract a large portion of this fastest growing segment of the international tourism sector.

Conclusion

India with its wide range of unique tourism products offers excellent opportunities for tourists. Even in the narrowly defined ecotourism niche market India offers a lot. In emerging 21st century ecotourism, India is expected to gain momentum in view of the policy and institutional support provided by government. The roles of the private entrepreneurs, trade bodies, the local communities, NGOs and all other stakeholders are well recognised in this regard.

Mutual sharing of information among experts in the region will definitely benefit each country and assist to further develop ecotourism. Such a mutually beneficial approach will help to utilise the potential of the region in ecotourism, and ultimately will lead to the creation of visitors (ecotourists) who may become ambassadors for conservation of our valuable natural resources. If we achieve this, that will be the biggest tribute we can offer to Mother Earth.

Chapter Ten

Ecotourism in Indonesia

Anak Agung Gde Raka Dalem

Introduction

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago, consisting of more than 17 000 islands. The country is 5000 km long, located around the Equator between Asia and the Australian continent, and between the Pacific and Indian oceans.

Biogeographically, the western part of Indonesia (Sumatra, Kalimantan, Java and Bali) has the characteristics of Asia, while the eastern part, Maluku and Irian Jaya (Papua), has the characteristics of Australia. Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara have separate characteristics. The diversity of ecosystems reflects the diversity of flora and fauna in the country. Indonesia is the second-most biodiverse country after Brazil (Primack et al., 1998). The diversity of flora, fauna and their ecosystems, as well as the diversity of culture, are potential attractions for the development of ecotourism in the country.

Ecotourism and nature tourism are recognised as being particularly conducive to enriching and enhancing the standing of tourism, on the basis that these forms of tourism respect the natural heritage and local populations and are in keeping with the carrying capacity of the sites.

It is quite interesting to explore the ecotourism concept from an Indonesian point of view, as well as its implementation in Indonesia. There is a vision in the country that tourism will be the main source of foreign exchange within the next 10 years (Sudarto, 1999). The role of ecotourism in this vision is fundamental.

What is Ecotourism?

The Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as "a responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people" (Western, 1993). Ecotourism in its Indonesian version (Sudarto, 1999; Dirjen Bangda Depdagri, 2000) is defined as activities of responsible travelling in intact areas (*daerah alami*) or in areas which are named according to *kaidah alam* (the role of nature), the purpose of such activities being