

## A STUDY ON ECO-TOURISM IN KODAIKANAL – A TOURIST HILL RESORT IN TAMIL NADU

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### Abstract

The terms eco-tourism and tourism were synonymously applied by Boo in her study of Latin America. She defined ecotourism as travelling to a relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of study, admiring and enjoying the scenery and wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural names stations. Lucas defined nature tourism as one, which is based on the enjoyment of natural areas and the observation of nature. He further stated that nature tourism has a low environmental impact, high labour intensity and contributes socially and economically to the nation. The satisfaction of human needs and aspirations is the major objective of development, sustainable development has gained much popularity among the economists in recent times. Now it is expected that tourism as a major economic activity can also be developed in line with this philosophy. Ecotourism has become the travel industry buzzword of the nineties, offering an idealistic avenue to many struggling Third World nations, including Pacific Islands to generate revenue while at the same time protecting vulnerable natural resources. In developing nations, which are prime destinations for ecotourists, nature travel accounts for more than 20 per cent of total tourism receipts. The importance of combining economic, ecological and environmental studies is now increasingly recognized in policy circles worldwide. The use of natural resources for ensuring the material well-being on the one hand, and for seeking a pleasurable experience on the other, has generated several environmental problems. In order to analyse the opinion of the tourists regarding environment, irritants and promoters and hotel facilities.

Hence, this paper has attempt to analyse eco-tourism in Kodaikanal a tourist hill resort in Tamil Nadu.

**Keywords:** Eco-tourism, Sustainable development, Environment, Pleasurable

### Introduction

The terms eco-tourism and tourism were synonymously applied by Boo in her study of Latin America.<sup>8</sup> She defined ecotourism as travelling to a relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of study, admiring and enjoying the scenery and wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural names stations. Lucas defined nature tourism as one, which is based on the enjoyment of natural areas and the observation of nature. He further stated that nature tourism has a low environmental impact, high labour intensity and contributes socially and economically to the nation.

Thus ecotourism implies an enjoyment of nature's bounty as well as understanding of the cultural and natural history pertaining to the environment. It so implies the need for taking utmost care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem while tapping the economic benefits from the resources of nature and environment.

### Sustainable Development of Tourism

The satisfaction of human needs and aspirations is the major objective of development, sustainable development<sup>9</sup> has gained much popularity among the

<sup>8</sup> E.Boo, Ecotourism, The Potential and Pitfalls, World Wild Life Fund, Washington D.C., 1990, pp. 163-174.

<sup>9</sup> Whelan, Tensie, Ecotourism and Its Role in Sustainable Development, Nature Tourism

economists in recent times. Now it is expected that tourism as a major economic activity can also be developed in line with this philosophy. The term sustainability has been used with varied connotations and meanings such as survival, enduring and lasting, to keep in being, ecologically acceptable production etc.

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)<sup>10</sup> defined, sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. The exploitation of resources, direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes must work in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.

Thus ecotourism, done well, can be sustainable. It promises employment and income to local communities and much needed foreign exchange to national governments, while allowing the continued existence of natural resources. It properly developed and managed, ecotourism and conservation can be compatible, complementary and sustainable. The experience of different countries on ecotourism shows that it is growing as a big business. How to conserve the ecosystem while promoting tourism is the major question facing the developing economics. A happy co-existence of tourism and environment is the crux of ecotourism. This calls for careful planning and management of the natural endowments.

#### **Ecotourism in Practice**

Ecotourism has become the travel industry buzzword of the nineties, offering an idealistic avenue to many struggling Third World nations, including Pacific Islands to generate revenue while at the same time

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Managing, For the Environment, Island Press, Washington, DC., 1991, pp.251 -262.

<sup>10</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* Oxford University Press, England, 1987, pp. 56-61.

protecting vulnerable natural resources. In developing nations, which are prime destinations for ecotourists, nature travel accounts for more than 20 per cent of total tourism receipts. It is well established in industrially advanced nations too. Generally, wild lands provide prime locations for ecotourism. The role of mountains, forest and wildlife in promoting ecotourism has been widely accepted.

#### **Economics of Ecotourism**

Ecotourism in developing countries with tropical forests has become a big business. Tourism in natural areas, especially in mountains, forests, hills, wildlife, national parks, lakes etc., face a dual problem of ensuring the survival of plants and animals while providing opportunities for tourism activities. The development of tourism in these areas, therefore, relates to the economics of ecosystems. The economic importance of ecotourism is justified on the ground that it brings income and employment to remote areas having little economic opportunity. In contrast, the integration of these areas with other geographical plains of the nation in pursuit of employment will destabilize both the economy and the ecology. As ecotourism is of a small scale, a more diversified innovative and stable economy can emerge from the needs, requirements and interests connected with it in local areas. By and large ecotourism projects are less capital intensive.

#### **Problems of Ecotourism**

Ecotourism is environment friendly compared with many other forms of tourism. It may be ideal, but there are significant problems in ecotourism.

The unintended negative effects of wildlife tourism have been pointed out by several writers (Duffie,<sup>11</sup> 1981 and Henry<sup>12</sup> 1982). The influx of tourist is followed by the

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<sup>11</sup> J.Duffie, "Who Will Watch the Bird Watchers?", *Wildlife Review*, Vol. 10, No.7, 1981, pp.23-24.

<sup>12</sup> W.R.Henry, "Amboseli Park: Kenya: Problems of Planning and Resource Management" in T.V. Singh and Kaur(ed.), *Studies in Tourism and*

need for more accommodation, roads, parking lots and services such as water, water disposal and power. These can have significant impact on actual areas and their ecosystem. Other impacts such as development of rural slums, noise and air pollution, litter destruction, loss of habitat, disturbance to wildlife etc., may also follow. The physical and social carrying capacities of many areas place constraints on ecotourism. Serious conflicts between nature based tourists and the particular aspect of nature they seek are also reported.<sup>13</sup>

### Statement of the Problem

The importance of combining economic, ecological and environmental studies is now increasingly recognized in policy circles worldwide. The use of natural resources for ensuring the material well-being on the one hand, and for seeking a pleasurable experience on the other, has generated several environmental problems. The environmental menace of industries including tourism has assumed alarming proportions and hence was justifiably the major agenda item of Earth Summit 1992. This summit emphasized the great need for conserving nature. The environmental havoc that tourism generates has made it necessary to put it on a sustainable track so that tourism and nature can be complementary.

Today, the international market for any product including tourism is dominated by corporate interest. As ecotourism gained global acceptance, they have entered Central America, Thailand, South Africa and Europe to market natural attractions by providing 'facilities of international standard'. This is detrimental to the genuine efforts of local people and environmentalists to stop destructive tourism and to create a small scale, locally controlled and ecologically sensitive industry. Though ecotourism is sustainable, given this back drop, one has to place emphasis on sustainability while developing

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Wildlife Parks Conservation, Metropolitan Book Company, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 82-96.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.102

ecotourism. This is particularly important to Kodai where ecotourism development is in a budding stage. By adhering to a policy of sustainable tourism and marketing the natural attractions both notionally and internationally, the State can promote economic development while conserving nature. Recognising this, the present study primarily aims at exploring the ecotourism potential of Kodaikanal.

### Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To make an assessment of the ecotourism potential of Kodaikanal and
2. To offer suitable suggestions based on the findings of the study.

### Methodology

In order to analyse the opinion of the tourists regarding environment, irritants and promoters and hotel facilities. The link between tourism and environment has widely been accepted. The development of tourism is inevitable followed by externalities, both positive and negative. Environment pollution is one of the major negative externalities. The quality of water, air and the amount and diversity of vegetation and wild life have yet another type of influence. Ecotourism largely depends on the existence of clean environment. The present study has made an attempt to show how far the natural environment is clean from the perspective of tourists. For this, tourists were asked to mark the degree of pollution that they felt by using a five-point rating scale.

1. Much polluted
2. Polluted
3. No opinion
4. Not much polluted
5. Not at all polluted
6. Those answering (4) and (5) are taken as satisfied with clean environment.

### Irritants and Promoters

The attitude of the local residents and the experience of the tourists also from part of the

environment. A list of items were given in the schedule to study how far the existence of these irritate tourists or can work as promoting factors. The items were classified under tow-heads – irritants and promoters. Table 1 shows the percentage-wise distribution of tourists who feel irritated on various items.

**Table 1 Percentage-Wise Distribution of Both the Tourists who Feel Irritated about Various Items**

Sl. No.	Irritants	Expenditure	
		Domestic Tourists	Foreign Tourists
1	Unclean public places	49	55
2	Poor roads	58	42
3	Lack of signboards	34	37
4	Lack of manners of drivers	39	36
5	Beggars	28	35
6	Cheating in shops	45	31
7	Impure drinking water	31	24
8	Misguidance	18	21
9	Lack of entertainments	21	19

**Source:** Estimate Based on Primary data

It is clearly revealed from the above Table 1 that out of the nine items given under the caption irritants in the case of domestic tourists, poor roads annoy 58 per cent followed by unclean public places (49 per cent). It is evident that foreign tourists are not irritated by the cheating in shops and impure drinking water.

In the case of foreign tourists, out of nine items given under the caption 'irritants', unclean public places annoy 55 per cent, followed by poor roads (42 per cent). It is evident that tourists are most irritated by lack of signboards and lack of civilized behavior among drivers.

It is also a fact that tourists are exasperated by the existing insufferable hygiene conditions and traffic bottlenecks. To provide a clean environment, steps may be taken to keep public places clean and also provide good roads and traffic facilities. By creating public awareness on hygiene, public places can be kept much cleaner. India, well known as the land of charity, should adopt measures to rehabilitate the beggars. The

residents especially the shop owners should be made aware that the tourists are our guests and they must be given a fair treatment at the destination.

Among those items for which positive response has been given, accommodation ranks first followed by customs and tradition.

**Table 2 Percentage-Wise Distribution of Tourist Based on Positive Responses**

Sl. No.	Irritants	Tourists (%)	
		Domestic	Foreign
1	Accommodation	71	80
2	Customs and Tradition	69	75
3	Food	65	72
4	Literacy	62	66
5	Transport	58	54
6	Communication	54	44
7	Hygiene	36	23

**Source:** Estimate Based on Primary data.

Generally, it is believed that one of the major constraints in the field of tourism development in the State is lack of adequate accommodation facilities. The study shows that 80 per cent and 71 per cent domestic and foreign tourists respectively are satisfied with the available accommodation facility. This can be cross checked with the accommodation availed of by tourists. In fact, the demand for luxury model resort houses and cheap paying guest system is a testimony to the liking of eco-friendly habitat. Generally tourists have been found to be satisfied with the available accommodation in Kodaikanal. Considering the response on neatness at public places and hygiene situation in Table 1 and 2 respectively, Kodaikanal has to make earnest efforts to improve public health facilities.

Considering the profile/likings of domestic tourists as well as foreign tourists and the ecological and environmental scenario, Kodaikanal has no other option but to concentrate on ecotourism.

### Summary of Findings

The fourth objective of the study was to examine the impacts of ecotourism on Kodaikanal and to develop policy suggestions for sustainable tourism. It is inferred from the analysis that majority of the foreign tourists was found to be aware of ecotourism. The foreign tourists are also very much interested in knowing and taking part in ecotourism. Further it is observed that lack of information about the destination was the main barrier for foreign tourists and cost was the main barrier for domestic tourists.

The analysis of environmental impacts of ecotourism revealed that ecotourism has generated income and created direct and indirect employment to local people. In Kodaikanal, ecotourism has had a positive impact on the environment. In spite of that, a negative environmental impact has also been found in Kodaikanal due to increase in tourist population year by year. According to the opinion of the tourists, unclear public places and poor roads were sources of irritation to both domestic and foreign tourists. Tourists have opined positively about the accommodation available in Kodaikanal.

### Conclusion

Thus it may be concluded that both domestic and foreign tourists are attracted to Kodaikanal mainly by natural beauty, climate and environment. The rich variety of natural attractions and ecobased activities that are spread in Kodaikanal can be used for promoting Kodaikanal as an ecotourism destination round the year. As ecotourism is labour intensive and is practiced with local participation the potential to develop in this front is also very high. The scope for using local skill and material is immense in areas like accommodation, food, shopping and entertainment. Practicing ecotourism in its true sense demands more responsibility on the part of tour operator's guests and the hosts. As the local administrators have not made an earnest attempt at developing ecotourism, the researcher has conducted an expert study to evolve policy suggestions for ecotourism in Kodaikanal.

### Policy Suggestions

As natural attraction is the primary constituent of ecotourism, tourism development should always maintain a symbiotic relation with nature. This is possible through the effective management of resources with local participation. Facilities to tourists should be developed only in harmony with nature. Construction activities in Kodaikanal should never destroy the landscape. Festivals, their legends and beliefs may be advertised in advance to attract tourists when they actually take place. A proper focus on the fairs; festivals, various forms of arts, natural attractions and eco-based activities from a marketing point of view can convert tourism into a round-the-year phenomenon.

An Ecotourism Development Board may be constituted to oversee and monitor the tourism activities in Kodaikanal. It is suggested that local authority should form a Kodaikanal Lake Management Board and involve all the stake holders in the Watershed-House owners, commercial establishments, NGOs and others to plan and oversee the implementation of a well-conceived lake master plan.

### References

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6. Ibid, p.102.