

## ECOTOURISM: THE NATURAL VIEW

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**T**ourism involves travelling to areas of natural or ecological interest for the purpose of observing wildlife and learning about the environment. This is a form of tourism as well as tourism development. It encourages going back to natural products in every aspect of life and helps in preserving nature. It is also the key to sustainable ecological development. The word ecotourism has been derived from two words, 'Ecosystem' and 'Tourism'. It entails not only travelling to such ecosystems but also helping to conserve them.

“Ecotourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with specified object of studying, admiring and/or enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural aspects found in these areas. Tourism which contains a visit to an ecosystem is ecotourism.”

Ecotourism is now defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education."

Orams (1995) argues that the majority of ecotourism definitions lie between the passive position and the active position towards the high responsibility pole on the continuum.

Ecotourism has also been defined based on three criteria (Wall, 1994) the characteristics of the destinations, the motivations of its participants, and the organisational characteristics of the ecotourism trip.

### Principles of Ecotourism

1. Nature-based forms of tourism with the motivation to appreciate nature as well as culture in natural areas.

2. Educational interest to understand the ecosystem.
3. Often specialized and small group tours.
4. Minimizes negative impacts.
5. Supports natural areas by creating economic benefits for host communities (including employment opportunities) and increasing awareness.

### **Characteristics of Ecotourism**

- Involves travel to natural destinations
- 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 movement

### **Components of Ecotourism**

- Contributes to conservation of biodiversity.
- Sustains the well-being of local people.
- Includes an interpretation/ learning experience.
- Involves responsible action on part of tourists and the tourism industry.
- Requires lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources.

### **Ecotourism resources**

The geographical diversity of India is a wealth of ecosystem, which are well protected and preserved. The ecosystem has become the major resource for tourism in India.

They are as follow:-

1. Biosphere reserves
2. Mangroves
3. Coral Reefs
4. Deserts
5. Mountains and Forests
6. Flora and Fauna
7. Caves

## 8. Seas, Lakes and Rivers

### The key players in the ecotourism

- The key players in the ecotourism business are governments at levels, the local authorities, developers and the operators, the visitors, and the local community.
- Non-governmental organizations and scientific and research institutions also play a key role in the development of ecotourism.
- Some organizations are the Asia Pacific Ecotourism Society, Discovery Mice, World Tourism Organization, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), and Eco India etc.

### Common ecotourism activities

- Wildlife photography
- Bird watching
- Mountain climbing
- Hiking
- Nature photography
- Swimming in natural water

### Ecotourism in India

India is bestowed with varied geography and natural destination spots that offer the eco-tourism hub. The concept of ecotourism has been already introduced in India, and some planned approaches have been taken up for the establishment. The government has also taken initiatives for the promotion of ecotourism in India.

Thenmala in Kerala is the first planned ecotourism destination in India. There are several ways to enjoy the beauty of the country and its nature in the most pristine way. Some places suitable for ecotourism in India are the Himalayan regions, North-Eastern India, Kerala, Andaman & Nicobar Island, Lakshadweep Islands, etc.

### Conclusion

Ecotourism is an important economic activity in natural areas. It promotes sustainable use of natural resources and reduces the threat to biodiversity, and is economically profitable.

So let us dedicate ourselves to this wonderful practice and hope it can change our world. It is really useful in conserving our biodiversity as well. According to Goodwin (1996), managers of protected areas could turn nature tourism into ecotourism, based on the motivation of their consumers, in other words, at the point of consumption or based on a sound management strategy both in terms of numbers and activities.

### References

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