

ECO-TOURISM POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN INDIA - A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT: Over time the focus of travel and tourism has gone for Eco-tourism. It is not true for India only but for the world too. The travel and tourism are major sources of foreign exchange earnings of India. The potential of employment opportunities in this sector has improved over time significantly, specially the indirect employment opportunities. Govt. of India in its new tourism policy has spelt out some guidelines for the department of tourism and also for the private entrepreneurs in the field of tourism in general and eco-tourism in particular.

Key words: *Eco-tourism, employment opportunities, government policies.*

INTRODUCTION

Travel and tourism are among the world's fastest growing industries and are the major source of foreign exchange earnings for many developing countries. Ecotourism has attracted increasing attention in recent years, not only as an alternative to mass tourism but as a means of economic development and environmental conservation.

Ecotourism is a growing niche market within the larger travel industry with the potential of being an important sustainable development tool. With billions of dollars in annual sales, ecotourism is a real industry that seeks to take advantage of market trends. At the same time, it frequently operates quite differently than other segments of the tourism industry, because ecotourism is defined by its sustainable development results: conserving natural areas, educating visitors about sustainability, and benefiting local people.

CONCEPT OF ECO-TOURISM

Ecotourism is a nature based form of special travel defined by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) in 1991 as

"responsible travel to natural areas which conserved the environment and sustain the well-being of local people". Ecotourism has been defined as a form of nature-based tourism in the marketplace, but it has also been formulated and studied as a sustainable development tool by NGOs, development experts and academics since 1990. The term ecotourism, therefore, refers on one hand to a concept under a set of principles, and on the other hand to specific market segment.

Major ecotourism destinations in the world are - United States of America (USA), Nepal, Belize, Galapagos Islands, Kenya, Australia, Peru, Brazil, South Africa, United Kingdom (UK) and India.

ECO-TOURISM IN INDIA

India is a multi-destination country with a variety of tourist attractions. Tourism is the second largest net foreign exchange earner for the country by way of invisible exports- It creates more jobs than any other sector for every rupee invested. It provides large-scale employment opportunities. Keeping this in view, it has been granted the status of an industry.

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Several incentives have been made available by the Central and State governments to this sector. These efforts have largely promoted tourist arrivals in the country. Foreign exchange earnings during 2000-2 registered a significant increase of 9.3 per cent. The total earnings up to March 2001 were Rs.4, 430.79 crore. In dollar terms there were US\$ 977.18 million. India is expected to be one of the fastest growing travel and tourism economies of the world over the next ten years at a rate of 9.7 per cent real growth annualized in 2001.

Another leading barometer of the industry's growth and development is the top ten list of countries that are expected to increase their Travel and Tourism capital investment the fastest. Between 2002 and 2012, such investment is expected to grow fastest in Turkey, Mexico, Malaysia, China, India and Hong Kong.

Over the next ten years, it is forecast that more than 7.0 million jobs associated with Travel & Tourism will be created in India. The implications for education, training and customer service are readily apparent in all those countries where Travel & Tourism employment is growing so rapidly.

Examples of tourism infrastructure on which money will be spent include airports, seaports, highways, parks- stadiums, museums, and cultural attractions. There will also be private sector investment in aircraft, cruise ships, hotels and resort properties, rolling stock, restaurants, retail shops and many other facilities and equipment.

The diversity of natural beauty of any country, coupled with its range of tourism products on offer, adds to the richness of the tourist experience. Looking from this angle, India should have been a tourism haven as the country is blessed with tourism destinations

and products catering to the tastes and preferences of tourists and travelers of all ages and economic backgrounds. But surely that has not been the case so far. While China and India used to attract the same number of foreign tourists way back in 1978, today while more than 27 million international tourists visit the former annually, India manages only around one twelfth of the above.

India registered a decline of 4.2% in international arrivals in 2001. Of the 2.54 million international arrivals, 0.48 million were from the neighbouring Pakistan and Bangladesh. UK and USA continued to top the arrival charts with other major source countries being Sri Lanka, France, Canada, Japan, Germany, Malaysia, Australia and Singapore featuring in the top 10. India's share in international tourist arrivals has been 0.37% where as her share in world tourism receipts has been 0.6%. According to RBI sources, tourism receipts in India in 2001 stood at US \$ 3.04 billion. Tourists from US continued to remain the highest spenders. It has been observed worldwide that neighbouring nations generate the bulk of inbound tourists for any particular country. Conforming to this standard, South Asia accounted for 26.5% of India's inbound tourists. An interesting feature of India's inbound traffic for 2001 has been the youth factor. Though 21.1% of the tourists were in the 35- 44 years category, the age-group of 25-34 years accounted for 20.1%. This is truly reflective of the growing interest in India amongst the world youth.

The outbound traffic from India is fast increasing. The outbound figure stood at 4.07 million in 2001. The domestic tourism has witnessed a sustained boom. In 2001, there were as many as 234 million domestic travelers.

All above is apparent in Table-1, given below:

Table-1: Tourist Arrivals from Top Eight Countries (in Number)

Year	U.K.	U.S.A	Sri Lanka	France	Germany	Canada	Japan	Australia
1980	102483	78608	68402	58682	55855	23783	30575	22630
1981	116484	82082	75842	57272	54311	25358	29032	20940
1982	120772	86806	76143	59267	49610	25991	29132	23395
1983	136823	95847	81716	50158	51087	29857	26662	23436
1984	124205	95651	75449	47148	47913	25135	29566	24546
1985	119544	95920	69063	44091	44790	29022	30573	22047
1986	160585	125364	75631	65948	61397	39837	36402	33264
1987	166590	134876	74351	64432	70697	37677	46240	32883
1988	200509	122888	70640	69799	77543	37498	49244	31462
1989	229496	134314	67860	78001	78812	40306	58707	30443
1990	235151	125303	68400	79496	71374	41046	59122	30076
1991	212052	117332	70088	69346	72019	36142	46655	22700
1992	244263	152288	71935	74304	84422	43386	60137	26646
1993	274168	1588129	76898	70694	83341	47800	49616	28795
1994	300696	176482	89009	73088	85352	56441	63398	33142
1995	334827	203343	114157	82349	89040	63821	76042	36150
1996	360686	228829	107351	93325	99853	74031	99018	48755
1997	370567	244239	122080	91423	105979	78570	99729	50647
1998	376513	244687	118292	97898	93993	80111	89565	57807
1999	345085	251926	120072	85891	85033	82892	73373	73041
2000	354217	309309	128444	89565	84989	98259	79167	90456
2001	405472	329147	112813	102434	80011	88600	80634	52691

Source: Planning Commission of India, GOI, New Delhi.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN TOURISM SECTOR

Tourism sector provides both direct and indirect employment opportunities. The details of the employment opportunities generated during first four years of Ninth five year plan have been exhibited in Table-2

The analysis of the table-2 reveals that employment opportunity in total in our country has increased from 30.09 billion man days (1997-98) to 38.82 billion man days (2000-2001). It also reveals that indirect employment opportunities are more than direct employment opportunities.

Table-2: Employment Opportunities in Tourism Sector of India

Year	Employment (in billion)		
	Direct	Indirect	Total
1997-98	12.75	17.34	30.09
1998-99	14.39	19.57	33.96
1999-2000	15.90	21.62	37.52
2000-2001	16.45	22.37	38.82

Source: Planning Commission of India, Government of India, New Delhi

REVIEW OF TOURISM POLICIES IN INDIA: Summary

A National Policy on Tourism was

formulated in 1982 focusing on the development of travel circuits and assigned the responsibility of promoting international tourism to the central government and domestic tourism to the state governments.

Tourism was given the status of an industry in 1986 and became eligible for several incentives and facilities including tax incentives, subsidies, priorities in the sanctioning of loans by the State financial institutions and preferences in providing electricity and water connections.

Tourism was made a priority sector for foreign direct investment in 1991 making it eligible for automatic approvals up to 51% of the equity.

A National Strategy for Tourism Development was evolved in 1996, which advocated the strengthening of an institutional set-up in human resource development, setting up of an Advisory Board of Tourism Industry and Trade (which has since been set up), the integrated development of tourist destinations and the promotion of private sector in tourism development.

Tourism was granted "Export House" status in 1998 making hotels, travel agents, tour operators and tourist transport operators eligible for such recognition entitling them to various incentives.

In order to take advantage of the liberalized economic regime and the developments taking place around the world, a new National Tourism Policy has been under consideration of the Government.

NEW TOURISM POLICY (2002) OF INDIA

Ministry of Tourism has come up with a forward looking tourism policy after intensive deliberation over its draft format with state governments, industry associations and all

stakeholders. The policy aims to evolve a framework which is government-led, private sector driven and community welfare oriented. The new policy 2002 has broadly addressed most of Confederation of Indian Industry (CII's) recommendations. In addition to that, the policy has stressed on the following:

Carrying capacity of every tourist site not to be ignored.

Special thrust to rural tourism and tourism in small settlements so as to encourage flourishing of local art and craft.

On the domestic tourism front special attention would be given to pilgrimage tourism

Special attraction of tourists for the Yoga, Siddha etc. as well as for the Indian cuisine would be made use of and effectively encouraged.

Travel industry would be persuaded to evolve and adopt voluntarily a Code of Ethics and its infringement would be firmly dealt with by Tour and Travel Associations.

States would be advised to earmark a section of the state police to act as tourist police and special training would be imparted to it.

Above all, the New Tourism Policy has proposed placing tourism in the Concurrent List. So far eight states have opposed this move and three states are undecided. The rest of the states and union territories are in agreement with the proposal. Discussions are still on so as to have unanimity on this proposal.

The Department of Tourism has decided to:

Promote the application of policy and guidelines related to ecotourism: Policy and guidelines have been developed at national level and agreed to by State Governments. State Governments are being advised to

undertake suitable specific measures in respect of ecotourism.

Advise the Ministry of Environment and the State Governments on initiating compulsory and voluntary regulations regarding ecotourism activities.

Undertake specific programmes for national parks and sanctuaries.

Form national and state level committees for the co-ordination of activities in the framework of the year, as advised by WTO.

The New Tourism Policy will provide thrust on development of new tourist product like rural tourism, eco-tourism, health tourism, cruise tourism, cultural tourism, heritage tourism and event tourism.