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A write up on Eco Tourism

Ecotourism

Ecotourism may be termed as a component of the field of sustainable tourism. The concept of Ecotourism is always being applied to achieve sustainable development. Ecotourism is a new concept, developed around the idea of travelling to places of natural beauty, moving around and staying with the locations of nature for a couple of days. The term ecotourism was coined by Héctor Ceballos-Lascuràin in 1983; he defined Eco-tourism as 'travelling to relatively undisturbed areas with the specific objectives of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas.' The concept has, however, developed to a scientifically-based approach to the planning, management and development of sustainable tourism products and activities. In simple words, Ecotourism is sustainable, site-specific, person-friendly where participation of local communities is ensured both at planning and implementation level. Dr P.K Bhattacharya has tried to outline the principles and characteristics of Ecotourism in the following manner.

Principles and Characteristics of Ecotourism-

- It should be small-scaled, locally controlled, land sensitive and ecologically oriented.
- It should be based on environmental ethics with a concept of 'small is beautiful doing more with less and treated with fostering resource integrity.
- It should be sustainable environmentally, socially, culturally and economically.
- It should enrich the experience and should be educational.
- It must ensure the participation of the local communities. (Bhattacharya A.K.2005 pp7)

Benefits of Ecotourism

- Avoids negative impacts that can damage or destroy the integrity or character of the natural and cultural environment being visited.
- Educate the traveler on the importance of conservation.
- Directs revenues for the preservation of natural areas and the management of protected areas. Brings economic benefits to local communities and direct revenues to local people living adjacent to protected areas.
- Emphasize the need for planning and sustainable growth of the tourism industry and seeks to ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental carrying capacity.
- Retains a high percentage of revenue in the host country by stressing the use of locally owned facilities and services.
- Increasingly relies on infrastructure that has been developed sensitivity in harmony with the environment – minimizing the use of fossil fuels, conserving local plants and wildlife and blending with the natural environment.

In an era of heightened environmental consciousness and accessibility to exotic locales, countries are busily promoting their natural resources as lures for tourists. Countries like Kenya, Costa Rica, and South Africa have already successfully promoted Ecotourism. In India, Kerala and Sikkim present a unique success story of Ecotourism.

Community based Eco tourism-(CBE)-

Community-based Ecotourism generally means ecotourism enterprises that are owned and managed by the community. Furthermore, community –based Ecotourism implies that a community is taking care of their natural resources in order to gain income through operating a tourism enterprise and using that income to better their lives. It involves conservation, business enterprise and community development. It is also a better option for the people of the developing countries as an alternative means of livelihood, as it can both protect the resource base if properly managed and can act as an economic source. In the community-based Ecotourism, the maximum benefit must go to the local community. Therefore, community involvement in tourism has now been widely supported as being essential for sustainability. Participation of local communities in tourism leads to community ownership, livelihood security, efficient conflict resolution and improved conservation. In the north-eastern region of India efforts are being made now to involve the local communities in the tourism process with a view to benefitting the local communities and

for the conservation of the environment. In Sikkim, we have seen such an effort in the remote areas like Yuksom, Lachung and Yumthang etc. In Nagaland, too local communities got involved for conservation and maintenance of Khonoma area which was rich in biodiversity and wildlife. However much of its resources got depleted with time. The villagers in alarm decided to work for the conservation of the area, and the local village council declared Khonoma area as a protected area. In 1998 the Khonoma Nature conservation and Tragopan Sanctuary was proclaimed by the local community. Now both central and state governments have also come forward to support the noble effort of local communities of Khonoma, and in 2003 Khonoma Tourism Board was formed to promote community-based Ecotourism in the area. In Meghalaya, Mawphlang sacred forest illustrates the type of Community Conservation. The 400-year old grove has been protected by generations of Khasi villagers, under the spiritual head or Lyngdoh.

Ecotourism has tremendous potentiality in Assam too. Assam forms a part of global biodiversity hot spots. With its dense forests, uneven topography, flora and fauna, the majestic Brahmaputra and its tributaries, hundreds of wetlands, wildlife sanctuaries and many rare species of animals and unique cultural diversity, Assam offer nature-centric tourism. From one end to the other, the state provides to the tourists so many places of natural beauty with a wide variety of wildlife that very few places in the world can compete with it. Therefore, the concept of Ecotourism is being applied for tourism promotion in Assam.