



Eco Tourism of Sub Himalayan North Bengal: A Study of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri Districts.

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Abstract

Eco tourism is a kind of tourism that takes into consideration the conservation of the well being of natural resources and the local people as well as the tourist experience of their life. It fosters respect for the nature and strengthens the employment opportunities of the local people. The objective of this study is to generate an awareness for the conservation of the biodiversity and a spirit of adventure among the travelers. It also seeks to study the employment opportunities through forestry and related activities. Some important eco tourist spots in Sub Himalayan North Bengal like Buxa Tiger Reserve, some national parks and Wild Life sanctuaries and nature Interpretation Centre have also been studied in the above mentioned work. Extensive surveys around the region have been conducted and several thesis, journals and articles have also been referred. The work deals with questions on eco tourism, it's impact on the travelers and local people and how the government of West Bengal is promoting the growth of such concept. It also suggests measures to promote the idea and in turn educate the tourist and the world on the sustainability of the healthy tourism. Eco Tourism, being an idea of environment friendly tourism is the need of the hour. The urgency to generate financially sound local community while at the same time maintaining the well being of the nature, is what the article promotes.

Introduction

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that involves responsible travel (using sustainable modes of transport) to natural areas, protecting the environment and improving the well-being of local people. The purpose may be to educate the traveler, provide funds for conservation, directly promote economic development and political empowerment of local communities, or promote respect for other cultures and human rights. by human intervention.

Ecotourism can focus on educating travelers about the local environment and natural environment with an eye toward environmental protection. Some include within the definition of ecotourism an effort to create economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources financially viable. In general, ecotourism is concerned with the interaction with biotic components of natural environments. Ecotourism focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth and environmental sustainability.

Ecotourism generally involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the main attractions. Ecotourism aims to give tourists an insight into the human impact on the environment and to encourage a greater appreciation of our natural habitats. Ecotourism aims to minimize the environmental impact in the areas visited. Ecotourism not only promotes respect for the natural environment, but also helps create socio-economic benefits for the communities in the region visited. The basic components of ecotourism in the districts are shown in the following figure.

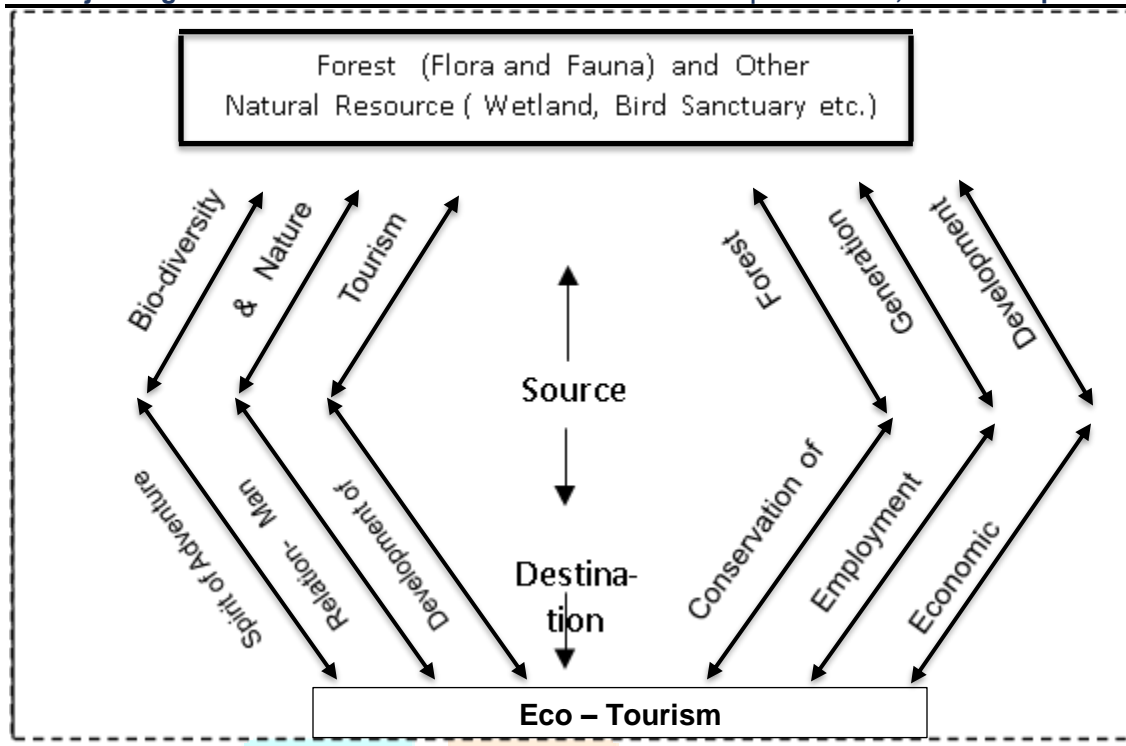


Fig.- Basic components of eco-tourism in the area.

The Sub-Himalayan North Bengal are associated with 3, Ts Tea, Timber and Tourism. Tourism is the most important place for the economic growth of this region. This area is designed in such a way that the natural forests are not disturbed. The Forest Service can also generate more revenue by establishing ecotourism venues, which provide many jobs for local people.

Research Questions:

During the research, the following set of questions have been carefully examined.

1. What is eco tourism?
2. How eco tourism became a strong motivation or earning of locals?
3. Does ecotourism help in developing connectivity?
4. How does this sector help in creating opportunities for employment?
5. How the government of West Bengal promotes eco tourism?
6. What are the negative and positive impacts of ecotourism?

Objective of the study:

1. To develop awareness for the conservation of biodiversity and inducing a spirit of adventure among the youth.
2. To develop good interdependence among man and nature
3. To flourish the tourism industry through the exploitation of natural resources.
4. To develop awareness for the conservation of Forest and its beauty.
5. To make the study area in this field economically advanced.
6. To generate rural employment through forestry and related activities.

Methodology

The field study analyzes the issues and strategies for the development of ecotourism sites around the Sub-Himalayan region of North Bengal. This study is both theoretical and analytical in nature. All relevant reports, documents, journals, books and articles were consulted to develop a better hypothesis and to complete the study, although the basic sources are primary and secondary in nature. Unpublished reports, documents etc are also consulted to properly understand the problem. The work includes extensive research on relevant literature, research methods and examples in the chosen field of study. There is no patent recipe for successful research study, but it is important to remember that the research process is cyclical and iterative. Important data collected from the archived work was also consulted to develop better research papers and to complete the study, although the basic sources are primary and secondary in nature.

MAIN SOURCE OF FIELDWORK:

The main source is based on the survey method and uses a survey questionnaire. After thorough literature research, a preliminary questionnaire is designed for better understanding. Raw data was also collected from various field sources.

Research Gap:

A major research gap has been identified. There has been some positive and negative research on ecotourism, but no specific study on ecotourism has been made. Data analysis is one of the major gaps in the research work as all the data that were available in various articles and websites are not relevant to the proposed work. Therefore, there is a major research gap in this work that could warrant proper scholarly research.

Limitations:

The main Limitations of such research is the lack of reliable data:

1. Primary data reliability sometimes suffered from problems of suppression of the facts by the respondents.
2. Political and social pressure, biased opinion and indifferent behavior have been observed among the respondents while the primary survey has been done.
3. Secondary database was not available in the giver office due to absence of proper records.
4. Sometimes officials did not give enough time and relevant information due to some pressure in the service period.

Some important eco tourist spots:

Sub Himalayan North Bengal is dotted with several eco tourism spots. Those are classified into four categories:

1. Tiger Reserve
2. National Park and WildLife Sanctuary
3. Nature Interpretation Centre
4. Other areas which the scholar like to include are forest museum, zoo, picnic spots etc.

Some important national parks and wild life sanctuaries in the study area for promotion of ecotourism are shown below.

| Name of NP and W.L.S. | Location (District) | Area in Sq.Km | Main faunas of tourist attraction | Best time for visit |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Gorumara (N.P.) | Jalpaiguri | 79.45 | One horned Rhinoceros, Elephant, Tiger, Bison, Sambhar, Barking & Hog Deer, Buffalo, Leopard, Gaur, Chital etc. | April, May, October & November |
| Jaldapara | Jalpaiguri | 216.00 | Indian Elephant, Rhinoceros, Deer, Indian wild boar etc. | December to May |
| Chapramari (WLS) | Jalpaiguri | 9.60 | Rhinoceros, Elephant, Tiger, Bison, Buffalo, Pig Barking & Hogdeer, Fowl etc. | February |
| Mahananda (WLS) | Darjeeling | 127.00 | Tiger, Elephant, Bison, Deer, (Barking Hog, Sambhar & Chital) Pig etc. | November to April |
| Senchal (WLS) | Darjeeling | 38.00 | Serpw, Bear (Himalayan) Barking Deer, Goral, Red Panda etc. | April, May & October |

Source: Centenary Commemoration Volume (1964) and State Forestry Action Plan 1996-2015.

- N.P.: National Park
- WLS: Wild Life Sanctuary

A sample survey has been conducted by the scholar from the various nature lovers tourists at the different ecotourism spots of the study area through questionnaire. Various responses have come out from the tourists. Most of the tourist suggested that a proper infrastructural development is immediately needed for the expansion of this new chapter of tourism. Besides, organization and management from the side of forest department should be more active.

Table: Sample Survey Report on Eco-tourism in the Study Area (2021-2022) in Percent

| | | | | | |
|---|---|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------|
| 1 | Type of nature lover tourist | Within the state | Out side the state | Out side the country | total |
| | | 62% | 25% | 13% | 100% |
| 2 | Purpose of visits | Refreshment | Curiosity | Health & other | |
| | | 54% | 36% | 10% | 100% |
| 3 | Preference of eco- tourism area to visit | Hilly Region | Foot Hills | | |
| | | 68% | 32% | | 100% |
| 4 | Transportation, management & organisation | Highly satisfied | Satisfied | | |
| | | 48% | 52% | | 100% |
| 5 | Growth of awareness of man & nature relation after visit the area | Very high | High | Moderate | |
| | | 53% | 27% | 20% | 100% |
| 6 | More infrastructural development | Required | Not required | | |
| | | 93% | 7% | | 100% |
| 7 | Plan for next visit & motivating others | Very high | High | Low | |
| | | 52% | 36% | 12% | 100% |

Source: Sample survey during 2021-2022

Some other aspects are also studied which are depicted in the following tables.

Occupational pattern of the tourists

| Nature | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Government servant | 63% |
| Non- Government servant | 17% |
| Business man | 15% |
| Unemployed youth & others | 5% |
| Total | 100% |

Source: Sample survey during 2021-2022

Preference of Tourist Lodge

| Preference | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| Forest Tourist Lodge | 47% |
| Private Tourist Lodge | 32% |
| Home Stay | 21% |
| Total | 100% |

Source: Sample survey during 2021-2022

Engagement of Local people in Eco-tourism Industry

| Type of engagement | Percentage (%) |
|---|----------------|
| As driver | 52% |
| As Tourist Guide | 9% |
| As Shopkeeper (Restaurant, Hotel, Stall etc) | 28% |
| As seller of local products (Shawl, Saree, Woolen Garment, Jewellery etc) | 19% |
| Total | 100% |

Source: Sample survey during 2021-2022

Potential of ecotourism:

The study area has a high potential for the development of ecotourism, which can boost the local economy. Ecotourism has also created employment opportunities. Every year, it offers a large number of direct and indirect jobs. Currently, the Forest Service has a Nature Interpretation Center (NIC.) near the natural forests of the region, which are attracting more and more attention from nature-loving tourists. In general, the area can attract more than 2,00,000 nature-loving tourists in various ecotourism spots every year. In addition, the forest division of the area has created some picnic areas near the natural forests, through which a good revenue is generated every year. Mangpong and Kunjabehar Picnic Spots are visited by more than 1000 picnic parties every year from December to February

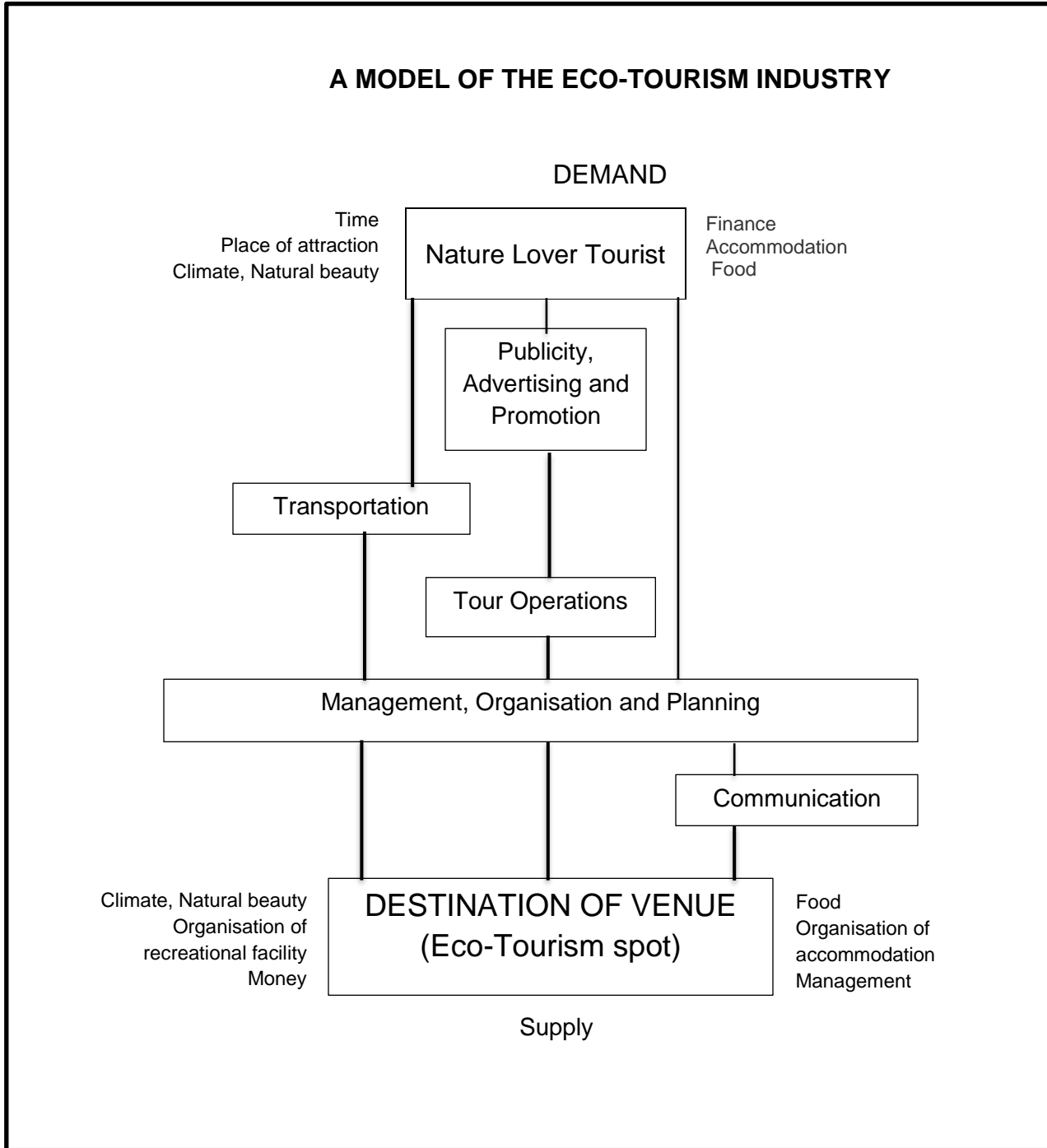
Some suggestions are:

1. There should be information centers for tourists. In this sense, it is a way of raising awareness among tourists of the need to treat local communities and their cultures, workers, women and children in a responsible and fair manner. and the environment.
2. For Sub Himalayan North Bengal, Ecotourism should be supported by the local government.
3. The tourism tax must be collected every five years, which will contribute to the development of new ecotourism spots.
4. It is necessary to treat all visitors with honesty and courtesy and to ensure they are aware of all local customs and laws.
5. Some policies and packages need to be put in place to attract more tourists every year. As the construction of multiple storage buildings in the mountainous region of the study area are

increasing, there is a need for ecotourism not only for commercial interests but also to safeguard the interest of local people and their well-being.

- There must be community groups through their small collaborations can participate in these sectors. and in this way there will be more employment opportunities for local people.

A model of eco-tourism industry in the study area is depicted through the following chart:



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Key words:

Sub Himalayan North Bengal, Eco – tourism, National Park, Wild Life Sanctuary, Nature Interpretation Centre, National Resources, Fauna, Local community, Mountainous Region, Potential, Conservation, Nature, Flora, Wetland, Survey questionnaire, Museum, Zoo, Picnic.

