ABSTRACT

Tourism is an important source of revenue-generation for any destination. It is a source of earning valuable foreign-exchange for the country. It supports the local economy directly as well as indirectly. A form of tourism that has been around for some time is eco-tourism. It is also known as sustainable tourism. It is a kind of tourism which leaves minimum impact on the environment. However, at the same time, it also helps in conservation of the environment. This tourism is for the travelers who are interested in the flora, fauna and natural attractions of a particular destination, rather than man-made attractions and shopping. It is a responsible type of tourism, one that promotes the well-being of the indigenous population, by encouraging financial benefits for the locals. The Konkan region of Maharashtra stretches from Mumbai to Sindhudurg. Its beaches are very popular amongst tourists, and there are a lot of domestic and international visitors or most of the year, except during heavy monsoon. To cater to this demand, there is a lot of development that has taken place over the past few years, ranging from infrastructure and roads, to accommodation facilities, local transport & recreational activities. All this growth and expansion has had an impact on the environment. Encouraging eco-tourism will be instrumental in ensuring sustainable development of the Konkan region.

Keywords: Eco-Tourism; Environment; Impact; Locals; Konkan

INTRODUCTION

Eco-tourism is a form of tourism that involves travelling with a focus to destinations that are rich in culture as well as natural attractions. It is of interest to those kinds of travelers who would like to reduce the negative effects arising from their visits on the environment. Such travelers are also fascinated by the indigenous culture and landscape.

Tourism in any form has impacts on the environment to a lesser or greater degree. Every organism in the eco-system has its own role to play. Numerous organisms co-exist in harmony in nature. However, if this synchronization is disturbed in any way, it disrupts the natural balance.

The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), which is the top-most body for the development of tourism in the world, defines Tourism Carrying Capacity as “the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction”
If the number of tourists visiting a particular destination is greater than the carrying capacity, it is reflected in the harmful after-effects such as garbage left over, traffic jams and pollution, to name a few.

**OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH ARTICLE**

1. To review eco-tourism development in the Konkan region of Maharashtra State.
2. To suggest recommendations for making this type of tourism successful.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research article is based on secondary data, sourced from research articles and papers, internet websites and magazine articles as well as Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation website.

**Konkan Region-A Paradise for Tourists**

Maharashtra is blessed with a long coastline of about 720 km. There are numerous fishing villages like Karde, Murud, Harne, Harhareshwar, Achra, Ganpatipule, Tarkarli, that are ideal for a short break away from the demands of modern-day living and its stresses. This proximity to the sea has created beautiful stretches of beaches, which are a main attraction for people. Alibaug, Kihim, Diveagar, Tarkarli, Bhatye beaches are well-known among tourists.

In addition this land, known as ‘the Land of Parshuram’ there are ancient temples that are a major source of attraction to tourists. Also the original inhabitants, who have migrated elsewhere now, but come to pay respect to their family deities here when they can. Some of these include the Ganesh temple at Ganpatipule, the Suvarna Ganpati at Diveagar, and the Kadyavarcha Ganpati at Anjarle, Kanakadiya Sun temple at Kashieliand Mahakali temple at Adivar where ancient customs and traditions are followed till today. Forts like Raigad, Alibaug, Vijaydurg and Suvarnadurga stand as proud sentinels of history and a visit evokes memories of the glorious Maratha Empire.

The emerald green coconut palms swaying invitingly in the breeze on the land welcome fishing boats home each evening and morning, laden with the catch of the day. This land has everything, from the seashores to verdant spice and betelnut plantations. The delicious local cuisine comprising of the freshest possible fish and the extremely popular sol kadhi, as well as fruits like mangoes and jackfruit and tales of local favorites like ‘kuleethpithla’ savored with soft rice have attracted many a tourist to this beautiful land.

The Sahyadri mountain ranges are a rich source of bio-diversity. Velas, near Dapoli is well-known as the place where female Olive Ridley turtles come to lay their eggs, and the little ones, once hatched head for the sea. Malvan is known for its mesmerizing coral reefs.

So, there is something for every type of tourist. The locals of the Konkan region have been quick to grasp this opportunity and utilize it to improve the local economy. Homestays have come up, offering rooms with attached bathrooms and local food to the droves of visitors.

**What Is Eco-Tourism?**

This kind of tourism focuses on conservation of the environment, the host community and sustainability. So, the stake-holders in eco-tourism must concentrate on the following issues-

1. Reduction of impacts on the environment and the local population whether physical, sociocultural or psychological.
2. Promotion of respect of local culture and the environment.
3. Restricting them from leaving non-biodegradable waste material in the form of plastic or metal.
4. Ensuring that there is a favorable exchange between the locals and the tourists, thus making both benefit from the interaction.
5. Delivering economic benefits to the local population that can be partly diverted towards the protection and upkeep of the natural attractions.

6. Encouraging the multiplier effect of tourism, that can be beneficial for the locals personally as well as for creating commercial opportunities.

7. Generation of awareness about local issues amongst visitors.

8. Building facilities that create minimum negative impacts on the environment, by following norms such as CRZ etc.

9. Respecting the local customs and traditions and sensitizing visitors to them.

10. Not carrying any kind of plants (in the form of cuttings etc.) away at the end of a trip from the destination.

11. Experiencing the local way of life, eating the same cuisine and staying as the locals do.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hall and Brown (2000) opined that Eco-tourism is an instrument for natural protection and assures sustainable economic benefits for the local people.

Usha Bande (2005) analyzed that ecotourism stands for the management of tourism in such a manner that man derives maximum benefits from nature without disturbing its innate balance. It seeks to restore man’s communication with nature and to ensure the fulfillment of the need of the local cultures and traditions remain undisturbed and intact.

Raghavan (2005) said that ecotourism is ecologically sustainable with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation. It is therefore necessary to bring together conservation and development in the activities yearning for economic progress.

Panigrahi (2005) stated that eco-tourism as a concept centres on the nature of the tourism and with regard to local communities emphasizes conservation, sustainability and biological diversities.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Konkan region of Maharashtra attracts not only domestic, but also foreign visitors who come for relaxation.

2. In spite of the constant flow of tourists, this region of Maharashtra has largely managed to safeguard its original culture and way of life. The economic gains from tourists have helped in improving the standard of living, with modern day conveniences such as television sets and refrigerators existing in harmony with traditional brass vessels and cow-dung coated floors.

3. The ‘Bed and Breakfast scheme’ of the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation of the State Government has been instrumental in promoting the concept of eco-tourism, offering clean and maintained rooms to the tourists.

4. Hotel rooms and home stays are often built using locally found material such as the ‘jambha stone’ and other things such as betel nut tree trunks. This has helped in sustainable development and to minimize the carbon footprint, as fuel required for bringing building material from far off places has reduced.

5. Since the locals are benefitting from tourism, they are actively participating in these endeavors. In fact Velas is an eco-tourism case study by itself. A group of locals organize a ‘Kasav Mahotsav’ that encourages nature tourists from all over to visit this village and see the hatching of turtle eggs on the beach and the watch baby turtles progressing to the water. This has helped boost the local economy as so many tourists require accommodation, food etc. that
is provided by local entrepreneurs. It also helps in conservation of the sea turtles as now the locals have a personal reason to protect these turtles and prevent their poaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that unregulated ‘home stays’ that have sprung up everywhere and say that they provide an authentic Konkan experience get themselves upgraded, and ensure that they provide clean rooms and bathrooms to the tourists. These are not recognized under the ‘Bed and Breakfast scheme’. Currently, there are a lot of resident families that put up signs of ‘rooms for visitors’. These do not have adequate facilities, and even lesser attention is given to hygiene. So, people wanting a true Konkan stay are disappointed and are turning away. They prefer to go to resorts that provide a comfortable stay.

2. Also, the locals are also at times seen to over-charge gullible tourists for food, beverages etc, often quoting rates that would be the same in large cities. This attitude should not persist.

3. There is insufficient trained manpower in this region. Since the tourists are from all over the country as well as abroad, the locals should make an effort to pick up English language basics so that communication becomes easier and hassle-free for both the tourists as well as the hosts.

4. The accommodation providers should be encouraged to use more and more environment-friendly products and incorporate such initiatives in their daily operations like doing away with plastic plates replacing them with the more traditional brass or steel ones.

CONCLUSION

1. It is seen that to promote sustainable development, it is necessary that all development related to tourism should consider the opinions and experience of the locals.

2. Moreover, it should be in such a way as to enhance the standard of living of the local population, by generating income and providing employment. The locals should be made aware of the benefits that their participation will bring for them.

3. Eco-tourism projects will ensure that the indigenous plant and animal species, as well as natural attractions are not affected by development.

4. This kind of tourism will be instrumental in retaining the bio-diversity of the Konkan area, as well as preserving it for the next generation, and future visitors.

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