



Importance of Ecotourism for Sustainable Life in India

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Tourism is an important, and often vital, source of income for many regions and countries. It contributes significantly to local economies through payments made by tourists for various goods and services. This article reviews the concept of tourism and ecotourism, highlights their interrelationship and explains the critical differences between the two terms, which are frequently confused. The article also provides a brief overview of the history, types, and benefits of ecotourism. In addition, it discusses the key characteristics of responsible and sustainable tourism in India.

Keyword: Ecotourism, history, types, functions and principle

Introduction

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2005), tourism is defined as travel undertaken for pleasure. It also includes the theory and practice of touring, the business of attracting, accommodating, and entertaining tourists, and the operation of tours. The service industries that benefit from tourism include transportation services such as airlines, cruise ships, and taxicabs; hospitality services such as accommodations, including hotels and resorts; and entertainment venues such as amusement parks, casinos, shopping malls, music venues, and theatres. Ecotourism, on the other hand, is a form of tourism that involves visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas. It is intended as a low-impact and often small-scale alternative to standard commercial tourism. Ecotourism refers to responsible travel to natural areas that helps conserve the environment and improves the well-being of local communities. It emphasizes socially responsible travel, personal growth, and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. It is designed to offer tourists insights into the impact of human activities on the environment and to promote greater appreciation of natural habitats. Overall, ecotourism is a form of responsible tourism that conserves the environment and supports the well-being of local people (Hunt et al., 2015).

Ecotourism:

- Builds environmental awareness
- Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
- Offers financial benefits and empowerment to local communities
- Respects and preserves local culture
- Supports human rights
- Encourages democratic values and community participation

History of Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a late 20th-century neologism formed from the combination of eco- and tourism. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term eco-tour was first recorded in 1973, while **ecotourism** appeared later, in 1982, “probably after eco-tour (Tripathi, 2016).

Eco-tour, noun: A tour or visit to an area of ecological interest, usually with an educational purpose; in later usage, it also refers to a visit designed to have minimal negative impact on the environment or undertaken specifically to support conservation efforts. Eco-tourism, noun: Tourism involving travel to areas of ecological interest-typically exotic, fragile, or threatened natural environments especially to support conservation and observe wildlife. It often refers to controlled access to endangered environments in a way that minimizes adverse effects. However, the tourism industry and governments often emphasize the product side of ecotourism, treating it similarly to any other form of nature-based tourism. Terms such as nature tourism, low-impact tourism, green tourism, bio-tourism, and ecologically responsible tourism have been used in both literature and marketing, although these are not necessarily synonymous with ecotourism (Tuohino and Hynonen, 2001). The main purpose of ecotourism is to engage tourists in low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented environments in order to preserve species and habitats, particularly in underdeveloped regions. While some ecotourism projects achieve these goals, many fail to address the fundamental issues faced by host nations. As a result, ecotourism does not always deliver the intended benefits, and in some cases, it may leave local economies in an even worse condition than before (Fennell, 1999).

Definitions of Ecotouris

Ecotourism as environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present), that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.

Types of Ecotourism

It's can be divided into the following types:

1. Mass Tourism
2. Alternative Tourism

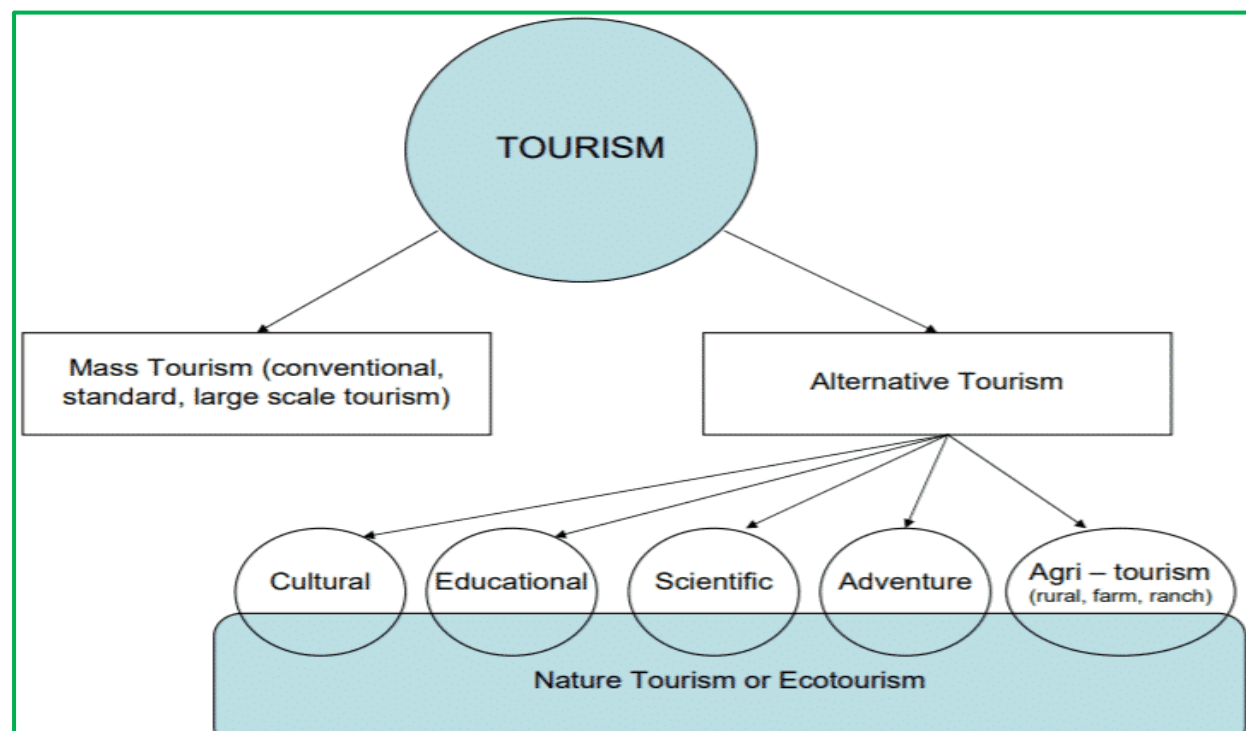


Fig.1 (Source: <https://tourismnotes.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Types-of-Ecotourism.png>)

1. **Mass Tourism:** - Mass tourism is the conventional form of tourism focused on large numbers of visitors and maximum economic gain. It was once viewed as a clean industry that boosted foreign exchange, jobs, and infrastructure, but later became criticized for

causing environmental degradation, cultural loss, overcrowding, and pressure on resources.

2. **Alternative Tourism:-** In response, alternative tourism emerged as a more sustainable and responsible approach. It includes ecotourism, green tourism, soft tourism, and responsible tourism, aiming to minimize negative impacts on nature and local communities. However, alternative tourism is not automatically better, and can also cause harm if poorly planned. It is best seen as a complementary and more thoughtful style of tourism development.

Functions of Ecotourism

Eco-tourism is nature-based, environmentally educated and sustainably managed (Blamey, 2001) outline the five fundamental functions of ecotourism namely:

1. Protection of natural areas
2. Education
3. Generation of money
4. Quality tourism
5. Local participation

Principles of Ecotourism

The principles of ecotourism, as per the International Ecotourism Society (TIES), are outlined below:

- Avoids negative impacts that can damage or destroy the integrity or character of natural or cultural environments being visited.
- Educates travellers about the importance of conservation.
- Directs revenues toward the conservation of natural areas and the management of protected areas.
- Provides economic benefits to local communities and ensures that revenues reach people living near protected areas.
- Emphasizes planning and sustainable development, ensuring that tourism does not exceed the social and environmental carrying capacity of the destination.
- Retains a high proportion of tourism revenues within the host country by promoting the use of locally owned facilities and services.
- Encourages environmentally sensitive infrastructure, developed in harmony with the natural environment minimizing fossil fuel use, conserving local plants and wildlife, and blending with surrounding landscapes.

Examples of Ecotourism Destinations in India

India offers numerous ecotourism sites that combine nature and culture harmoniously:

Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary - Kerala

- **Location:** Western Ghats, Kerala
- **Famous for:** Elephants, tigers, and Periyar Lake
- **Activities:** Boating, guided jungle treks, bamboo rafting
- **Significance:** A model for community based ecotourism and conservation in India



Fig.2= Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary (SOURCE)

Sundarbans - West Bengal

- **Location:** Ganges delta, West Bengal
- **Famous for:** Royal Bengal tiger, mangrove forests
- **Activities:** Boat safaris, bird watching, village visits
- **Significance:** World's largest mangrove forest; UNESCO World Heritage Site; crucial for climate



Fig.3 Sundarbans (SOURCE)

Jim Corbett National Park - Uttarakhand

- **Location:** Foothills of the Himalayas, Uttarakhand
- **Famous for:** Bengal tigers, leopards, elephants
- **Activities:** Jeepsafaris, bird watching eco-lodges
- **Significance:** India's first national park; part of Project Tiger; rich in biodiversity



Fig.4 = Jim Corbett National Park (SOURCE)

Khangchendzonga National Park - Sikkim

- **Location:** Eastern Himalayas, Sikkim
- **Famous for:** Mt. Khangchendzonga, red panda, snow leopard
- **Activities:** Trekking, camping, spiritual ecotourism
- **Significance:** UNESCO World Heritage Site; sacred to locals; combines ecological and cultural heritage



Fig.5 = Khangchendzonga National Park (SOURCE)

Conclusion

With the rise of environmental awareness among people, tourism is increasingly gaining attention in the form of ecotourism. Although ecotourism is widely promoted as a form of *responsible tourism*, its implementation remains a topic of considerable debate. In many cases, the term is misused by certain stakeholders who market destinations as “eco-friendly” merely to attract higher-paying tourists, knowing that environmentally conscious travelers are often willing to spend more for services labeled as sustainable. This misuse dilutes the true purpose of ecotourism, which is meant to support conservation efforts, protect natural ecosystems, and promote the well-being of local communities.

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