

# THE STUDY OF PERCEPTION OF YOUNG TOURISTS TOWARDS ECOTOURISM ACTIVITIES IN INDIA

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## **Abstract**

*Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the natural environment and sustain the well-being of local people and involve their interpretation and education. The present research focuses on tourist's preference towards ecotourism activities and to find the barriers to ecotourism operations in India. The study tries to identify the preference of young tourists on ecotourism sites. The study used structured questionnaire based primary data collected from young Indian tourists. Suitable statistical tools were used to get unbiased results and conclusions. The study revealed that the young tourists are much aware about the ecotourism initiatives operated at such sites. Measures should be taken by administration in consensus with local people for pleasure of tourists without harming the flora and fauna. It is important to promote ecotourism opportunities to the young tourists on the media channels widely used by them. Effective implementation and monitoring of existing laws will help to achieve the use ecotourism sites sustainably. Ecotourism is inevitable to achieve sustainable development goals.*

## **Keywords:**

*Ecotourism, Conservation, Tourism, Sustainable, Biodiversity*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines 'ecotourism' as responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the natural environment and sustain the well-being of local people and involve their interpretation and education [1]. It is a type of natural based tourism that focuses on environmental sustainability and ecological preservation aiming to protect natural landscapes and promote green growth in developing countries.

The focus of ecotourism is on sustainable tourism in carried out in natural areas with a great sense of responsibility to educate the tourists about conservation efforts. It helps to create financial benefits to local communities, provide an alternate source of earning and bring them in to conservation efforts. It helps to educate tourists about local, regional and global environmental issues which can lead to environmentally conscious efforts at natural places.

Tourism already has become the world's fastest growing service industry with great potential for its further expansion and diversification [2]. In India, it has become a strong tool to bring about socio-economic development mainly of under-privileged population. Ecotourism as a part of sustainable tourism is relatively a new approach. There are 106 national parks, 573 wildlife sanctuaries and 18 biosphere reserves which are working towards enhancement of the ecosystem [3].

A key player in promoting ecotourism at such sites is the visitors. The current study makes an effort to articulate the perception of youth towards ecotourism and conservation efforts undertaken.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Zahid Ali et al [4] did an extensive qualitative study on socio-economic implications on community-based tourism. The study suggested that the government promoted efforts by local communities in their socio-economic upliftment are extremely necessary to bring conservation in to practice. Furthermore. The study suggested that the government should involve local communities in decision making process to improve resident's quality of life. The study proposed to improve collaborations and friendly nature of tourists with the residents to boost recurrent tourist visits. Thenmozhi and Maheswari [5] studied the tourist preference towards ecotourism efforts in Kodaikannal. They suggested that the occupational status of the tourists is acting as a barrier to take part in ecotourism activities leading to environmental degradation. Mirela Stanciu et al studied the youth's perception towards ecotourism as a possible model for sustainable use of local tourism resources. The questionnaire-based research confirmed that today's youth are well aware about the concept of ecotourism, it's role in sustainable development and conservation. Local level programs are very significant in promoting ecotourism. Extensive use of digitization and internet access will help further to strengthen the ecotourism goals. Tran [6] analyzed the tourists' preferences for ecotourism services and biodiversity conservation in a protected area in Vietnam. The results showed that tourists had an interest in the hypothetical ecotourism and prefer to enjoy all above ecotourism services. The study also revealed that tourists were willing to donate for biodiversity conservation activities in the protected area [7]

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study was carried out as quantitative, questionnaire-based survey. Both primary and secondary data from trusted websites and research articles of repute were used. The primary data was collected from Indian youth irrespective to demographic characteristics. The collected data was analyzed using statistical tools namely percentage analysis, arithmetic mean,  $\chi^2$ -test and Kendall (W) ranking technique.

### **3.1 HYPOTHESIS**

There is no significant difference in the preferences of Indian respondents among the socio-economic variables.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **4.1 PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS**

The profile of the respondents based on socio-economic status was recorded. Out of the total number of respondents, 58.49%

were male and remaining 41.51% were females. 83.02% respondents were from urban area, 11.32% were from rural area, while 5.66% were located in semi-urban area. 88.68% respondents had an annual income of less than 1.25 lacs. 7.55% had an annual income in the range of 1.25 to 5 lacs where as a mere of 3.77% had annual income above 5 lacs.

The question was designed to judge the perception of young Indian tourists towards the definition of ecotourism. The following Fig.1 shows the results.

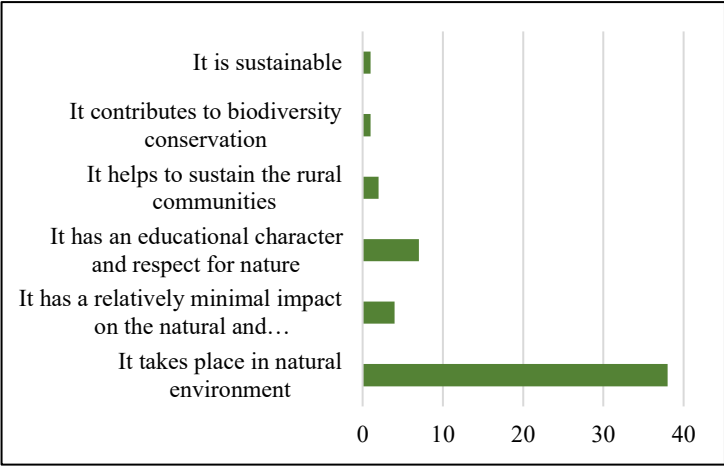


Fig.1. Perception of Young Indian Tourists Towards Ecotourism

71.69% respondents pointed out that ecotourism takes place in natural environment. It shows that the majority of the respondents were aware of the basic concept of ecotourism. 3.77% respondents opted that ecotourism practices exert relatively minimal impact on the natural and socio-cultural environment, in fact it takes all such steps to boost such environment. 13.20% respondents said that ecotourism has an educational character and respect for nature. 1.88% participants responded that it contributes to biodiversity conservation and is sustainable. While 3.77% participants said that it helps to sustain local rural communities. The answers reveal that there is awareness about the broader aspects of concept of ecotourism but much more publicity needs to be created for its effective implementation.

In order to identify the perception of tourists, the question on motivation of tourists to identify ecotourism destination was asked to the participants. Refer graph 2.

33.33% respondents said they wish to appreciate the scenic beauty at the tourist site. 23.52% participants responded that they prefer better hospitality facilities at the tourist destinations. 21.57% participants pointed out that they wish to enjoy a plethora of ecotourism activities such as wildlife safaris, nature trails, adventure sports, trekking, mountaineering, scuba diving, butterfly gardening, appreciation of local crafts and culture and many more. The same was evident with 13.73% respondents claiming that they wish to appreciate the floral and faunal biodiversity. Preference to local weather at natural places, local cuisine and popularity of natural area were of least concern with only 1.97%, 1.96% and 3.92% participants pointing out to such answers.

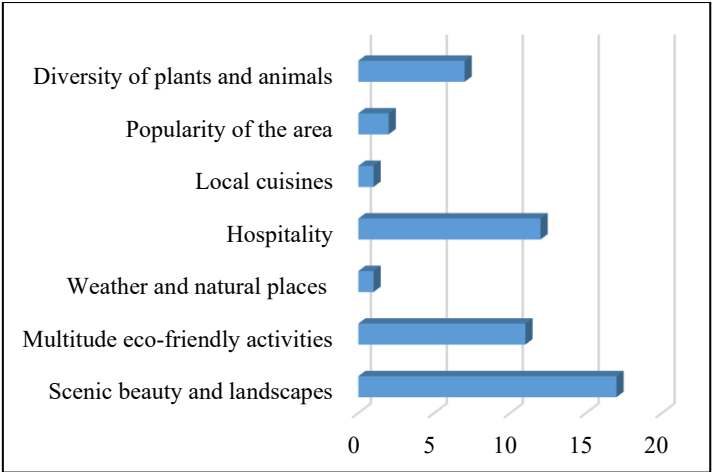


Fig.2. Motivation to Select an Ecotourism Destination

It shows that the young Indian tourists are much more sensitive to environmental aspects and are ready to take all such initiatives to implement ecotourism in its true sense.

4.2 BARRIERS TO TAKE PART IN ECOTOURISM ACTIVITIES

Barriers to take part in Ecotourism activities was ranked and analyzed by using Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance Test (Kendall's W) and  $\chi^2$  Test. The details are represented in the following Table.1.

Table.1. Barriers to Ecotourism Activities

Barriers to take part in Ecotourism Activities	Mean Score	Rank	Kendall's W
Low income	2.36	5	0.087
Transport problem	2.81	4	
Poor Infrastructure	2.92	3	
Safety measures	3.39	2	
Degradation of ecosystem	3.51	1	

From the table it is evident that the mean score for the barriers to take part in Ecotourism activities of the youth in India ranged from 2.36 to 3.51 out of 5. The 'degradation of ecosystems' ranked the top most with the mean score of 3.51. It was followed by 'safety measures' at the ecotourism sites with the mean score of 3.39. The mean score for 'poor infrastructure' (2.92) and transport problem (2.81) were recorded. The least concerned was low income with the mean score of 2.36.

Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance also referred as Kendall's W is a non-parametric statistic for rank correlation. It is used for assessing agreement among rankers. Kendall's W ranges from 0 indicating no agreement to 1 showing complete agreement. The calculated value of Kendall's W was found to be 0.087 which is closer to zero. This shows that there is very low similarity among the respondents in assigning the ranks.

The  $\chi^2$  value for the data for degrees of freedom 4 and p value of 0.001 was calculated to be 18.43. It was found to be much higher than table  $\chi^2$  value. Hence it is evident that there is low

similarity among the respondents and the sampling process is unbiased.

## 5. SUGGESTIONS

- Tourism authorities and all other stake holders should create awareness of the concept of ecotourism activities.
- Encourage tourists to participate in ecotourism activities in large numbers.
- Measures to be taken by administration in consensus with local people for pleasure of tourists without harming the flora and fauna.
- Effective implementation and monitoring of existing laws to use ecotourism sites sustainably.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, ecotourism is inevitable to achieve sustainable development goals. the research thrusts up on the socio-economic and environmental factors on ecotourism sites in India. The study reveals that there is tremendous potential for development and sustainable use of ecotourism. The study has put light on significant role of economic benefits employment generation given by operating ecotourism thereby improving standard of living of large number of disadvantaged section of people. The administration needs to work on barriers like low income, transport related issues, dearth of infrastructure, poor safety measures and lack of consciousness towards degradation of ecosystem. It is important to promote ecotourism opportunities to the young tourists on the media channels used by them. Despite of all such challenges, ecotourism has significantly contributed to uplifting local economies, cultural exchange and environmental

conservation. Working on the elimination of barriers while capitalizing on the benefits of ecotourism will be crucial for sustainable development of these remote areas.

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