

A Study On Growth & Development Of Wildlife Tourism In Rajasthan State

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Abstract:

Wildlife Tourism is one of the most emerging trends of tourism in India and all over the world and it is recently becomes a most important part of tourism industry. People are always fond of watching animals at their natural habitat, and for such activities love to visit sanctuaries and parks. This research is all about the wildlife sanctuaries and national parks extended to the beautiful area of Rajasthan state i.e. Ranthambhore National Park, Sariska National Park, Ghana National Park, Dara Wildlife Sanctuary and Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary etc. Each sanctuary and national park has its own reason to visit because of various different species. In this study, we will discuss about these sanctuaries and national parks and a primary & secondary data is collected to find out the number of tourists visit, their level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, problems faced by them while they are visiting wildlife sanctuaries and national parks and an explanation about what type of measures should be taken to overcome all such problems.

Keywords:

Wildlife Tourism, Wildlife Sanctuaries, National Parks, Conservation.

Introduction:

Wildlife tourism is a growing phenomenon, particularly in emerging economies such as India. Purported benefits of this growth in tourism include greater tourist interest in, and support for, conservation. Many researchers examined the interest, awareness and potential for this support in three prominent Indian national parks, Nagarhole, Kanha and Ranthambore. Park records indicate that most tourists (71%) are Indian nationals. Our surveys of 436 Indian tourists indicate that many were on their first visit to the park (71%) and are well educated (82% with bachelor and master degrees). Most tourists (88%) visited for <1 week and spent <USD 600 on their visit.

The main reasons for visiting parks were opportunities to see nature, tigers Panthers tigers and scenic beauty. Seventy-one percent of tourists indicated they are likely or somewhat likely to return to the parks but only 34% would be willing to visit the parks if tigers are absent. Forty-two percent indicated willingness to pay higher gate fees.

Surprisingly, those spending less on their trip were more willing to pay higher fees than those spending more. Sixty-five percent believed that local people benefit from the park, whereas in reality local benefits are few. Our results indicate the potential for the growth of domestic wildlife tourism and support for conservation among tourists but highlight the need for increasing education and awareness on the difficult realities of conservation in India.

In January this year, the latest tiger census revealed that India's big cat population had risen from 1704 in 2010 to 2226 in 2014. And with the rising number of tigers in the country, the tourism in various tiger reserves of the country has risen manifold as well. On the occasion of International World Tiger Day, we find out how wildlife tourism is catching up and what drives the trend.

With 99 national parks and 400 plus wildlife sanctuary, India is the home to various exotic fauna and flora species. One of the recent ongoing buzz around the town is the upward graph of India wildlife tours. Earlier wildlife tourism brought new challenges for the governmental bodies, but in the present time this rise is indeed supporting the conservation initiatives taken for the welfare of flora and fauna.

Factors behind increased wildlife tourism in India

There is a reason behind everything and the rise of Indian wildlife tours is no exception.

Though there are several factors behind the mounting rate of wildlife tour, mentioned below are the top two reasons:

Presence of rare fauna species

Various endangered and on the brink of extinction wildlife species inhabit in Indian national parks, sanctuaries and reserves. These rare species form major tourist attraction during wildlife expedition. The top species that work as the crowd puller are stated below:

- Bengal Tigers
- One Horned Rhinoceros
- Asiatic Lions

People love spending wildlife holidays in India because they can't afford to miss the glimpse of the most furious predator – tigers. Project Tiger 1973, was started at the Jim Corbett National Park (the oldest established national park of India) covering 9 tiger reserves. Presently around 43 tiger reserves fall under the respective project. Amidst all the reserves, The Sunderban National Park is acknowledged for forming the largest tiger reserve in India. Coming to One Horned Rhinoceros, then Kaziranga National Park, Assam is known for inhabiting the world's largest populace of this endangered species. Further, the Gir National Park is the only dwelling place of Asiatic Lions.

Beautiful Collection of Floral Species

The astounding beauty of Indian wildlife sanctuaries and parks is another reason behind rising tourism. Their lush green forests not only offer a shed to the wild species but also attracts tourists from different nooks and corners of the globe. It is the Sunderbans National Park and the Valley of Flowers National Park that are regarded as the paradise for botany lovers. Both of these national parks are renowned World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. On one hand where the Sunderbans National Park is recognized for having one of the largest Mangrove forests, on the other Valley of Flowers is known for owing meadows of endemic

alpine flowers. Further, there are various other sanctuaries that are acknowledged for showcasing the plethora of natural beauty.

Tourism aiding conservation

An India wildlife tour ultimately helps the respective authorities for further conservation initiatives. The fare collected via wildlife tourism is used for the maintenance of national parks and sanctuaries. In a study conducted in the year 2012 at three prominent national parks – Nagarhole, Kanha and Ranthambore, the facts revealed that tourist spends around \$600 in their visit. The study also showed that tourists are willing to re-visits and are even ready to pay higher entry fares as they simply love the tour. The funds thus collected are then utilized for the welfare of the wildlife dwelling in different parks and sanctuaries. In addition to the financial help, wildlife tourism also promotes awareness about fauna and flora species. These tours bring people closer to the nature and make them understand the ecological importance of wildlife.

This makes it crystal clear that the increase in wildlife tourism is a positive step towards conservation. In fact it would not be wrong to state that both wildlife tourism and conservation are interlinked. As tourism educates people about wildlife and its importance and thus is a part of conservation and on the other hand conservation allows wildlife enthusiasts to explore their world of dreams.

Like the two phases of a coin, wildlife tourism is also bejeweled with two perceptions. As per one opinion wildlife must be set apart from tourism, so as to protect the endangered species. On the other hand, a different school of thoughts promotes wildlife tourism as a means of conservation. Indian wildlife tourism supports the second set of opinion.

Review of Literature:

Sanjay Singh, Director, Dudhwa National Park, throws light on the rise in tourism at the park in the last year. "This season, we catered to almost 25,000 visitors during the season, which is an increase of almost 20% from last season. We have visitors from all over India and not just the state visiting the park. Keeping the rush in mind, we have earmarked the eco-tourism zones as per the direction of the Supreme Court and developmental activities are underway for the upcoming season."

Rajiv Arora, owner of Rayhaan Travels, tells us, "Among Lucknowites, packages to Dudhwa National Park and Corbett Tiger Reserve are extremely popular. Lately, Katarniya Ghat Wildlife Sanctuary, which is close to Bahraich, has also started emerging as a tourist destination. People have started taking shorter holidays. Weekend getaways to these places, which are within driving distance from Lucknow, completely fit the bill. In fact, during peak season, which is mostly during the summer vacations, it is very difficult to get bookings at these places as they're completely full."

Hina Zaidi, director, sales, Sheeraz Tours & Travels, adds, "In the last 2-3 years, we have seen a considerable rise in the interest of travellers to these reserves. During peak season, we get almost 40 queries per week for shortweekend packages to these places. A 3 nights 4 days package to a wildlife reserve is the most popular among vacationers. People have moved beyond holidays that include too much on their itinerary. They now prefer experiential holidays where one can relax."

From student groups to young honeymooners to even corporate executives, resorts at these sanctuaries are catering to all. Ratindra Pandey , Tourism Development Officer, UP Tourism, tells us, "Seeing the rise in the tourism at Dudhwa National Park in the last year or so, UP Tourism has elaborate plans for Dudhwa National Park. We have completely revamped our existing facility , the Tiger's Den, and are coming up with an improved one replete with luxury rooms and a multi-cuisine restaurant. Additionally , we have planned packages and organised tours for different groups like students, corporates and individuals which will kick off from November. Work is underway to install major signages and improve the infrastructure in the area."

We have organised packages for school groups, individuals and even corporate firms who take their employees for team-building exercises there. Corporate conferences at resorts in the wild are very common. The main reason is that the entire activity works out to be very economical. Packages start from almost `2500 per person per day and can be customised as per the client's demand, depending upon the type of place they want to stay. There are camps as well as luxury resorts," says Rajiv.

Schools in the city are known to take students on short trips to these sanctuaries for vacations. Says Priyank Simon, teacher at a prominent boys' school in the city, "Every year, invariably there is one group that goes to a wildlife sanctuary for a camping trip. We typically take the younger students, mainly Class 3 and 4, for these camps and organise various activities related to nature. Last December, we took around 45 students to Dudhwa and they stayed in tents for four days. We organised many nature-centric games and also taught the children about tiger conservation through plays that we staged there in the forest itself."

Vikas Singh, a city-based businessman and a wildlife enthusiast, has visited almost all the known tiger reserves in the country . "I've been visiting wildlife reserves religiously since the past 18 years. Dudhwa, Corbett, Katarniya, Kanha, Panna, Pench, Ranthambore, Bandhavgarh, and even sanctuaries in Mauritius - I've visited all of them. Every year, I go to Corbett and another chosen sanctuary for a trip. The feel of the jungle never fails to excite me. Even though I've spotted the tiger on 18-19 different occasions, it is an altogether different experience every time. I have a portfolio of almost 100 pictures of tiger sightings on different trips. My son is also a wildlife enthusiast and my wife has also grown to love the experience now," he says.

Vikas Jain, an executive with a real estate firm, was part of his company's teambuilding activity at Corbett National Park earlier this year. "Our company took a group of around 40 executives who had achieved their targets to Jim Corbett for three days. We were all staying in a resort with a number of in-house activities planned for us. A safari was also a part of the itinerary . Even though we didn't spot the tigers, it turned out to be a good opportunity to unwind," says Vikas.

While budget holidays to nearby tiger reserves are more common, Lucknowites are now also opening up to the idea of luxury holidays in the wild, and looking at reserves like Ranthambore and Bandhavgarh as vacation options. "Wildlife enthusiasts have now started travelling to places like Ranthambore and Bandhavgarh, in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh respectively , for tiger sightings. Reserves around Bandhavgarh, mainly Baghvan, Mahua Kothi and Pashangarh near Khajuraho have also become popular among Lucknowites. People

typically go there for luxury vacations, as tariffs at the resorts there can go up to almost `30,000 per night. Destination birthdays and anniversaries there are very popular. In spite of the high prices, we have almost 20 groups going there per month from the city during peak season, which is from October to June," says Gagan Gurnani, owner of Dreamway Travels.

Sharad Thadani of Mayfair Travels, adds, "Ranthambore National Park in Rajasthan has emerged as a favoured travelling destination in the last couple of years. A lot of foreign celebrities are also known to visit there, which has fuelled the interest among local travellers. They are willing to undertake short luxury vacations to the high-end cottages in the reserve."

Prarthana Dalmia, a dentistry student in the city, went for a short family vacation to Ranthambore National Park recently. "We hadn't taken a family vacation in ages due to unmatched schedules. So my parents, brother, sister-in-law and I went on a short three-day trip to Ranthambore recently and the experience was fabulous. The point is not just a jungle safari; the entire experience of staying in a beautiful resort in the wild is beautiful. It really helped us unwind," she says.

Wildlife Resources of Rajasthan:

Three wildlife sanctuaries and National Parks are selected across Rajasthan- Ranthambore, Sariska and Ghana National Park of Rajasthan - where visitor numbers vary from 74,000 to 154,000 people per year. These parks are among India's premier tiger viewing destinations.

Tourists play a critical role to play in India as wildlife tourism continues to grow in leaps and bounds. Visitors' concern and interest in Indian wildlife sanctuaries and national parks along with financial prowess can become a boon or death knell for conservation. There is a critical need to encourage visitors to behave better inside parks (noise, clothing, trash), and respect the environment they are in. Interest in tigers is wonderful, but obsession with a single species can do serious harm to the other wildlife and wild places we are trying to conserve.

Conclusion:

Wildlife Tourism is one of the most emerging trends of tourism in India and all over the world and it is recently becomes a most important part of tourism industry. People are always fond of watching animals at their natural habitat, and for such activities love to visit sanctuaries and parks. This research is all about the wildlife sanctuaries and national parks extended to the beautiful area of Rajasthan state i.e. Ranthambore National Park, Sariska National Park, Ghana National Park, Dara Wildlife Sanctuary and Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary etc. Each sanctuary and national park has its own reason to visit because of various different species. In this study, we will discuss about these sanctuaries and national parks and a primary & secondary data is collected to find out the number of tourists visit, their level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, problems faced by them while they are visiting wildlife sanctuaries and national parks and an explanation about what type of measures should be taken to overcome all such problems.

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