

Eco-Tourism: Its impact in the conservation and development of Kaziranga National Park, Assam

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Abstract: Environmental pollution possesses a serious threat to life on earth and this is true not only to the areas where there is a great concentration of industry but also to those areas where there is a concentration of tourism activities. The new concept of tourism popularly termed as “Ecotourism” came into existence where utmost consideration is given to the conservation and development of the natural and socio-cultural environment in a particular tourist destination. In this paper an attempt has been made to study Kaziranga National Park on the principles of eco-tourism concept practices by Forest department and related organization for the conservation of the park. This paper also investigates the environmental impact caused by the development of tourism in Kaziranga National Park and also to search the path to minimize the negative impact on the environment by the use of eco-tourism concept.

Keywords: Environmental pollution, industry, eco-tourism, natural and socio-cultural environment, tourist destination.

I. Introduction

Tourism Industry in today’s context is considered as one of the fastest growing industry of the world. As per “United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Tourism Highlights, 2013 editions”, in 2012, international tourism generated US\$1.3 trillion in export earnings and international tourist arrivals grew by 5% in 2013 to 1.087 billion. UNWTO also forecasts a growth in international tourist arrivals of between 4% and 4.5% in 2014. In the earlier times, the Romans practiced travel activities for pleasure purpose which was confined to the wealthy people but gradually with the development of industrialized societies in Western Europe and North America, large scale tourism had become a phenomenon among the masses. The introduction of railways, waterways, road and air transport have also boost up in the development of modern tourism. Now-a-days tourism has come within the reach of the common man and hence more and more people are travelling thereby increasing tourism related activities to all the parts of the world.

II. Eco-tourism: The new emerging concept

The “tourism industry”, though it may be considered as “smokeless industry” since it has the capability of earning foreign exchange for a country without exporting any tangible product, but the tourism activities in a particular tourist destination has a great capacity to pollute the environment as would any smoke ridden industry does. Today, environmental pollution possesses a serious threat to life on earth and this is true not only to the areas where there is a great concentration of industry but also to those areas where there is a concentration of tourism activities. Due to which a new concept of tourism popularly termed as “eco-tourism” came into existence which means tourism about nature, in nature and for nature. It is a concept used in tourism industry which gives more emphasis on environmental principles in the process of tourism activities in a particular tourist destination. Eco-tourism impact on the environment of particular tourist destination could be seen in the following ways.

1. It encourages the protection of the natural environment.
2. It helps in the development of economy of the local communities.
3. It provides a nature based environmental and cultural education experience for tourist.

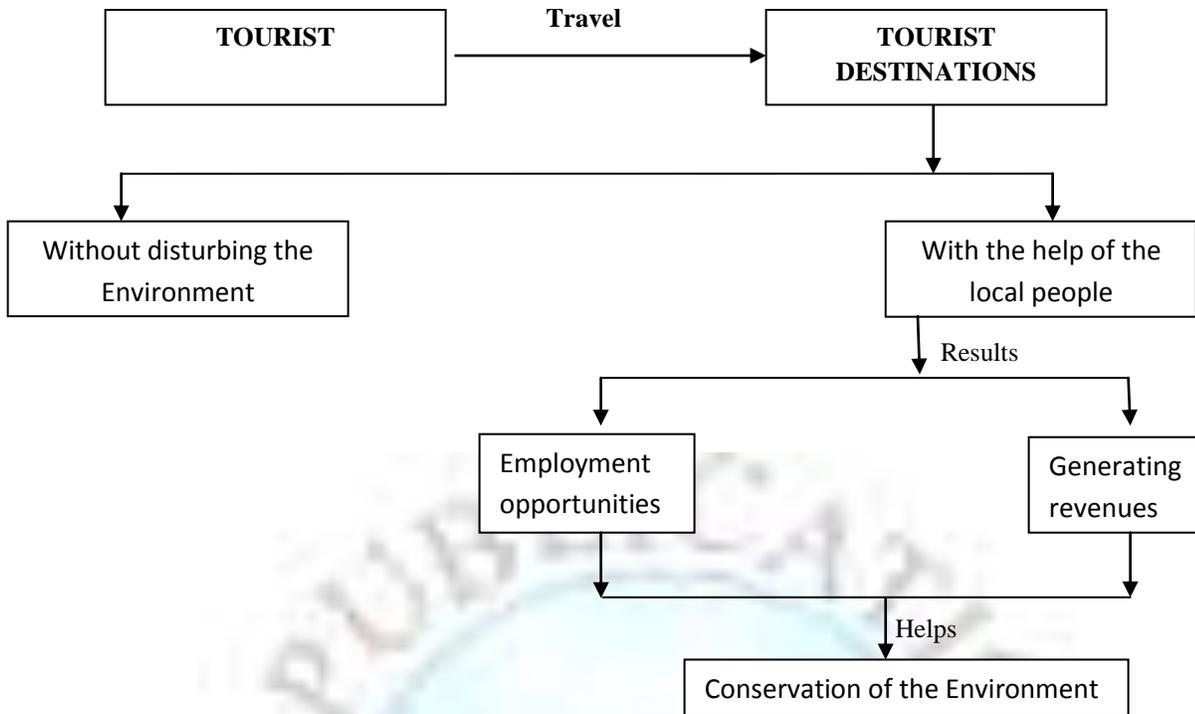


Figure 1: Concept of Eco-Tourism (Compiled by the authors)

III. Methodology

The study is based on primary as well as secondary sources of data. The primary data are collected through personal interview, schedules and questionnaires. As one of the objectives of this study is to explore the contribution of tourism industry to local economy and employment, therefore, questionnaires are mainly distributed to local people, visitors, employees and owners of different resorts, hotel restaurant, shop-keepers of different shops for the collection of data. Data are also collected from the Forest office and Tourist offices to examine the principles of Eco-tourism practiced in Kaziranga National Park. The secondary data are collected from different books, magazine, newspaper, journal and different website

IV. Kaziranga: The study area as an Eco-tourist destination

Kaziranga National Park was established in 1905 is a world Heritage Site in Assam and has been the theme of several books, documentaries and songs. It is a name known for its success in the conservation story of the one horned Indian rhinoceros and provided habitat for a number of threatened species of migratory birds. A symbol of dedication for the conservation of animals and their habitat, Kaziranga with a National Park status represents the single largest established protected area within the North east Brahmaputra Valley Biological province to provide a long term viable conservation of the rhinos (Rodgers, Panwar et. al. 2002). Kaziranga National Park is an outstanding example representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of ecosystem and communities of plants and animals. Kaziranga National Park possesses the world's largest population of: -

- ❖ The Great Indian One horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros Unicornis*)-1855 (2005)
- ❖ Asiatic Wild Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*) –1431 (2001)
- ❖ Eastern Race of Swamp Deer (*Cervus duvauceli ranjitsinghi*) – 468(2000)
- ❖ Highest ecological density of Tigers (*Panthera Tigris*) (one per 5sq.km.)-86in 2000
- ❖ Significant population of Asiatic Elephant (*Elephas maximus*)-1046 in 2002
- ❖ The junction of the East Asia / Australia flyway and Indo-Asian flyway exhibits considerable diversity in avifaunal species – 478 species recorded, including 25 globally threatened and 21 near threatened species.

Kaziranga contains the most important and significant natural habitat for conservation of biological diversity. According to Jain & Sastry(1983), the three main types of vegetations are:

- (i) Alluvial inundated grasslands
- (ii) Tropical wet evergreen forests
- (iii) Tropical semi-evergreen forest

Kaziranga is a land of wide varieties of wild animals. The big mammals like the Elephant, Tiger, Leopard, Indian Bison, Buffalo, Sambar, Barking Deer, Swamp deer, Hog Deer and Wild Boar apart from the Rhino are encountered most frequently. Gangetic Dolphin another mammalian Species is seen in the Brahmaputra, Bhengrai and Diphaloo rivers. Because of thick and impenetrable vegetation, it is difficult to spot wild animals easily in the woodland, but the numerous footprints and pugmarks over the sandy riverbanks and muddy swamps remain a testimony to the richness of the area. Kaziranga enjoy a pleasant climate throughout the year with a cool winter from November to January and a warm summer. Viewing wildlife at Kaziranga with breath taking beautiful landscape makes a trip to this park a complete jungle adventure. A tourist can see the park in the back of the elephant or in the jeep. The elephant and jeep safari is a lifetime experience for the tourist. Tourists can spend their night in a beautiful resort, Lodge, forest IB, which are decorated in an Assamese architectural style.

V. Eco-tourism principles practiced in the Kaziranga National Park

Eco-tourism in Kaziranga is still in a very nascent stage, but there are conscious efforts to save the natural Eco-system, culture and heritage of the indigenous people. Some of the principles practiced by the Forest Department of Kaziranga for the conservation of the park comes under Eco-tourism practiced which are discussed below: -

- (i) Use of all non-degradable litter such as empty bottles, tins, plastic bag inside the park is not permitted. If somebody use they have to carry back with them.
- (ii) Be accompanied by a guide authorized by the park authority
- (iii) Tourist should wear inconspicuous "Khaki", olive or gray cloth. Bright cloths particularly white, black and red are not advisable.
- (iv) Tourists are not permitted to enter in the core area.
- (v) Maintaining silence while visiting the park. Radio, tape-recorder and musical instruments are prohibited inside the park.
- (vi) Drive off the road, overtake other vehicles and blow horn inside the park is not permitted. Drive vehicle only through the specified routes.
- (vii) The maximum speed limit of the vehicle is 20 Km/hrs.
- (viii) Taking away flora in the forms of cutting, seeds or root is illegal.
- (ix) Cooking anything inside the park is not allowed.
- (x) Smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol is strictly prohibited.
- (xi) Fishing and trapping of wildlife with any kind of implement be prohibited.

For preserving and promoting the local culture, Kaziranga arranged "Elephant Festival" annually. In these festival different types of cultural show performed by indigenous tribes and handicrafts, traditional dishes are displayed for sale. This gives an opportunity for foreigners as well as domestic tourist to experience the culture of the local people of the destination. A forest guard is accompanying with every jeep and acts as a guide. An amount of Rs.50 is charged for this guard in the booking center. This rupee is directly gone to the fund of Kaziranga National Park Staff Welfare Society. This act comes under the conservation of the park by helping the front line staffs (the dedicated conservationists). There is an assumption that eco-tourism generate revenue that will be used to protect and conserve the natural environment. From this point of view it can be said that the forest department of Kaziranga practices the Eco-tourism principles by helping the conservationist. An elephant safari in the early hours of dawn provides an excellent opportunity for viewing wildlife from close range. The elephants are trained and controlled by authorized mahouts (trainers) who guide visitors through the park. It is one of the examples of eco-tourism practiced in Kaziranga.

VI. Eco-tourism and its impact on the conservation of Kaziranga

Eco-tourism has an impact on natural eco-system, but more importantly, it offers a way to encourage conservation in ecologically fragile region. For the conservation of natural eco-system Kaziranga accommodate all the tourists outside the National Park boundary i.e. all the resorts, tourist lodges, Forest I.B. are established outside the Park, so that the impact on the environment of the park is due to tourist activities are minimized. Eco-tourism focuses on local culture and tradition. It provides an opportunity to the visitors to learn and know the culture and heritage of that locality. For sustaining and supporting the native cultures of Kaziranga most of the resorts and the tourist lodge operating by Assam Tourism

Department and Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) organized Bihu dance, Jhumur dance, Satriya Dance programmes frequently. By doing so, the tourists become aware of the local culture also help in its sustainability. For sustainable development of the natural eco-system of the Park, the Forest Department introduced some rules and regulation, which can be called as eco-tourism principles. Forest Department restrict tourist to enter in the core area of park, because these areas are natural breeding habitat of the wild animals and presence of human being will create disturbances. Tourism discourages poaching because it places economic value on wildlife and protection of natural resource. Kaziranga also adopted the anti-poaching strategy and get success in wildlife conservation.

Eco-tourism also endeavors to encourage and support the diversity of local economies for which the tourism related income is important. Local peoples are eco-nominally benefited by providing jeep safari and elephant safari to the tourists. Large numbers of people are engaged in the various resorts, restaurants, hotel, tourist lodge and other types of accommodation for providing services to the tourists. Some people convert their homes into lodge to provide services to the tourists. A market is growing day by day with various types of shops in the main entry gate of Kaziranga National Park. Because of tourism development, tourism creates economic opportunity for the local communities of Kaziranga are an integral part of eco-tourism. If the local people are benefited economically and socially then it becomes a positive factor for conservation of the environment of the destination. In Kaziranga also local people are engaged and opening their employments in different ways. Table1 and Table2 give an overview of the benefits of the local people of Kaziranga for which the data were collected by authors during the field survey in the month of January & Febuary, 2012.

Table:-1 Total numbers of people associated with the Jeep and Elephant Safari in Kohora and Bagori range

Types of Safari	Range	Owner	Driver/Mahout	Total People
Jeep	Kohora	53	21	74
Elephant		17	17	34
Jeep	Bagori	09	03	12
Elephant		11	11	22
Total				142

Source: -Field Survey

Table: - 2 Total people employed in the Accommodation sector in the Kohora range.

Name of Resort/ Hotel/Lodge	No of People	Total
Private Sector		
Wild Grass Resort	102	235
Green Reed	10	
Network Travel	30	
Bonhabi resort	28	
Jupuri Cottage	24	
Dhanshree Resort	15	
Unicorn Cottage	05	
Heritage Cottage	04	
Shanti Lodge	03	
Mudhuban	03	
Maa Kamala	03	
Florican Lodge	03	
(Services provides by family member)		
The park resort	03	
Guest House	02	
Govt. Sector and Corporation		
Assam Tourism (including Bonani Banashru, Kunjaban, Aranaya lodge)	69	80
Jungle Camp (ITDC & ATDC)	07	
Forest IB	02	
Soil Conservation IB	02	
Total		315

Source: Field Survey

Conclusion

Kaziranga National park occupies an important position in the tourism industry of Assam. It is well famous and thousand of tourist, both domestic and international, visits Kaziranga every year. The Eco-tourism concept could be applicable fully in the park only when all players of tourism industry i.e. the govt., the travel related organization, the tourist and the host population became aware of the beneficial effects of Eco-tourism.

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