

SUSTAINABLE WILDLIFE TOURISM WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO ECO FRIENDLY RESORTS/HOTELS -A CASE STUDY OF CORBETT NATIONAL PARK, UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT

Background: This paper discusses the sustainable wildlife tourism with specific reference to resorts/hotels in and around Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand. **Methods:** This study is a part of detailed survey of the park and elaborates the eco-friendliness of these resorts/hotels. 69 (95.8%) resorts/hotels responded in the study. **Results:** It was observed that only 24.6% resorts/hotels have eco-friendly building, 27.5% have energy management system, 5.7% have water recycling, 14.4% use recycled materials, 37.6% train their staff for eco- friendliness and 27.5% resorts/ hotels have written guidelines for the guests.

Key Words: Wildlife Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Eco friendliness.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the oldest, largest and fastest growing economic activities in the world. Economy of many countries is totally dependent on tourism activities. There have been various organizations and authors who tried to define tourism but it is indeed difficult to see any common agreement between all these definitions given for tourism. However, there are some widely accepted definitions that are recognized and followed universally.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourists as people who "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited".

According to Hunziker and Krapf (1941), the tourism is defined as people who travel "the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, insofar as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity."

The Tourism Society of England's gave definition of tourism as: "Tourism is the temporary, short-term movement of people to destination outside the places where they normally live and work and their activities during the stay at each destination. It includes movements for all purposes."

In 1981, the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism defined tourism in terms of particular activities selected by choice and undertaken outside the home.

In its "Recommendations on Tourism Statistics", the United Nations classified three forms of tourism in 1994: Domestic Tourism which involves residents of the given country traveling only within this country; Inbound tourism, involving non-residents traveling in the given country; and Outbound tourism, involving residents traveling in another country.

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism is the tourism ecologically supportable in the long term. The very importance of sustainable tourism lies in its motives to conserve the resources and increase the value of local culture and tradition. Sustainable tourism is a responsible tourism intending to generate employment and income along with alleviating any deeper impact on environment and local culture.

Characteristics of Sustainable Tourism

- Sustainable Tourism tries its utmost to maintain the importance of local culture and tradition.
- Sustainable Tourism is informative, as it doesn't only let tourists know about the destinations but also it helps locals know about the culture and civilization of tourists.
- This kind of tourism is aimed to conserve the resources of destinations where one is visiting to.
- Sustainable Tourism seeks deeper involvement of locals, which provides local people an opportunity and makes their living. Above all, Sustainable Tourism stresses pointedly upon the integrity of the tourist places.

Wildlife Tourism

Tourism is having many forms ranging from religious tourism to adventure tourism. Wildlife Tourism is one of the forms of tourism which may be high volume mass tourism or low volume and low impact tourism. It may be domestic or international tourism. It may have sustainability or may not have.

Wildlife tourism is defined as "tourism that includes, as a principal aim, the consumptive non-consumptive use of wild animals in natural surroundings". Wildlife tourism often involves not only seeing wild animals in their natural habitat but visiting difficult forest areas.

Many studies have been done in the past about the impact of tourism on wildlife, the role of tourists and travel operators in wildlife tourism, the contribution of hotels and resorts in wildlife conservation and eco-friendly tourism.

Study conducted by Susanna Curtin in "Managing the wildlife tourism experience: The importance of tour leaders" focuses on three important aspects of this type of travel. First, the tangible benefits of the tourist experience; second, the importance of the tour leader as the interface between the product and the tourist; and finally, tourist perceptions of their potential environmental and social impacts.

Asia-Pacific Environmental Innovation Strategies (APEIS) conducted research on Innovative and Strategic Policy Option (RISPO)- Good Practices Inventory, Community Based Tourism in Corbett National Park and Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary (India): A Case Study of Multi stakeholder Tourism Planning for the CBN (Corbett National Park, Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary, National) Landscape.

The CBN Ecotourism Initiative was a planning activity. However, several actions have resulted. Major impacts with regards to conservation and development from community- based tourism were as follows-

- There has been an increase in the awareness about the natural and cultural heritage and tourism issues in host communities.
- Night treks for tourists have been voluntarily discontinued in Camp Kyari as the villagers realized that they disturbed wild animals.
- Toilet / bathrooms developed for home stays helped with sanitation. Villagers have taken action to maintain a clean environment.
- Interpretation has increased at all the four sites.

Corbett National Park

The Reserve area was named as "Hailey National Park" in 1936. This was renamed in 1954-55 as 'Ramganga National Park' and again in 1955-56 as 'Corbett National Park'. It is the oldest National Park of India. It was one of the nine Tiger Reserves created at the launch of the Project Tiger in 1973. The original area of the Park was 323.75 sq.km. to which 197.07 sq.km. was added later. An area of 797.72 sq. km. was added as buffer of the Corbett Tiger Reserve in 1991. This area includes the whole of Kalagarh Forest Division (including 301.18 sq. km. area of Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary), 96.70 sq. km. of Ramnagar Forest Division and 89 sq.km. The administrative control over the entire area is that of the Field Director of the Reserve. (projecttiger.nic.in)

Although the population of tiger has increased from 123 in 1993 to 162 in 2009 but excessive wildlife tourism in the area is causing harm to tiger population. Jairam Ramesh, the Environment Minister, said that unregulated tourism was as much a threat to tiger population as poaching. He said that he would clamp down on "mushrooming luxury resorts around tiger reserves". He singled out Corbett National Park as a habitat that had degenerated because of tourism. At least four tigers have died there in the past two months, according to reports. (Timesonline, 28.04.2010)

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire was devised for the survey. The questionnaire consisted of the questions related to eco-friendly building, use of energy management system, recycling of water, use of recycled material, training of staff for eco-friendliness and presence of written guidelines for the guests. The questions were having the choice as "yes" or "no".

The survey was conducted in December 2009 along with the survey of resorts/ hotels/ lodges/ camps/ guest houses in an around Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand, for Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Total 72 resorts and hotels were surveyed in and around Corbett National Park.

RESULTS

Out of existing 80 resorts and hotels in and around the Corbett National Park, data was collected from 72 (90%) resorts and hotels. 3 resorts did not respond to the questionnaire making 95.8% (69 resorts/hotels) respond rate. The owners or general managers were asked to fill the questionnaire. The responses of the resorts/ hotels to the various questions are summarized in table 1.

Table 1:Ecofriendly measures taken by resorts/hotels

Questions	Yes	No	Did not Respond
Eco-friendly Building	17	50	2
Energy Management System	19	49	1
Water Recycling	4	64	1
Use of Recycled Material	10	58	1
Training of Staff for eco-friendliness	26	43	-
Written Guidelines for the guest	19	50	-

In the reply of the question whether the building of the resorts/hotel is eco-friendly or not, 2 resorts did not respond to the questions. Only 17 (24.6%) resorts/hotels said yes while 50 (72.4%) resorts/ hotels do not have eco-friendly building.

Only 19 resorts/ hotels (27.5%) have some kind of energy management system implemented while 49 resorts /hotels (71%) do not have any energy saving devices or energy management system in practice. In the case of water recycling, only 4 resorts/ hotels (5.7%) recycle the waste water to the gardens etc. otherwise majority of them i.e. 64 (92.7%) resorts/ hotels do not have provision for recycling of water. Majority (84%) resorts / hotels do not use any recycled material while only 10 (14.4%) resorts/ hotels use some kind of recycled products in guest supplies or amenities.

In the response of the staff training for eco- friendliness 26 resorts / hotels (37.6%) donot conduct training for the staff and 43 (62.4%) resorts/ hotels do not have such kind of programmes. Only 19 (27.5%) resorts / hotels have written guidelines to be placed in the room for the guests while 50 resorts / hotels (72.5%) do not have any thing in writing for the guest.

CONCLUSION

Present work was conducted on behalf of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India wherein survey of resorts/ hotels/ lodges/ camps/ guest houses in an around Corbett National Park was conducted to check the eco-friendly attribute. This study may not cover all the aspects of sustainability but certainly

provides an insight to the role of resorts / hotels in using eco-friendliness measures in relation to the wildlife tourism. In order to understand the role of resorts / hotels in sustainable wildlife tourism, it is recommended to have a detailed study of the resorts / hotels in a number of national parks.

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