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Assessment of ecotourism potential of Dooru tehsil and its environs, Anantnag, J & K

Naik Yaseera, Sanjay Sharma*

Department of Environmental Sciences, University of Jammu, Tarwi-180006.

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries as well as major source of foreign exchange. Tourism based on the natural environment i.e., eco-tourism is a vital growing segment of the tourism industry. Eco-tourism has attracted increased attention in the recent years as a means of economic development and environmental conservation. Kashmir, one of the beautiful places on earth is one of the regions of India which offers variety of experiences to the tourists. Thus there is the dire need to tap the eco-tourism potential of the area. The present study was carried out in Dooru Tehsil of Anantnag district as the area is famous for its natural beauty, temples, shrines and other places of heritage which serve as a source of attraction for tourists. After categorization and weighing of potentially relevant physical, biological and socio-cultural resources following the Ecotourism Opportunity Spectrum (ECOS) method, about ten potential sites were identified in the area among which many sites are having good eco-tourism potential. Eco-tourism promotion in these areas will serve as best income source for the locals in a eco-friendly manner. Such eco-tourism projects will help in direct and indirect improvement of income levels, living standards of the locals, reduction of pressures on the natural resources and protection of the ecological balance in the area.

*Corresponding Author: Sanjay Sharma ✉ sansharman@rediffmail.com

Introduction

Tourism is one of the most important ways through which potential of various land use patterns can be tapped. Tourism is a collection of activities, services and industries that delivers a travel experience including transportation, accommodation, eating and drinking establishments, and other hospitality services provided for individuals travelling away from home. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) claims that tourism is currently world's largest industry with annual revenues of over three trillion dollars (Parilla *et al.*, 2007). The WTO defines tourism as all travels that include a stay of at least one night, but less than one year away from home (Shaw and Williams, 2000). Tourism has a potential to contribute in a positive manner to socio-economic achievements (Liu *et al.*, 2013). As far as economic benefits are concerned, tourism certainly constitutes an opportunity for economic development, diversification and growth of related activities in developing countries. It is a catalyst for economic development and is rightly called the fourth dimension of modern economics. Tourism is a composite phenomenon and a human activity of great economic, socio-cultural, educational and political significance (Singh, 1989). Despite tourism's economic benefits especially in parts of the developing world, where it is the only source of foreign exchange, the tourism industry can have so many negative impacts on the local ecological, social and cultural climates of the area (Mirsanjari *et al.*, 2013). In many developing countries even the financial success of tourism is often overshadowed by effects of tourism on local economy caused due to over exploitation of local natural resources. Due to these drawbacks of mass tourism and realizing the uncommon catastrophe that modern tourism generates, the environmentalists emphasize the need for making resilience to nature. The growing concern for cleaner environment has fostered a strong desire on them to share the experience at destinations well known for their natural and cultural attraction. The only option is nature based tourism or eco-tourism,

viz. tourism depending on natural attraction in pollution free environment.

The concept of eco-tourism was developed in the 1980's with the purpose of controlling tourism and its adverse effects on natural areas (World Trade Organization, 2002). Eco-tourism has become a vital part of sustainable community development and at present is the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry (Weinburg *et al.*, 2002). According to the UNEP, eco-tourism involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objectives of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery, wild plants and animals as well as the existing cultural aspects (both past as well as present) found in the areas. Ecological tourism implies a scientific, aesthetic, philosophical approach, although the ecological tourists are not required to be professional scientists, artists or philosophers (UNEP, 1992).

The geographical diversity of Jammu and Kashmir provides many opportunities for eco-tourism activities and the state has a very high eco-tourism potential which needs to be assessed. The present study is an attempt to assess the potential sites for eco-tourism in Dooru tehsil of Anantnag and its environs, J&K. The study area is also known as the "Gateway of Kashmir" having vast natural resources ranging from snow capped mountains, blooming plains, rolling streams, dense forests, mountains, shrines, temples and other heritage sites which can be important destinations for eco-tourists.

Materials and methods

Study area

The study area is located in the Jammu and Kashmir state of western Himalayas, India. The state is regarded as the crown of India (latitude $32^{\circ} 15'$ and $37^{\circ} 05'$ N and Longitude $72^{\circ} 35'$ and $80^{\circ} 20'$ E). It covers an area of 2,22,236 Km² and accounts for 6.7 percent of the total geographic area of the country. This state has international boundary with Afganistan, Pakistan and China and is contiguous to

the states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh towards south. The state comprises of three administrative regions (Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh). Anantnag district, in which the study area is located, is situated at a distance of 55 km from summer capital Srinagar. The total area of the district is 3984 sq. km with a population of 11.70 lakh (2001 Census). Due to variability in the topography, altitude and aspects, there is diversity of climatic conditions. The area being the part of Kashmir valley falls under temperate climatic region. The temperature varies from maximum of 33°C to minimum of -3.5°C. The area experiences a heavy snowfall during the winter season which further adds to the beauty of area.

Methods

The literature, including written and graphic, related to the area was studied to gather the information about the study area. Formal interviews with the general public and senior citizens were also conducted to get additional information about the area. On the basis of the observations made and the literature studied many spots having potential for eco-tourism were selected and thoroughly studied for information and data collection.

To collect the data a total of 100 respondents representing different socio-economic and occupational groups were interviewed using structured questionnaires. The selection of respondents was done randomly to avoid any bias. Three types of questionnaires designed for the purpose were used for three respective groups such as tourists, locals and officials. The collected information was evaluated using framework of ECOS (Eco-tourism Opportunity Spectrum) method (Boyd and Butler, 1996).

The ECOS method used for the present study is applicable to solve the problems related to the protection and management of natural areas. The various sub-components of ECOS method are specified under (Boyd and Butler, 1996):

- Acceptability
- Relationship between eco-tourism and other resources
- Attraction in the region
- Availability of tourism infrastructure
- Status of user's capability and knowledge
- Degree of social interaction
- Acceptable degree of effects and control on utilization
- Type of management development for long term protection of the area.

The eco-tourism potential of the study area was determined and compared on the basis of biological, physical, socio-cultural and economic structural components of the ECOS method (Acikoz *et al.*, 2010). The sub components which can have effect on protection and maintenance of eco-tourism were evaluated. The sub components identified were further divided into twenty criteria for the determination of the ecotourism potential in the study area (Table 1). Each criterion was given a score from 1 to 4 on the basis of their significance. Thus a maximum of 80 cumulative points and a minimum of 20 cumulative points can be scored by every site. On the basis of the cumulative scores scored by each site, the various sites were categorized in to four categories such as: Weak centers, with score less than 35; Moderate centers with scores between 36 to 50; Strong centers with score between 51 to 65; and very strong centers with score of greater than 65.

Table 1. Criteria developed in order to carry out the ECOS method in the study area (adopted from Aciksoz *et al.*, 2010)

Components	Criteria
Biological- Physical structure	Topographical structure diversity ¹
	Scenic beauty ¹
Socio-cultural structure	Forest cover ¹
	Wild life diversity ¹
	Young population potential ¹
	Education status ¹
	Consciousness for ecotourism ¹
	Educational institutions ¹
	Fisheries ¹
	Human resources ¹
	Health services ¹
	Utility infrastructure (electricity, water, communication, etc) ¹
	Distance to the central town ²
	Historical-archeological sites ¹
	Religious sites ¹
Road network ¹	
Accommodation for eco-tourists ¹	
Economic structure	Water resources ¹
	Plant production ¹
	Animal production ¹

1 high: 4, Fair: 3, low: 2, none: 1; 2 very close: 4, close: 3, far: 2, very far: 1

Results and discussion

For the assessment of the eco-tourism potential of the study area, various weaknesses and the strengths to assess the eco-tourism potential of the study area was identified (table 2). The basic strengths attributing to the eco-tourism potential and development in the study area are the natural landscape and traditional cultural composition of the region whereas, the main weaknesses observed were unawareness towards eco-tourism, lack of promotion of eco-tourism. The cumulative scores obtained after evaluating each site using ECOS method are shown in table 3. The categorization of potential sites on the basis of the cumulative scores scored by each site is shown in Table 4. The table 4 reveals that out of a total of ten

sites identified eight sites fell under moderate category, whereas only two sites were found to fall under strong category. According to the categorization none of the site falls under very strong and weak categories. The results show that all the sites in the study area posses almost all the criteria needed for development of eco-tourism. More over the tourists are already visiting the area for religious, cultural and historical aspects as well as recreational purposes, which leaves lot of scope for the sites to be developed as eco-tourism centers by providing some additional facilities and infrastructure. In the evaluation made in scope of ECOS, the different sites are also listed in table 4.

Table 2. Strengths and weaknesses of the study area in terms of Eco- tourism potential

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Natural forest containing rich biodiversity	1. Insufficient experience on natural resources for tourism facilitators
2. Existence of natural resources like springs, snow clad mountains	2. Undeveloped basic utilities infrastructure
3. Local people’s willingness to take part in eco-tourism activities	3. Lack of promotion
4. Variable seasons	4. Unawareness of the part of areas with eco-tourism potential
5. Endemic flora	5. Insufficient health services and financial resources
6. Closeness to national highway	6. High rate of unemployment.
7. Historical and ethnic values like shrines and temples	7. Shortage of qualified personnel for eco-tourism activities

Table 4. Ecotourism potential of the Villages.

Village Name	ECOS points	
Verinag	61	
Panzath	55	Weak sites = < 35
Hajided	48	
Wasaknag	47	Moderate sites = 36-50
Lukbawan	46	
Malikabad	45	Strong sites = 51- 65
Khanebarne	43	Very strong sites = > 65
Umwah	43	
Kabamarag	42	
Gutligund	42	

Kashmir has always been the source of attraction for the tourists from every corner of the world. In the recent years there has been a change towards the ecotourism. However an efficient development of ecotourism requires appropriate management. Ecotourism demands greater environmental quality and in order to minimize various adverse effects careful measures are to be taken. There are two major problems with respect to ecotourism: (1) to achieve ecological integrity of the ecotourism resource and (2) to increase and ensure the consistency of quality of the recreation experiences for the eco tourists (Boyd and Butler, 1996).

Conclusion

O the basis of the study It can be concluded that the study area is having a very good ecotourism potential and has all the characteristics essential and significant for the development of eco-tourism sites such as natural beauty, diverse landscapes comprising of water bodies, forest covered mountains, snow clad mountains, lush green agricultural fields, blossoming orchards, diversity in flora and fauna, temples and shrines of importance. In order to optimally use the area and preserve the natural environment, a proper management as well as a correct land use selection is required. On the basis of the observations made it may be pertinent to mention that there are other important factors such as existence and adequacy of

human resources and the services to define the areas having eco-tourism potential. Development of eco-tourism in the area will be a positive step for the conservation of the environment of the area. In order to develop this sector there is a need to further develop proper management and action plan. Eco-tourism as a sustainable tool can be promoted in the study area from a community perspective and it is expected to provide benefits that may ultimately enhance local support for the conservation of natural resources.

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