

Empowering Eco Tourism Mechanism – Awareness to the Local Community

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Abstract

Tamil Nadu is one of the states in India which has a rich resource potential and also has the ability to attract the different kinds of tourists from all over the world. The location of Tamil Nadu geographically has made it an important tourist destination. The landscapes, wild reserves, forests and a very rich cultural heritage make tourists love the place. The state is located right between the Western and Eastern Ghats with the coastline of 1076kms making it the third largest in India. It has a combination of elements like the beaches, hill resorts, tropical climate, ancient culture and friendliest people making the state a fascinating tourist destination. According to the Bureau of Indian Standards, Tamil Nadu is said to be grouped under the low seismic hazard zone.

Introduction

The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as a way of traveling with responsibility to the natural destinations that conserves the environment. Moreover, it also considers the well being of the locals and deals with the interpretation and education. The awareness of ecotourism is only known globally and nationally. The tourists and the travelers tend to explore the world but fail to explore their own locales. As in the world one find many tourism spots, one must develop the ability to appreciate the ecotourism sites locally. A person living in a particular locality or district is aware of famous tourist places but is ignorant of the many environment

friendly ecotourism places in their own district. To create awareness in every district of Tamilnadu about the necessity and benefit of ecotourism, we can have the following practices.

Documentation

Every district has its own culture and its own varied specialties. There might be so many beautiful and unknown locations in a district. Some locals might have knowledge about these different places but the rest will be unaware.

Documentation can be made regarding these unknown destinations in a district. To make documentation, a detailed research about each district is to be made. For such a research, a team of people or a set of volunteers who have passion towards tourism and ecotourism can be assigned. The research team can work on different and intimate locations in the district that are closer to nature. To know more about the district, the team can have interviews with the senior citizens or the elders of the district who can share much information about their location. The senior citizens will have a greater knowledge about the sites as they have spent their livelihood in that place and they have witnessed the growth and prosperity of their locality. The elders or the senior citizens will have a lot to share about the history. They can also share about several personalities who were famous in the development of the locality. If there are any statues of the personalities, the interviewee can also share information about their doings in the development of the locality. These interviews will add even more life to the documentation as the essence of the surrounding will be brought out.

A written documentation is necessary so that it can be stored and referred for later purposes. After finishing the documentation, it can be circulated to everyone in the district in the form of a notice or in the local newspaper as an episodic column. The documentation of the district can also be posted in a website which can be referred by the locals as well as the tourists. The written documentation can also contain the history of each destination, the history about the name given to each destination – the reason for giving that particular name for that particular place. The uniqueness of each tourist spots and how well it is maintained can also be portrayed. This documentation can be circulated to the students of each and every school in that district. This way everyone would gain a wide knowledge about their locality at a young age.

The research teams while making the written documentation can also make a video documentation along the way. In this documentation, the full view of the location and also the interviews from the locals, senior citizens and elders can also be shown. These locals can share the history, culture and uniqueness of the place. The whole journey taken towards each of the destination can also be shown. This will be helpful for the people to know that the travel to these localities is not a tedious task. The video documentation can be telecasted in the local channels of the district. It can also be uploaded online, which will be useful for the locals as well as the tourists visiting the place.

Rally

The Government of Tamilnadu can conduct rallies relating to the tourism. These rallies can be informative as well as environment friendly. The rally can take place in the most remote tourist places so that the people in the district will be aware of their locality. The rallies can be conducted on the World Tourism Day (September 27). The theme of the rally can be in such a way that it promotes ecotourism. These rallies can be a helpful tool for the people to explore their land and culture.

In such rallies, there can be an event at the beginning. This event can have an honored guest like an MP or an MLA who can grace the occasion and speak about the natural wealth of the district. The importance of the rally should be to educate the people about their locality and also to incorporate the value of an environment friendly society.

Schools and Colleges

Schools and colleges are a bigger platform, where the knowledge about one's locality can be gained. Every school and college can provide an opportunity to create awareness about their district and locality to the students. The educational institutions can give insights about ecotourism and its importance. So many events can be conducted by the institutions regarding the district and the locality the institution is located in. An event like a heritage walk can be helpful for the students to discover new places in the locality near their institutions. This will help them connect with their surrounding environment. There can be competitions conducted by the institutions. There can be a debate or a rangoli competition which can bring out the beauty of their locality and their culture. An essay writing contest and public speaking contest can be

initiated. In such contests, the contestants can be asked to research and speak about different tourist places in their district.

In every district of Tamilnadu there are certain tourist places which are famous in that district. The crowd visiting the district also tends to visit mostly those places which are famous. So for those travelers and visitors an itinerary can be provided. Each and every hotel and resort can provide this itinerary to their guest. The itinerary can also be published in the tourism website.

Itinerary

The itinerary can contain the details about each and every intimate detail of the ecotourism places in the district. The itinerary can begin with the details about the district and their culture. This would make the tourists knowledgeable about the district they are visiting. After the introduction about the district the tourist places can be listed out. Each of the places can be grouped according to the routes, where the travelers can visit all the tourism places in that single route. Each of the tourist destinations can also have the details and the history of the place along with some pictures of the place. The itinerary can also portray the details of how environment friendly the district and how well the places are maintained. This will interest the tourist more as they look for eco friendly places.

The idea of creating awareness among the local communities is to preserve the land, which is the mother earth in the local level. The nature and the land are said to be preserved and conserved globally and nationally. Tourism and Ecotourism plays a major role in this as most of the travelers look for destination that are conserved and maintained. But in the local level, the locality and the tourist places can be preserved only if the local communities are aware of their locality. So it is necessary to create awareness among the people of each district and localities so that they would know about the essential valuables in their local.

Ecotourism Approach

Sue Beeton in her *Community Development through Tourism* conveys that both the community and the tourism have a simultaneous role in building an environment.

‘As tourism relies on visiting places and people, it cannot exist outside

A community. So, both tourism and the communities it is in must

Be viewed simultaneously – any change to one will affect the other.’(16, Beeton)

The Government of Tamilnadu can provide a platform for ecotourism at the local community level as both the community and tourism are interlinked. The ecotourism can address the economic and social issues of a community, where the ecotourism can take care of the conservation of the environment. The Government of Tamilnadu can propose an ecotourism project at an intimate level of each district. For such ecotourism project the local community people can be involved in the planning and development of their district. The participation of the locals can be really effective as their view on their land is quite deep. The ecotourism project can involve the local participation with the partial decision making. Through this the objectives and the need for the development of the project can be sort out. The involvement of the locals in the decision making can help in the efficiency and effectiveness of the project. With the involvement of the local people of the community the capacity building is much stronger than the involvement of a set of strangers of that community.

Empowerment of the Local

The local people’s participation and decision making should lead to their empowerment. Without the empowerment of the local people of the community there might be struggle in introducing the ecotourism. Giving a control over their society or the community leads to the empowerment of the community. This empowerment brings out their leadership, ideas, views and knowledge regarding the issue. So, the locals when given an opportunity would surely be a greater benefit to the ecotourism project. Since the responsibility is bestowed on the people they will thrive to create a better society and they would truly work as empowered citizens. Only by empowering the local communities the necessary developments in that particular community can take place at the right order. Regina Scheyvens portrays a case study regarding four empowerments of the local communities and the ecotourism in her work *Ecotourism and the Empowerment of Local Communities*.

Economic Empowerment

The ecotourism project can be of a great impact to the local community economically. This can empower the community by taking the opportunity of the economic development through the ecotourism project. The community can also receive the productive resources that are meant for the ecotourism. The ecotourism economic benefits can be shared equally with the community as the community and the tourism are interlinked. The people in the local communities can have an open eye to the formal and informal job and business opportunities that are available through the ecotourism project. The cash that the ecotourism earns will be shared among the community. With the funds received from the involvement in the ecotourism the local communities can also work on other necessities in their area. This makes the local community to have a stable and empowered economy through the ecotourism.

Psychological Empowerment

A community that relies on its own self, being optimistic of its future, having great faith in the people living in their community and has a huge pride over their culture and tradition is said to be a psychologically powerful community. These ecotourism projects which respect the culture and tradition of the community can empower the locals psychologically. The customs, traditions and the culture of the community is highlighted with the introduction of the ecotourism. It has the ability to showcase the essence of their culture to the tourists visiting the place, especially the foreign tourists. This will bring a sense of pride among the people and will also enhance their self esteem. The ecotourism extends access to a wide sector which provides educational and job opportunities making the local communities psychologically empowered.

Social Empowerment

Ecotourism can be a cause of bringing different social groups together for a better cause. There can be men's group, women's group and youth group coming together for the betterment of their society. The unity among the members of the society during the planning and decision making can strengthen their community. The local community can also share the profits received from the ecotourism in any of the social developmental projects which the community is very much in need of. The social empowerment of the local communities can be enhanced with the implementation of the ecotourism in the community.

Political Empowerment

With the implementation of the ecotourism projects, the community will be having the rights to make their own decisions in the project making them a strong part of the project. The locals can raise their voice in developing their community and they can as well jot out their views regarding their community. This ardent involvement of the local communities in the projects will strengthen their groups politically and they would gain a place in working on the development of their community.

Benefits of Ecotourism in a Local Community

The ecotourism implementation in a local community can benefit the people living in the community in so many ways. This would bring their culture and tradition out into the world and the travelers and tourists would gain a new experience exploring through their community. The ecotourism tends to conserve the natural resources that are available in the local community. It aims to protect the animals, birds and insects also, this way the local community would stand for its environment friendly habitat. This will also be a great positive impact in the business field. The implementation of ecotourism spots in a region can improve the economy of the community. The locals can work towards the ecotourism and the income received through the tourism in that region can be shared with the locals and also used for improvising the region. These income and economy received helps the locals with constructing new buildings and infrastructure for living, for laying roads and providing the community with proper water supply. The ecotourism not only benefits the present, but also works on a better future for the local communities.

Sustainable Development in the Local Communities

Ecotourism works on a sustainable development where it meets the necessities of the present and also save resources for the future generation. It tends to make no compromise in such matters. For a sustainable development, there should be a constant work and care given to the basic needs of the society and also to the environment. To achieve this, there should be a check on the proper economic growth. The essential and important needs of the local communities like the jobs, food and water supply, sanitation and other necessities are to be kept as the first priority. Initiatives should be taken to combine economy and environment. Preserve and conserve the available resources in the region.

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