

GREENING THE GOLDEN LAND: POTENTIAL AND ISSUES IN CONSERVATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL TOURISM

Ramanpreet Kaur

Associate Professor

Department of Business Administration, CGC-College of Engineering, CGC Landran

Sanya Dawer

Assistant Professor

Department of Business Administration, CGC-College of Engineering, CGC Landran

ABSTRACT:

Eco-tourism is a journey that weaves together adventure, education, and conservation, inviting travelers to experience the majestic beauty of nature while promoting sustainable practices and community engagement. Punjab, renowned for its rich cultural heritage, is also a treasure trove of natural wonders, boasting a diverse array of flora and fauna. Eco-tourism in Punjab offers a unique opportunity to explore and conserve its breathtaking forests, wetlands, bird sanctuaries, and zoological parks. Visitors can embark on an exhilarating Lion Safari at Chhatbir Zoo near Chandigarh or marvel at the majestic migratory birds at Hari Ke Pattan in Amritsar, showcasing the state's lesser-known yet captivating natural beauty. By promoting eco-tourism, Punjab aims to foster a deeper appreciation for its natural treasures and inspire conservation efforts, making it really great for people who love nature and for people who are looking for adventure. It is perfect, for nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers.

Objectives: The main objective of the paper is to explore the eco-tourism potential in state and to highlight the various opportunities and challenges in developing eco-tourism in Punjab.

Methodology: The research is descriptive in nature. The data for the purpose is based on secondary sources like policy documents, journals, books, newspaper and internet.

Finding: The State really has a lot of potential to become a place, for people who love nature and the environment. Taking into consideration the enormity of eco-tourism and its tremendous resources, there is massive opportunity of eco-tourism development in Punjab. Diversification of tourism activities and the participation of local people is needed at all the stages of development of eco-tourism.

Keywords: Eco tourism destination, flora and fauna, natural habitat, sanctuaries, zoological park, exotic, myriad culture, enormity, tremendous resources.

INTRODUCTION:

Eco-tourism or ecological tourism is a way to travel that helps protect nature and makes life better for people living in the area. It is about traveling to places in a way that does not harm the environment. This type of tourism also helps to save ecosystems, biodiversity and old cultural sites. Eco-tourism supports efforts to protect areas that're special and need to be preserved. Local people are involved in making decisions about tourism and get a share of the money it brings. They are also helped to run their tourism projects, which makes them proud and gives them control over tourism in their area. Environmentally-friendly practices are adopted in tourism operations, reducing waste, conserving water and energy, and promoting eco-friendly accommodations and transportation. Tourists are educated about local ecosystems, conservation efforts, and cultural significance, promoting

environmental stewardship. Cross-cultural understanding and respect are promoted, avoiding cultural exploitation and misrepresentation. Support is given to local customs, traditions, and festivals, encouraging community-based tourism initiatives. Negative impacts on the environment, culture, and community are assessed and mitigated. Measures are implemented to reduce pollution, waste, and over-tourism. Responsible behavior among tourists is promoted, and tourism impacts are monitored and evaluated. Revenue generated from eco-tourism supports conservation efforts and local communities. Eco-tourism enterprises and community-led initiatives are encouraged, promoting sustainable tourism practices and responsible travel. Investment is made in conservation and community development projects. Transparency is ensured in tourism operations and decision-making processes, holding stakeholders accountable for eco-tourism practices. Clear policies and guidelines are established, monitoring and evaluating eco-tourism performance. By implementing these principles, eco-tourism supports conservation efforts, empowers local communities, enhances tourist experiences, promotes sustainable development, and encourages responsible travel practices. Eco-tourism promotes sustainability by supporting conservation efforts, preserving natural habitats, and protecting biodiversity. By adopting environmentally-friendly behaviors, tourists contribute to the preservation of ecosystems and local cultures, ensuring a lasting legacy for future generations. Effective eco-tourism initiatives integrate economic, social, and environmental sustainability, creating a harmonious relationship between tourism, nature, and communities.

1.1 Principles of Ecotourism

- **Reduce Negative Environmental Impact:** We need to make sure that ecotourism does not hurt the environment. This means we have to reduce things like pollution damage to habitats and disturbing wildlife. Ecotourism has to reduce the environmental impact it has.
- **Respect for Local Cultures:** When tourists visit a place they should be nice to the people who live there and respect their way of life. Ecotourism has to respect the customs and cultures of the communities.
- **Support Conservation:** Ecotourism businesses should help protect the environment and the animals that live there. They can do this by giving money or time to projects that help conservation. Ecotourism should support conservation efforts.
- **Economic Benefits to Local Communities:** The money that ecotourism brings in should help the communities. This means that a lot of the money from ecotourism should go to the people who live in these areas. This can help them have a life and want to protect the environment. Ecotourism should also teach people about why conservation and protecting the environment's important.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** Ecotourism has to be planned so that it can keep going for a time. This means that ecotourism should be sustainable and not hurt the environment or the local culture. Ecotourism should be planned with long-term sustainability, in mind. We need to make sure that ecotourism is sustainable and does not have an environmental impact.

1.2 Eco Tourism in Punjab Punjab has different landscapes, forests, wildlife and wetlands. It is also home to endangered species like the Indus Dolphin. The state can become a place for eco-tourism. Now most tourists do not get to see the lesser-known but rich natural heritage of the state. Ecotourism is a type of tourism that's good for the environment and helps local communities. People are now more willing to visit forests and appreciate their beauty and learn from them. If people are allowed to visit forests in a way it can help conserve them. Ecotourism is a way to encourage people to visit places and help conserve them. It is about balancing conservation, local community needs and sustainable travel.

Ecotourism should not harm the environment. Should support local culture. The National Forest Policy of 1988 wants people to protect forests as national heritage. The Government of Punjab wants to promote ecotourism in the state. The goal is to conserve resources involve local communities and develop tourism sustainably. The focus is on conservation through awareness tourism activities and local participation. This policy aims to inform people and government departments about ecotourism and create a framework for its growth. Eco-tourism in Punjab is growing, with the state government launching initiatives. The Punjab Forest Department has developed eco-tourism projects in Pathankot and Hoshiarpur. These projects offer activities, like camping, water sports and nature trails. In 2023 Punjab saw a number of tourists, which helped the states economy.

1.2 Tourism Products in Punjab: Punjab is a place to visit. It is in India. Punjab has a lot to offer when it comes to tourism. You can see the cultural heritage of Punjab. You can also see how beautiful the natural scenery is. The people of Punjab are very welcoming. The Golden Temple, in Amritsar is really amazing. Punjab also has the Shivalik Hills which're very pretty. Punjab has something for everyone to enjoy. The tourism products of Punjab are very interesting. Punjab's tourism products include the Golden Temple and the Shivalik Hills. The state's unique blend of history, culture, and natural attractions makes it an ideal destination for travelers seeking immersive experiences. Punjab's tourism products include heritage sites, cultural festivals, wildlife sanctuaries, adventure activities, rural tourism, and cuisine tourism, among others. These products not only provide a glimpse into Punjab's glorious past but also showcase its modern charm, making it a must-visit destination for travelers from around the world.

1.2.1 Natural Attractions

1. Fertile Plains: Punjab's vast plains are perfect for agricultural tourism, allowing visitors to experience the state's rich farming heritage.
2. Hills and Valleys: The Shivalik Hills and valleys provide opportunities for trekking, hiking, and adventure tourism.
3. Wetlands and Wildlife Sanctuaries: Punjab has wetlands and wildlife sanctuaries. The Harike Wetland and the Kanjli Wetland are two examples. They are home to different types of plants and animals

1.2.2 Cultural and Historical Attractions

1. Heritage Sites: Punjab is home to numerous heritage sites, including forts, palaces, and monuments, such as the Quila Mubarak in Patiala and the Shahi Samadhan in Amritsar.
2. Museums: The state has several museums, like the Punjab State Museum in Chandigarh and the Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum in Amritsar, showcasing its rich history and culture.
3. Festivals and Events: Punjab celebrates various festivals, including Lohri, Baisakhi, and Teej, which offer a glimpse into its vibrant culture.

1.2.3 Eco Tourism Attractions in Punjab

1. Nature Retreat Chohal: A paradise for eco-tourists in Hoshiarpur, featuring comfortable huts, a well-equipped canteen, jeep safari, and nature trail facilities.
2. Kulara Island: An eco-tourism spot near Ranjit Sagar reservoir in Pathankot, with 20 cottages and water sports.
3. Talwara Eco-Park: Offers a hilltop view, known as "Hawa Mehal," and showcases Punjab's natural beauty.

4. Siswan Eco-Tourism Project: Located in Mohali, promoting sustainable tourism practices.

5. Thana Dam: A scenic spot in Hoshiarpur, ideal for nature lovers and birdwatchers.

1.3 Punjab's recent Eco-Tourism Key Projects Despite the eco tourism products in Punjab the state government has started projects to promote tourism. The focus is, on beauty, rich heritage and scenic landscapes. The goal is to make Punjab a top eco-tourism spot. Some notable initiatives are:

1.3.1. Mattewara Forests Eco-Tourism Hub: Development of eight wooded sections and a 2.5-kilometer green stretch along the Sutlej River.

1.3.2. Ranjit Sagar Lake Eco-Tourism Projects: Two eco-tourism projects valued at INR 550 crore are being developed in public-private partnership mode near Ranjit Sagar Lake.

1.3.3. Eco-Tourism Policy: The Government of Punjab introduced an eco-tourism policy to promote sustainable tourism practices and community involvement.

1.3.4. Punjab Forest Department Initiatives: The department has launched eco-tourism projects, including nature trails, bird watching, and camping facilities.

1.3.5. Wildlife Conservation Efforts: The Punjab Wildlife and Parks Department is strengthening its conservation efforts, including eco-tourism development.

Additionally, the Government's initiatives aim to benefit various segments of society, including farmers, youth, and the middle class, through projects spanning agriculture to tourism. The government's efforts to promote eco-tourism will not only boost tourism but also positively impact the daily lives of Punjab's residents.

1.4 Current Tourist Traffic Pattern in Punjab

The Ministry of Tourism Government of India says that tourism in Punjab is a part of the states economy. It makes up 11 percent of the states total goods and services. The total goods and services are called the Gross State Domestic Product. This is like a report card for the state. It shows how well the state is doing with its economy. The Gross State Domestic Product is the value of goods and services produced in Punjab over a year. It helps us see how the states economy is growing. Tourism in Punjab is very important, for the states economy and the Gross State Domestic Product. 1. Domestic Tourism: Most tourists visiting Punjab are from within India, drawn to its cultural and historical significance. 4,73,85,387 (2019) and 2,66,40,432 (2021)

- International Tourism: Foreign tourists are attracted to Punjab's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and spiritual significance. 11,01,343 (2019) and 3,08,135 (2021)
- Seasonal Fluctuations: Tourist traffic varies by season, with peak seasons being summer and winter.

2. Review of Literature: Eco-tourism in Punjab is getting a lot of attention lately.

People are saying it can really help with development and keeping the environment safe. A study in the Smart Green Connected Societies journal found that eco-tourism can make Chandigarh a greener city. This happens when tourists travel in a way that does not harm the environment and helps protect areas. Community involvement is key to making eco-tourism work. It ensures that local people benefit economically and their culture is preserved. Ramaswamy and Kumar said in 2010 that the tourism industry is shifting towards eco-tourism. Now both tourism providers and tourists care about eco-tourism and sustainable development. This is because it helps protect biodiversity. Researchers are focusing on saving habitats, biodiversity and ecosystems in Punjab. For example a study by Aggarwal et al. In 2021 looked into this. They think we need tourism practices that're good for the

environment. This includes reducing waste and using eco-accommodations. Spicer said this in 2020. Eco-tourism can also help local communities earn money and boost the economy. As Aggarwal et al. said in 2021, eco-tourism is a way to make money locally and grow economically. Eco-tourism in Punjab can really make a difference. Eco-tourism helps protect the environment and supports communities. Eco-tourism is good for Punjab. Cultural Preservation: Research stresses the importance of preserving Punjab's cultural heritage and traditions through ecotourism. Cabral, C., & Dhar, R. L. (2020). The research paper addresses the need for a well-framed eco-tourism policy in Punjab, involving stakeholders and ensuring sustainable development. Further research is required to understand the impact of eco-tourism on local communities and ensure their involvement in decision-making processes. The current research proposes that future studies should focus on assessing the environmental impacts of eco-tourism in Punjab and developing strategies for mitigation.

2 Research Methodology

This study used a descriptive research design to take a closer look at eco-tourism in Punjab. Secondary data sources, including policy documents, journals, books, newspapers and internet resources, were utilized to gather information. The literature and the government reports really helped the researcher see what is important and what is going on with the policy documents. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize data, while qualitative analysis facilitated the interpretation of findings. The study's limitations, such as reliance on secondary data sources and potential biases, were acknowledged. Nevertheless, this descriptive research analysis provided valuable insights into eco-tourism in Punjab, highlighting opportunities, challenges and strategies for sustainable development.

3 Findings of the Study

This study's findings provide valuable insights into State tourism policies, shedding light on challenges and revealing key opportunities. Notably, the study reveals intriguing findings, which contribute to a deeper understanding of the state's potential to become a pioneer Eco tourism destination and have significant implications for Punjab State Tourism industry. The following sections present a detailed examination of the findings.

4.1 Opportunities in Eco-Tourism Development in Punjab

4.1.1. Diversification of Tourism Products: Punjab's natural and cultural heritage offers opportunities to develop diverse eco-tourism products, such as birdwatching, trekking, and rural tourism (Tomar, 2014).

4.1.2. Job Creation and Economic Growth: Eco-tourism can generate employment opportunities and stimulate local economies, contributing to the state's economic growth (Aggarwal, 2021).

4.1.3. Conservation of Natural and Cultural Heritage: Eco-tourism is a way to help protect Punjab's natural beauty and cultural heritage. This will help keep Punjab's character. As Spicer said in 2020, eco-tourism can promote the conservation of Punjab's cultural heritage, which is really important, for preserving Punjab's unique identity.

4.1.4. Community Empowerment: Eco-tourism can empower local communities, promoting their involvement in decision-making processes and ensuring they benefit from tourism activities (Cabral & Dhar, 2020).

4.1.5. Marketing and Branding: Punjab's eco-tourism products can be marketed and branded to attract high-value, low-impact tourists, enhancing the state's tourism reputation (The Law Brigade Publishers, 2020).

4.2 Challenges to slow progression of EcoTourism Development in Punjab

4.2.1. Infrastructure Constraints: Punjab's rural areas often lack adequate infrastructure, such as roads, accommodations, and amenities, hindering eco-tourism development (Tomar,2014).

4.2.2. Environmental Degradation: Punjab's natural resources face threats from pollution, deforestation, and land degradation, impacting eco-tourism potential (Aggarwal, 2021).

4.2.3. Lack of Policy Framework: The absence of a comprehensive eco-tourism policy framework hinders the development of sustainable tourism practices (Spicer, 2020).

4.2.4. Community Awareness and Participation: Raising awareness and encouraging community participation in eco-tourism development can be challenging (Cabral & Dhar, 2020).

4.2.5. Funding and Investment: Securing funding and investment for eco-tourism initiatives can be difficult, particularly in rural areas (The Law Brigade Publishers, 2020).

4.2.6. Seasonality and Climate Change: Punjab's climate and seasonal fluctuations can impact eco-tourism activities, requiring adaptive strategies (Tomar,2014).

4.2.7. Over-Tourism and Crowding: Managing tourist numbers and preventing overcrowding in sensitive ecosystems and cultural sites is crucial (Aggarwal, 2021).

4.3 Benefits of Eco tourism to the state

4.3.1 Infrastructure Development: Efforts are being made to improve infrastructure, including roads, hotels, and amenities.

4.3.2 Marketing and Promotion: The government is promoting Punjab's tourism potential through various marketing campaigns and initiatives

4.3.3 Raising Community Awareness: Educating local communities about eco-tourism benefits and involve them in decision-making processes.

4.3.4 Securing Funding: Explore funding opportunities, such as government grants, private investments and crowd funding.

These initiatives aim to promote eco-friendly tourism, conserve natural habitats, and support local communities. The Punjab government's eco-tourism policy focuses on sustainable development, community involvement, and environmental conservation.

5 STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES

Punjab Governments can have the primary role in creating momentum for sustainable tourism in the state. It should frame Eco-tourism policies and prioritized the development of Ecotourism .

5.1 Panchayati Raj Institutions and Ecotourism: Panchayati Raj Institutions play a role in promoting ecotourism and rural tourism. They know cultures, traditions and natural resources well. These institutions can help manage resources, like forests, water bodies and wildlife in a sustainable way. When we empower Panchayati Raj Institutions and involve them in developing ecotourism we can create tourism initiatives that're sustainable and led by the community. This approach supports economic growth preserves culture and protects the environment. Panchayati Raj Institutions and ecotourism go hand in hand for a future.

NGOs' Role in Development of Ecotourism: Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) focused on sustainable tourism, rural development, livelihood promotion and community development can

significantly contribute to forging strong community linkages, enhancing ecotourism initiatives and promoting rural prosperity.

5.2 A Comprehensive State Strategy: Ecotourism requires a multi-faceted approach, involving Central, State, and Local Governments, as well as strong partnerships with the private sector, local communities, and Civil Society organizations. A unified strategy and shared vision are crucial to unlocking ecotourism's potential, driving sustainable social and economic growth, and creating jobs. Effective collaboration among stakeholders ensures ecotourism benefits both local communities and the environment, promoting responsible travel practices and preserving natural heritage.

5.3 Skill development and entrepreneurship: State Governments should look at what local communities need to make the most of ecotourism programs. They should think about how to create jobs and help people start their businesses. This means giving people training for jobs like showing tourists around teaching people about nature helping to protect the environment and running small businesses from their homes. These small businesses can include things like selling souvenirs renting out equipment and taking photos for people. The goal of ecotourism programs is to help communities so State Governments should focus on job creation and entrepreneurship development in these communities. This will help people, in communities to benefit from ecotourism programs.

5.4 Certification for Ecotourism: To promote ecotourism in a professional, sustainable, and responsible manner, a certification scheme will be established for tour operators and service providers. This framework is really important, for ecotourism practices. It makes sure that ecotourism practices do things for the environment. They have to conserve the environment. Ecotourism practices also have to preserve the culture of the people.. They have to engage with the community. So ecotourism practices will prioritize conservation, cultural preservation and community engagement. The certification process will assess operators' commitment to sustainable management, socio-economic impacts and cultural sensitivity.

5.5 Marketing and Branding: Marketing and branding play a pivotal role in promoting ecotourism by raising awareness, building credibility, and differentiating eco-friendly destinations. Effective strategies highlight unique experiences, emphasize conservation and community benefits, and showcase sustainable practices. Branding eco-tourism products creates distinctive identities, leveraging social media, influencer marketing, and targeted promotions to attract eco-conscious travelers. This increases visibility, generates revenue for local communities, promotes sustainable practices, enhances destination reputation, and supports local economic development. By showcasing ecotourism's value proposition, marketing and branding inspire responsible travel, foster community engagement, and contribute to environmental conservation.

6 CONCLUSION

Eco-tourism in Punjab presents a myriad of opportunities for symbiotic growth, conservation, and community empowerment, capitalizing on the state's verdant natural heritage and rich cultural tapestry. However, it also poses formidable challenges, including environmental degradation, conservation conundrums, and socio-cultural impediments. To harness the full potential of eco-tourism, Punjab must adopt sustainable tourism practices, foster community engagement, and promote responsible travel behaviors, thereby ensuring a harmonious balance between economic development, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation. By navigating these complexities, eco-tourism in Punjab can emerge as a transformative force, catalyzing sustainable development, conserving natural and cultural assets, and enriching the lives of local communities.

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