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PROSPECTS OF ECOTOURISM IN BIHAR

VAIBHAV KUMAR CHAUHAN ASST. LECTURER INSTITUTE OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT BODHGAYA

ABSTRACT

Eco-tourism focuses on local cultures, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on our vulnerable planet. It is typically defined as travel to destinations where the flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Responsible Eco-tourism includes programs that minimize the adverse effects of traditional tourism on the natural environment, and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Responsibility of both travellers and service providers is the genuine meaning for eco-tourism. Saving the environment around you and preserving the natural luxuries and forest life, that's what eco-tourism is all about. This Paper reviews and helps in exploring the prime Eco tourism destinations available in the State of Bihar. The study involved exploratory interviews with the local residents and through the different written sources available on the internet. Bihar Government is betting big on Eco tourism especially in Valmiki Tiger Reserve which fourth largest tiger reserve in India There is more emphasis on Eco-Tourism has been taken as it was absent Earlier. Historical, biological and cultural conservation, preservation, sustainable development etc. are some of the fields closely related to Eco-Tourism. As Bihar is very much rich in this diversity as it has 3000 years back history which includes lot of cultural and historical diversity. Many professionals have been involved in formulating and developing eco-tourism policies. They come from the fields of Geographic Information Systems, Wildlife Management, Wildlife Photography, Marine Biology and Oceanography, National and State Park Management, Environmental Sciences, Women in Development, Historians and Archaeologists, etc. Eco-tourism is considered the fastest growing market in the tourism industry, according to the World Tourism Organization with an annual growth rate of 5% worldwide and representing 6% of the world gross domestic product, 11.4% of all consumer spending - not a market to be taken lightly.

KEYWORDS

Ecotourism, Flora, Fauna, Cultural diversity, Biodiversity, Wildlife sanctuary, Sustainable.

INTRODUCTION

undamentally, eco-tourism means making as little environmental impact as possible and helping to sustain the indigenous populace, thereby encouraging the preservation of wildlife and habitats when visiting a place. This is responsible form of tourism and tourism development, which encourages going back to natural products in every aspect of life. It is also the key to sustainable ecological development. The International Eco-tourism Society defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." This means that those who implement and participate in Eco-tourism activities should follow the following principles:

Minimize impact

Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect

Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts

Provide direct financial benefits for conservation

Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people

Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate

Support international human rights and labour agreements

The history of Bihar indicates a rich culture inherited from various dynasty and birthplace of and great personalities and several religions. It has immense potential for tourism activities like religious tourism, heritage tourism, and nature tourism. Apart from that, the wildlife, birds and sanctuaries hold vast potential for eco-tourism. But the tourism potential of the state for generating much needed income and employment remain under-utilized.

Generally, ecotourism deals with living parts of the natural environments. Ecotourism focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth, and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Ecotourism is intended to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment, and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research paper is to explore the Prospects of Eco-Tourism in Bihar so as to position Bihar in the list of tourist destinations in the said field.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data was accumulated through various sources like internet, reference materials, newspapers, magazines etc.

PROSPECTS OF ECOTOURISM IN BIHAR

VALMIKI NATIONAL PARK AND WILDLIFE SACNCTUARY

Valmiki National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the West Champaran district of Bihar state, India. The extensive forest area of Valmikinagar was previously owned by the Bettiah Raj and Ramanagar Raj until the early 1950s. Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR) is one of the natural virgin recesses in east India, situated in the north west corner of Bihar. The pristine forest and wilderness of VTR is an excellent example of Himalayan Terai landscape. VTR comprises the Valmiki National Park and Valmiki Wildlife Sanctuary. The VTR forest area covers 899.38 square kilometres (347.25 sq mi), which is 17.4% of the total geographical area of the district West Champaran. As of 2013, there were 22 tigers in the Reserve.

The name of the district West Champaran derives from two words, Champa and Aranya, meaning forest of Champa trees. Total forest area comprises about 900 square kilometres), out of which the Valmiki Wildlife Sanctuary is 880 square kilometres and spread of the National Park is about 335 square kilometres area. In the north, the protected areas are bordered by Nepal while the Indian state Uttar Pradesh bounds the sanctuary from western side.

Bihar Government is turning 800 hectares of forest in VTR into Grassland making it India's biggest grassland. The landscape of VTR encompasses foothills ranges of Himalayan Siwaliks with mosaic of the cliffs, ridges, gorges, hills, streams and valleys; dense forests, open woodlands, grasslands, swamps and riverine fringe. Situated in Gangetic plains bio-geographic zone of the Country, the forest has combination of bhabhar and terai tracts. Boulder and pebble deposits by the Himalayan rivers in foothills characterized the Bhabhar tract while the finer sediments deposits feature terai lands.

WILD ANIMAL DIVERSITY

MAMMALS: The wild mammals found in the forest of VTR are tiger, Rhinoceros, Black bear, Leopard, Wild dog, wild buffalo, wild boar etc. There are several species of deer and antelopes found in VTR which are barking deer, spotted deer, Hog deer, Shambhar, Blue bull. Apart from that hyena, Leopard cat, Wild cat, fishing cat, Languor, monkey, and flying squirrel can also be sighted in VTR.

REPTILES: The reptiles which are commonly found in VTR are python, Cobra, King cobra, Krait, Banded krait, domuha snake (sand boa), etc. Among aquatic reptiles crocodiles, otters (water cat), Ghariyal, monitor lizard, etc. are found in VTR. Good number of crocodiles are found near Belahwa Village which is adjacant to the VTR. Ghariyals are found in river Gandak.

BIRDS: At present 241 bird species have been reported from VTR. Some of the interesting birds of VTR are Nepal kaleej pheasant, three-toed quail, flycatcher, grey shrike, green willow warbler, tree pipit, white eye, green barbet, waders, ibises, storks, pitta, plovers, snipes, pied hornbill, emerald dove. There are five types of green pigeons and purple wood pigeon found in VTR. In the night several owls, owlets, nightjars, etc. can be easily sighted.

PLANT DIVERSITY

The important tree species found in valley area of VTR are Sal (Shorea robusta), Karam (Adina cardifolia), Asan (Terminalia tomentosa), Bahera (Terminalia balerica), Asidh (Lagestromia parviflora), Simal (Salmelia malaberica), Satsal (Dalbergia latifolia), etc.

In hilly regions apart from Sal, Piyar (Buchanania lanzon), Mandar (Dillenia aurea), Banjan (Anogeissus latifolia), Bhelwa (Semicarpus anacadium), Harra (Terminalia chebula), Bodera (Eugenia operculata), etc. tree species are found.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The Valmiki landscape harbours vivid socio-cultural diversity. 'Tharu', a scheduled tribe, is the dominant community in the landscape. There are several theories on colonization of this community in the Himalayan terai. It is said that the community migrated from Rajasthan to the Himalayan foothills some 400 years ago. Their prime occupation is agriculture and staple food is rice. They are non-vegetarian and like chicken, pork, snails and fish and gents relish liquor locally prepared from jaggary. Tharus speak Bhojpuri and worship Hindu deities. Ramnavmi is their main festival. They also maintain socio-cultural relationship with the Tharus of Nepal. Their population is around 2.5 lakh.

Communities other than the tribes are called 'Bajiyan'. They are outsiders and involved in agriculture as well as small business in the villages.

BHIMBANDH WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Bhimbandh Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the south west of Munger District. The forests cover an area or 681.99 km² on the hills and undulating tract of Kharagpur Hills. It is situated at a distance of 56 KM from southern border of Munger 20 km from Jamui Railway Station and 200 km from Patna Airport.

This forest are located in the famous Kharagpur hill range. Bhimbandh is situated south of river Ganges to the northern boundary of Chhotanagpur Plateau and west of Santhal Pargana. It is surrounded on all sides by non-forestry areas inhabited by dense population. In the valley portions and at the foothills are several hot springs of which the finest are at Bhimbandh, Sita Kund and Rishi Kund. All the hot springs maintain nearly almost same temperature round the year. Among them the Bhimbandh springs have the maximum temperature (52°C to 65°C) . There are number of places of tourist interest nearby the Sanctuary like, Rishi Kund, Sita Kund, Ha-Ha Punch Kumari, Rameshwar Kund, Kharagpur Lake etc.

FAUNA

Tiger, Leopard, Peacock, Wild Bear, Rabbit, Monkey, Sahil Bear, Cheeta, Barking deer. Van Murgi, Nilgai, Python, Tiger, Newala, Goh, and Hyena are the major fauna of the Bhimband. Other fauna include the Jungle Cat, Fishing Cat, Leopard Cats and Hyaena. Small mammals include the rare Hispid Hare, Indian Gray Mongoose, Small Indian Mongooses, Large Indian Civet, Small Indian Civets, Bengal Fox, Golden Jackal, Sloth Bear, Chinese Pangolin, Indian Pangolins, Hog Badger, Chinese Ferret Badgers, and Particolored flying squirrels.

Crocodiles are found in Kharagpur lake and Kalidah near Rameshwar kund. Among snakes cobra and kraits are of common occurrence while python, Narokole, Bisako and Karmegh are occasionally seen.

Common bird species are Peaf owl, Grey Patridges, Quail, Malabar, Pied Hornbill, Swallow, Nightjars, Dronge, Paradisefly, Kingfisher, Bulbul, Mainas, Pigeon, Wood Pigeon, Blue jay, Owl, Falcon, Kites, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Greater Spotted Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, and the Lesser Kestrel and Vultures. Birds such as the Lesser White-fronted Goose, Ferruginous Duck, Baer's Pochard duck and Lesser Adjutant, Greater Adjutant, Blacknecked Stork, and Asian Openbill stork migrate from Central Asia to the park during winter.

FLORA

There are two major biomes present in Bhimbandh, first is grassland biome and second is forest biome. The sanctuary area having mainly of sal forest, Bamboo forest, grass land and many small forests of many miscellaneous species of flora. The top canopy of Bhimbandh mainly consists Shorea Robusta (sal), Diospyros melanoxylon (kendu), Boswellia serrata (salai), Terminalia tomentose (Asan), Terminalia bellayoica (Bahera), Terminalia Arjuna (Arjun), Pterocarpus Marsupium (Paisar). The top canopy of Bhimbandh mainly Madhuca indica (Mahua) and Holarrhena antidysenterica. Bhimbandh's ground Flora includes Flemengia Chappar, Zizyphus Xylopyra, climber flora include Bauhinia Vahlii, Smilex Protifrera, and creppers flora includes Butea Superba, Butea Parviflora. Lying in the famous Kharagpur range, Bhimbandh Wildlife Sanctuary boasts of a very rich and varied fauna. In fact, the flora here is quite distinctive when compared with the other sanctuaries in Bihar. As you move across the sanctuary, you will find Sal, Kend, Semal, and creepers belonging to different classifications

THE KANWAR LAKE BIRD SANCTUARY

The Kanwar Taal or Kabar Taal Lake at Begusarai, Bihar, is Asia's largest freshwater oxbow lake. It is approximately three times the size of the Bharatpur Sanctuary. Ornithologist Salim Ali mentioned about 60 migratory birds that come all the way from Central Asia in winter and recorded around 106 species of resident birds. Even though Kanwar Lake Bird Sanctuary is less popular among tourists, it is a ideal destination for bird watching. There are around 106 species of birds at the Kanwar Lake. During winter, which is the best time to travel Kanwar Lake Bird Sanctuary, around 60 migratory birds come to the park from Central Asia.

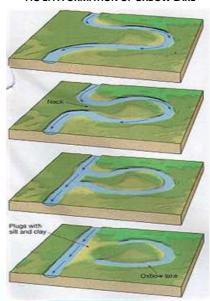
Since Kanwar Lake is one of the quietest bird sanctuary in India with pretty less tourist activity, the place is ideal for bird watching and photography.

At the Kanwar Lake Bird Sanctuary tourists will come across several species of birds that includes Oriental White-backed Vulture, Long-billed Vulture, Greater Adjutant, Greater Spotted Eagle, Lesser Kestrel, Sarus Crane, Darter Anhinga, Painted Stork and Black-bellied Tern.

OXBOW LAKE

An oxbow lake is a U-shaped body of water that forms when a wide meander from the main stem of a river is cut off, creating a free-standing body of water. This landform is so named for its distinctive curved shape, resembling the bow pin of an oxbow. In Australia, an oxbow lake is known as a billabong, from the indigenous language Wiradjuri. In south Texas, oxbows left by the Rio Grande River are called resacas.

FIG 1: A FORMATION OF OXBOW LAKE



VIKRAMSHILA GANGETIC DOLPHIN SANCTUARY

Vikramshila gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary is located in Bhagalpur District of Bihar, India. The sanctuary is a 50 km stretch of the Ganges River from Sultanganj to Kahalgaon. Designated in 1991, it is the only protected area for the endangered Gangetic dolphins in Asia. Once found in abundance, only a few hundred remain, of which half are found here. The Gangetic dolphins have been declared as the National Aquatic Animal of India. This decision was taken in the first meeting of the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) chaired by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh on Monday, 5 October 2009

KAKOLAT WATERFALL

Kakolat waterfall a stunning little hidden wonder of nature, situated on the beautiful Kakolat hill, located on the border of Bihar and Jharkhand, just 33 km from Nawada. This is one of the most visited and renowned Bihar getaway, where tourists come from all over the state and adjoining areas to witness the sheer beauty of Mother Nature cascading marvelously. The Kakolat waterfall of Bihar cascades down from a height of between 150 to 160 feet and forms a natural reservoir at the base of the waterfall. Legends are also associated with the Kakolat waterfall such as, a Treta Yug king was cursed to take the shape of a python and live at the falls here, by a Hindu spiritualist. The place was then visited by the Pandavas during their exile and it was during that time that the python king got rid of the curse, and he proclaimed that any person who bathed in the waterfall would never be reborn as a snake.

Kakolat waterfall has become an increasingly popular tourist attraction in Bihar, where huge crowds can be seen during summers for weekend picnics. This waterfall also boats a wide variety of watersports and fun in the water. Apart from its significance as a tourist destination, the Kakolat waterfall is also widely visited at the time when a big fair is held on an occasion of bishua or chait Sankranti. This is basically a religious event accompanied with a three day mela, where many devotees take their bath in the waterfall. The Kakolat waterfall has great historical and mythological significance. The waterfall is located near Govindpur police station, about 33 km away from Nawada, on Kakolat Hill. Below the falls there is a deep natural reservoir.

The fall is approximately 160 feet (49 m) in height. The scene is panoramic due to all-round green forest area. Kakolat Fall is a popular tourist spot in Bihar. During the summer, people from all over India come to the falls for picnics.

CONCLUSION

The Bihar has tremendous potential of ecotourism and with proper organized planning and implementation, ecotourism can make a breakthrough for the conservation and economic development of the area. The Community Based Ecotourism (CBE) module can be implemented as the local people are aware and sensitive about the tourism ventures, thus they can be involved in planning and implementation of the ecotourism. Most villagers strongly feel that ecotourism should be encouraged and more and more eco-tours be promoted. While there is liking for tourists, there is strong disliking as well for the non-environmental tourist behaviours of contributing pollution. There is need for capacity building for providing them opportunities for starting business at small-scale level. The youths of the village are very much interested to be a part of ecotourism to act as tourist guides. Women are also interested to take up the ecotourism related activities. There is need to streamline the functioning of the village forest committee with a view to involve villagers in the development and management of the area. An integrated holistic plan for the community-based ecotourism should be prepared through the involvement of all stakeholders and implemented through the local people and a strategy for the sustainable ecotourism management should also be evolved for all such areas.

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