

A road map for developing eco-tourism and its opportunities in Jharkhand

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Abstract

Jharkhand has rich forest and mineral resources. It has a very pleasant climate. Its topography is unique. On the one hand, it creates hurdles in providing amenities to inhabitants whereas, on the other side, it makes beautiful waterfalls, trekking sites and riches the state in scenic beauty. These ingredients are perfect for developing the state as one of the best destinations for all the eco-tourists in the country. The recent years' development of the tourism sector of the state is quite encouraging. However, there is a need to increase the speed and scale of the government efforts in this regard to build an eco-tourism ecosystem and develop this sector to its full potential level. Apart from discussing the theoretical aspects of eco-tourism, the present paper has tried to assess the growth in the number of domestic and foreign tourist visits along with the identification of a road map for the development of eco-tourism in the state.

Keywords: Eco-tourism, eco-tourism ecosystem, road map, Jharkhand

Introduction

Jharkhand has immense potential for eco-tourism. Its immense geographical diversity, vast and rich mineral resources, dense forests, luxurious vegetation cover, thriving wildlife, national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, rich varieties of flora, magnificent waterfalls, sparkling lakes, hot water springs, trekking sites and beautiful valleys are among the numerous bounties of nature. Besides the natural endowments, the state is renowned for its rich non-material cultural and historical heritage comprising the diverse tribes with their indigenous and unique languages, art and cultural forms, exquisite handicrafts, enchanting classical and folk dances, indigenous musical instruments, diverse local cuisines, ancient monoliths, cave paintings, sacred groves of indigenous communities and sacred shrines of pilgrimage. Adding charm to the plethora of tourist attractions in the state is the simple, hospitable and peace-loving nature of its people.

Theoretical Background

Eco-tourism is a niche segment of tourism in natural areas. The term emerged in the late 1980s. Fennell described it as such: "Ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally-oriented. It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas". The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) ^[1] has highlighted some principles associated with what eco-tourism stands for. According to them more than minimizing physical, social, behavioral and psychological impacts, eco-tourism is also about building a culture of environmental respect and protection while providing positive experiences to visitors and hosts. On the host's side, an eco-tourism mindset is one generating value for local people and the industry and they should help deliver remarkable experiences to visitors while raising their sensitivity to local environmental, political, or social issues.

Eco-tourism vs. Sustainable Tourism

The development of eco-tourism in itself is a guarantee that all the principles of sustainable development have been adhered to however, there is a clear-cut distinction between eco-tourism and sustainable tourism. Sustainable Tourism does not refer to a specific type of tourism, rather it is an aspiration for the impacts of all forms of tourism to be sustainable for generations to come. Whereas, eco-tourism is a niche segment of tourism in natural areas.

Eco-tourism vs. Conventional (Mass) Tourism

Although, eco-tourism may be a small part of conventional tourism. However, the features of eco-tourism are quite different than those of conventional tourism. In the case of eco-tourism, there is a greater chance of eco-tourists traveling to nature-surrounded sites compared to mass tourists looking for plenty of distractions, cultural sites, and the busy life of large cities. Similarly, eco-tourism activities are usually nature-related (such as hiking and exploring trails, birdwatching, or reef diving) and therefore, tend to be more physically demanding whereas typical tourism is more comfortable and less physical.

The Environmental Aspects of Eco-tourism: Pros vs. Cons

Pros: Since we cannot think about eco-tourism without protecting the environment and natural sites. The eco-tourism may help protect sensitive environment locations and raise awareness of the people on local environmental and social delicate issues.

Cons: Eco-tourists often go to environmentally fragile areas that risk collapse or getting eroded. Similarly, the disturbance of wildlife, the removal of vegetation (for plant collection, for instance) and garbage generation increases due to visitors are also the likely consequences of ecotourism.

Tourism/Eco-tourism and Economic Development

Several studies have highlighted the strong connection of tourism with economic growth and development. In fact, due to its multi-dimensional role in the socio-economic and

cultural sustainable development of a nation, nowadays tourism is seen as one of the important engines of economic growth. It is an industry which can successfully foster economic and human development (UNCTAD, 2008; Rogerson, 2013), as well as alleviate rural poverty in developing countries. It can certainly provide considerable economic benefits to a country, such as investment opportunities, tax revenue, and development of small and medium enterprises (Sirakaya, 2005; Dyer *et al.*, 2007). Although there are different types of revenue generated by this industry, the mere fact that tourism takes place in a developing country does not imply that the money will trickle down to the poor (M. Saayman *et al.*, 2012). Thus, the deliberate action is required to make sure that economic benefits reach local communities and have a positive social impact in terms of employment opportunities, access to education, and improved standards of living and health.

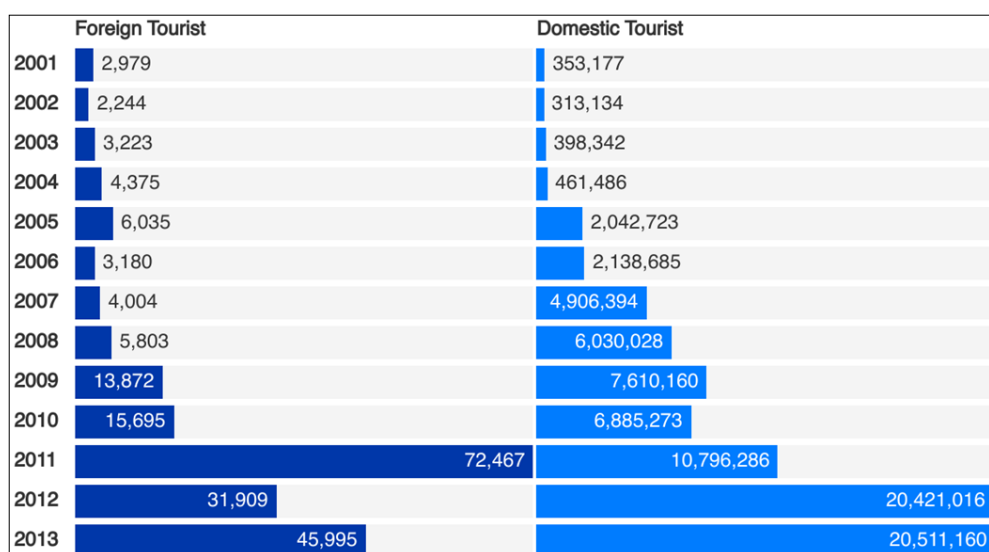
Need to Development Eco-tourism as an Engine of Economic Growth in Jharkhand

The state of Jharkhand was created as 28th state of the Indian Union by the Bihar Re-organisation Act on 15th November 2000 (the birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda) to fulfill the aspirations of the people living in this region. In terms of sharing the total geographical area, it is the 15th largest state in the country with a share of 2.42 percent (79.70 lakh hectares) of the total area. Similarly, it is the 14th largest state in terms of population. As per the 2011 census, it is home to about 3.29 crore people. The state is also recognized as a tribal state because of its sizeable numbers. About 26.3 per cent of the total population of the state are scheduled tribes. Its topography is mostly undulating, hilly and sloping with mountains, forests, river basins and valleys. If the above description is clubbed with the economic achievements of the state, then a clear need for developing eco-tourism in the state emerged. As per the Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy 2013-14, the per capita NSDP (nominal) of Jharkhand is only Rs. 50,006. It is quite low in comparison to some of the developed states in the country. For example, the per capita NSDP (nominal) of Maharashtra, Kerala, Gujarat and Punjab is Rs. 1,25,261; Rs. 1,23,388; Rs. 1,13,139 and Rs. 1,03,831 respectively. Similarly, as per the data quoted in Jharkhand Economic

Survey- 2013-14, about 12.4 million people (37 per cent) in the state were living below the poverty line (BPL) in 2011-12. The Scheduled Tribes (STs) have the highest percentage of BPL population at 49 percent followed by the Scheduled Castes (SCs) at 40.4 percent, the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) at 34.6 percent and the Others (Upper Castes) at 23.1 percent. More people fall under the poverty line in rural areas compared to urban areas except for the SCs in Jharkhand. Thus, there is an urgent need to identify and develop those sectors which can easily become the engines of economic growth in the state. Given the fact that nature has blessed Jharkhand with lots of natural sites, eco-tourism may play that role effectively.

Growth in the Number of Tourist Visits in Jharkhand

There has been a remarkable increase in the number of tourist visits to Jharkhand between the years 2001 to 2013. The number of foreign tourist visits has increased from 2,979 to 45,995 during this period. Similarly, the number of domestic tourist visits has also increased from 3,53,177 to 2,05,11,160 during the same period. A year-on-year increase in the number of foreign and domestic tourist visits is given in the figure-1.1. All this trend shows that Jharkhand has immense potential in tourism and the conducive policies of the state have helped in a continuous increase in the number of tourist visits in the state. However, there is not much improvement in the share and rank of the state in the country in this regard. In the year 2008, the share of the state in domestic tourist visits was about 1.1 per cent only and the rank was 16 out of the 35 states and union territories. In foreign tourist visits, the share was almost zero percent and the rank was 25. These figures have just improved to 1.79 percent and 13 in the case of domestic tourist visits and 0.23 percent and 20 in the case of foreign tourist visits respectively in the year 2013. The fact states that there are a good number of opportunities available for Jharkhand because there is no scarcity of demand in the country. This can be done by building a tourism ecosystem in the state and developing eco-tourism sites and opportunities as traditional or mass tourism has its own limitations to growth in relatively less developed states in the country.



Source: India Tourism Statistics- 2003 to 2013.

Fig 1.1: The trend of the Number of Foreign and Domestic Tourist Visits to Jharkhand between 2001 to 2013.

Tourism Ecosystem for Promoting Eco-tourism in Jharkhand

A tourism ecosystem is viewed as a network association of various economic entities with the aim of developing, implementing and promoting tourism products on the basis of their uniqueness, competitiveness and customization. The concept of an ecosystem has its origin in biology but nowadays it is commonly used in all disciplines. Biological ecosystems have served as a source of inspiration for introducing the term (business) ecosystem to the field of management. Moore was probably the first to do so, and many managers, policy makers and academics have followed him since (Moore, 1993).

Some authors define an ecosystem as a dynamic entity consisting of a heterogeneous, interdependent and continuously evolving set of actors that, positively or negatively, can influence or can be influenced by a value proposition (in the form of a product) (Adner, 2006). While biological ecosystems tend to be geographically defined, business ecosystems center on a value proposition (the value proposition is created by a tourism product in a tourism ecosystem). Every tourism product has its own ecosystem, and it can include actors localized in this region, from other regions of the country, and from all over the world. Defining an ecosystem in terms of a specific value proposition implies that ecosystems overlap and thus influence each other. Several authors have introduced a

classification of ecosystem participants depending on the life-cycle of a tourism product (project) implemented through an ecosystem association. These are:

Pacemaker- an actor who initiates an idea, project or process that inspires ecosystem unification in a given period of time;

Integrator: an actor who unites other actors for an idea or project and analyzes and evaluates the necessary competencies of actors and the degree of their economic security for other participants;

Developers: actors involved in developing and prototyping new processes;

Implementors: actors implementing new projects and processes on their sites;

Promoters: actors providing the promotion of implemented projects and conversion of past projects' experience into new projects and project commercialization.

Based on the above discussions a clear idea about the tourism ecosystem can be built by identifying the common actors of the tourism ecosystem and highlighting their potential roles in facilitating and developing the tourism sector of that specific region and that has been done here in Table- 1.1.

Table 1.1: Actors of Tourism Ecosystem and their Potential Roles

Actors	Purpose and Objective in the Development of Tourism	Potential Role in the Ecosystem
Tour Operator Companies	Fulfill the primary function of developing tourism products; initiate the creation of innovative products, forming a certain range thereof; deal with tourism service providers and select them for inclusion into tourism products and booking systems.	Integrator Developers Implementers Promoters
Travel Agent Companies	Participate in TP development via selecting tourism services and creating tours that meet the request of tourists in the booking systems of tour operators	Developers Implementers Promoters
Tourism Service Providers	Participate in TP development as the tour operator partners by selecting services from their range that correspond to the product model and service program; the tour operator enters contracts therewith on the basis of various cooperation schemes by buying/booking blocks or quotas of places in hotels and aircrafts, or from other service providers	Developers Implementers Promoters
Consumers	Can initiate a new tourism product by making purchase decisions (in case of emergence of a need/problem, search for options, choice of a product for purchase, and the purchase itself)	Pacemaker Promoters
Tourist Administration and Departments, State Government	Stimulate the development of new tourism product through competitions, the development of state targeted programs and budget financing, attracting investors, etc.	Promoters
Central Government	Stimulate the development of new tourism product through the development of national tourism development programs (strategy, national project) and budget financing, changes in tax policy, etc.	Developers Integrators

Source: Compilation based on the review of literature.

A Road Map for the Development of Eco-Tourism and its Opportunities in Jharkhand

In the light of the above discussions and facts, there is a need to build tourism ecosystem in Jharkhand so that base for a sustainable eco-tourism can be developed. In this regard, an action on the following issues will certainly deliver the desired results.

Enacting and Implementing Laws to Govern and Guide the Basic Structure of the various Policies related with the development and expansion of Tourism and particular Eco-Tourism in the State

Usually good policies are enough to do a specific job but the legal backing will ensure security and guarantee. This will

help in building trust among the stakeholders. A large number of various actors in the tourism industry are involved in the development, implementation, and promotion of a tourism product and the provision of tourism services (tour operators and travel agencies, tourism service providers (accommodation facilities, catering establishments, transport enterprises, cultural institutions, etc.), digital intermediaries, and tourism administrations), with each performing its own functions. Therefore, for the success of this sector, there is a need of collaborations and a sense of trust and security among the agents. Jharkhand has a tourism policy but there is a requirement of specific policies for eco-tourism as well as various tourism products.

Building Green (environment friendly) Infrastructures in the Eco-Tourism Zones

Although, there are debates over their cost, quality and durability but this process must be given the first priority by the state over the other easily available alternatives. The eco-tourism sites must also be declared as eco-tourism zones and all the agents as well as the local residents must be incentivized in that zone to build green infrastructures.

Making Local Residents of all the Eco-Tourism Zones Aware of the availability of Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities at their doorstep

Nowadays, unemployment and migration are probably the two most important problems of Jharkhand. There may be a permanent solution to this if the state focuses on this concept. Given the ample amount of eco-tourism sites in different parts of the state, there will be a significant amount of self-employment opportunities in the state if this concept is implemented. Since, this will create livelihood opportunities for them at their doorstep this will reduce the migration too.

A Proper Advertisement Mechanism for Eco-Tourism

There are many eco-tourism sites available in Jharkhand and they are very often used by the locals for picnic. However, only a few of them are famous. This is due to the lack of a proper advertisement mechanism for eco-tourism in the state. Most of the time we come to know about these sites through mouth publicity or Facebook posts. So, there is a need to address this area quickly.

Proper handling of Naxal nuisance

Jharkhand has suffered a lot due to the Naxal problems. The progress in handling this issue by the government is quite encouraging in the state. However, this problem has already dented the image of the state a lot. Hence, there is need to build confidence among the stakeholders that this problem is no longer an issue. This is necessary as most of the eco-tourism sites are located in the rural remote villages where the danger of Naxal Nuisance is very high.

Conclusion

Thus, Jharkhand has all the ingredients to make the state a favourite eco-tourism destination for all the lovers and admirers of eco-tourism in the country and the world. However, it is a fact that the state has not successfully harnessed its potential of eco-tourism. Apart from performing on the policy and administration related issues, the state needs to perform well in developing a good eco-tourism ecosystem and in eco-tourism management.

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