

Ecotourism in Nagapattinam District

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Abstract: Ecotourism is nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable. For tourism to be ecologically sustainable, there must be an appropriate return to the local community and a contribution to the long-term conservation of the resource. A distinction exists between nature-based tourism experience to qualify as an ecotourism experience, more specific criteria must be present, such as an identifiable contribution to conservation. Because the term has different meanings, it is difficult to state exactly all the criteria.

Keywords: Estuarine benthos, Sea shore, Mudflats, Lagoon environs, Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary

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I. INTRODUCTION

Man is not only a social animal but also an environmental animal. The more he lives in tune with nature, the more he rests content. Many degradation of nature and its resources will result in the degradation of human beings in the long run. Realising this, the eco systems should be given due regard with proper and indigenous utilization of the natural resources in the best possible manner.

Eco systems at large comprises of most of the natural forces like sand, forest, watery resources, unpolluted and salubrious air, imposing mountains, blue sky, and all that attract human eyes and give consolation to his troubled mind, and that mitigates the frets and fevers of life. Man has ruthlessly damaged the equilibrium of nature unmindful of its baneful consequences. Time has come now to realise the importance of eco system and thereby wrest out a delightful life of peace and prosperity on earth. Nature has showered upon the Nagapattinam district its mulfarious munificence in the form of rich lands, moon, white sands, deltaic boons, estuaries, tanks, ponds, rivers, vegetations with a considerable fauna and above all the coromendal coast.

“Ecotourism” is the buzz word in tourism. It embraces “environment- friendly,” “community friendly,” and “market friendly” tourism. Ecotourism is one of the commonly used terms, referring to a niche market for environmentally aware tourists who are interested in observing nature. Tourism is an environment dependent industry and eco tourism is the latest expression of this relationship. Eco tourism is an offshoot of the way environmental awareness. The main idea behind this concept is to make use of tourism as a tool for the protection of natural ecosystems by giving them a socia-economic value in the original state. One value of eco tourism is its potential for promoting alliance among environmental, conversation and development interest. The term ecotourism was originally coined in 1987 by Hector Ceballos- Lascurain of Mexico. (Sharma 2007: 35-36)

Major part of tourism depends on nature, forests, beaches. They have their own environmental impact on the growth of tourism in a country like India. The interrelation between plants and animals (including man) and their environment, otherwise called ecology is getting now a days out if fear leading to serious consequences. With decastation caused the environment, these requirements are threatened and the species run the risk of extinction. Habitat suffers disruption; wild life is hit; animals are constantly kept on the more sympathetic conditions of nature. Many species have vanished and many more are on the verge of extinction. Air, water and sea pollution affect climate and weather and threaten the life of flora fauna and human beings.

Nagapattinam district has the largest coast line of 153 kms which consists a spacious beach area from Tarangampadi to point-calimere. Tsunami has done a lot of havoc to re-creationary features in the Nagapattinam beach. In spite of the devastation, steps taken by the State Government to improve the port and the beech have restored normally to a certain extent. The damaged bridge across the river Kaduvai was newly built so to facilitate convenient transport for the fisher folks and public.

To preserve the eco-system some protective and preventive measures have to be undertaken by the government and the voluntary organization, which will improve the coastal area of Nagapattinam district and conserve the marine biodiversity.

Most of the wastes are discharged into the seas and remain trapped in coastal waters poisoning the marine life. Sources of marine pollution are 44% direct or via rivers, (Sewage, urban and agricultural run-off) 33% fallout air pollution, 12% shipping, 10% dumping in oceans and 1% offshore oil and gas (Sathyanarayana 2004: 10). Over load of organic nutrients through sewage is an expanding problem. Excessive nutrient load is also known to alter species composition in water thus lead to changes in bio-diversity. Nutrient load also enhances the eutrophication of harmful algal blooms. Cigantera, adisease affecting the nervous and cardiovascular systems, is caused by eating tropical fish that have bio-accumulated toxins from natural algal. Other toxins produced by algae blooms are also known to affect coastal aquaculture industry.

II. POINT CALIMERE WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Pt. Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary was created in 1967 with an extent of 2250 Ha for the conservation of Blackbuck, an endangered and endemic species of India. The Sanctuary is located in Nagapattinam District of Tamil Nadu. It can be approached by road from Nagapattinam (60 Kms) and Thanjavur (110 Kms) Blackbuck locally called "Veliman" is the key of species of the Sanctuary. They are mostly seen grazing in the open grassland area. Other important animals of the Sanctuary include spotted deer, Jackal, Civet, Wild boar etc. A notable feature of the sanctuary is the presence of Feral horses which were originally used for carrying salt. Olive ridley turtles have also been regularly nesting in the beaches of the Sanctuary. During winter, Bottle nose dolphin sighting is also common along the Sanctuary coast.

The unique dry evergreen forest of the Sanctuary houses more than 150 species of medicinal plants which are protected in the Medicinal Plants Conservation Area. Manilkara hexandra locally called "Palai" is the most important species of the Sanctuary. Two species of Drosera, an insectivorous plant are also found in the Sanctuary.

With the arrival of north east monsoon, migratory birds start congregating in and around the Sanctuary. More than a hundred species of migratory birds visit the Sanctuary from October to February. They include Flamingo, Painted storks, Pelicans, Teals, Terms, Ducks and a variety of shore birds. About 20,000 Flamingoes visit the Sanctuary every year. The rare Spoonbilled sandpiper has also been sighted in the sanctuary.

III. ESTUARINE BENTHOS

The great Vedaranyam Swamp as it is known, is a conglomerate of the mangrove swamps, coastal salt flats without submerged vegetation, coastal open blackish water with patches of aquatic bed and an irregularly flooded forested wetland, having water chemistry ranging from hyper-haline to euhaline at mixohaline fresh. The entire area is transformed into a vast sheet of almost freshwater lagoon during the peak of the rainy season. In the lean period especially in summer, salinity content shoots up as most of the mudflat dried up and gets periodically flooded due to high tides or excessive wind action.

The estuary is very rich in micro and macro organisms and these are spread out in numerous microhabitates. For the sake of convenience the entire area can be divided into four broad categories: 1. Sea shore, 2. Mudflats, 3. Lagoon environs, 4. Man-made environs.

IV. SEA SHORE

The Sea-Shore in the eastern most portion of the swamp has a variety of shore crabs, molluses, and several other rare species. The moist sand, accommodates a large number of insects. This zones provides a rich prey for birds like gulls, terns, sand pipers, stint, plovers and even scavengers as Brahminy Kite and White Billied Sea Eagles, etc.

Mangrove swamp predominates mudskippers and other burrowing organisms. Crab plovers, Curlews Godwits and other long billed wading birds congregate here as they are better adapted to prob deep silt and ooze.

V. MUDFLATS

The soil in the mudflats is mostly clay-silt and the fauna is predominantly of burrowing types. Due to variation in water level and temperature the polychaete worm, occur at depths of 5-20cm. Smaller wading birds feed on this worms. This zone is rich in molluscus certain, species of eels and crabs. Breeding of shrimps take place in the area and these along with other breeding fish provide abunda food for piscivorous birds. A large number of small and big waders exploit this zone under favourable conditions namely Flamingos, spoonbills, herons, egrets and other medium sized waders.

VI. LAGOON ENVIRONS:

The freshwater channels bring fresh deposits resulting in a rich clay-silt-ooze formation. The habitat here has burrowing organisms, and gives a natural protection forsubmerged vegetation thus providing an additional feeding zone for birds.

Shrimps, Amphipodes, Molluscus, crabs and fishes occur in this area. The varied range of water depths (shallow to deep water) provide an ideal feeding ground for Flamingos, ducks, spoonbills, storks, egrets, curlews, shanks, crabs, plovers, avocets, godwits, sand pipers, sand plovers and stints etc.,

VII. MAN-MADE ENVIRONMENTS

The man made salt pans near Vedaranyam, in the easternmost portion of the estuary has given rise to different types of zonation both for epifauna as well as predator species. These artificially created environments for commercial purpose and also beneficial for birds (Avifauna project report 1981-82 : 27-41).

Three types of systems are operated by salt companies. They are 1) Direct pumping of sea water into a series of reservoirs leading in from the seashore. 2) Salt water drawn from the creeks into reservoirs far inland 3) Conducting Sea water through long channels deep into the hinterland before running it into reservoirs.

Salt is manufactured in three stages. First brine is evaporated in the reservoirs and then pumped into condensers before finally being run off into pans where salt crystallises due to excessive evaporation. In the first system, littoral forms from the sea are pumped directly into the reservoirs. The second system is taking brine from the estuary directly into the condensers. During the summer season this zone has the high degree of salinity which is harmful to the ecology of the area in the long run. The third system is the poorest in organisms.

VIII. BEACH TOURISM

Beach tourists may be motivated by relaxation and entertainment. This does not imply any interest in learning about the special natural features of the area, nor any responsibility to ensure that their vacation maximises positive impacts to the environment and surrounding communities while minimising the negative ones. Nature based tourists are usually motivated by education and personal enrichment. The motivations of the latter are closely correlated with objectives of a more specific form of special interest nature-based tourism, called ecotourism. Eagles provided a motive-based segmentation of nature-based tourism.

Beach tourism is very popular among the affluent societies as well as in the middle class section. It is basically a leisure activity among the people of all age groups. Government of India (Ministry of Tourism) established a sub-group committee in 1989 to review different issues related to beach tourism. This committee has identified the following issues for the development of beach tourism as under (Ravi Bhushan Kumar 1995 : 115)

1. The beach and the offshore water conditions must be conducive to allow the people for carrying out different sorts of enjoyment such as sun bathing, bathing, swimming and other forms of recreation.
2. The committee also sited that the beach must be of sufficient size in length and width to accommodate large numbers of people without congestion and crowding. The beach should have sufficient sand with good quality and attractive in colour, fine in texture free from debris and other waste materials.
3. The beach resort should have a scenic beauty with emphasis on nature.
4. Accessibility is an important criteria. The beach resort destination should be conveniently accessible to relatively large number of visitors by air and other modes of transportation.
5. The essential basis amenities should be provided in the beach such as drinking water supply, electricity, sewerage system, drainage system and effective communication systems.
6. The beach should have generally aesthetic features such as beautiful topography, flora and fauna regional architectural style, regional life style, local cuisines, shopping and entertainment, sports and recreation facilities, local cultural attractions so as to attract the tourists to stay in the beach areas for longer periods.
7. At last the committee has emphasised on the need of security. There must be sufficient number of trained life guards. There is a need for high degree of vigilance. It is the responsibility of the resort to ensure the welfare of the tourist. He can get lost, drowned or assaulted by anti-social elements. So proper security arrangements should be ensured against trespass and theft.

IX. CONCLUSION

If the coastal area of Nagapattinam District is improved on the above lines, more number of domestic as well as foreign tourists will visit and stay in the internationally important tourist spots such as Tarangambadi, Poompuhar, Nagapattinam, Vailankanni, Vedaranyam and Point Calimere.

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