

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ECOTOURISM WITH REFERENCE TO ITS EMPLOYABILITY POTENTIAL: UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA

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Abstract

The growing tourist demand is resulting in an increase in pressure on our natural and other resources. Ecotourism has received much attention in recent years especially within the developing world. Eco-tourism can also be termed as management of tourism and conservation of nature in a way so as to maintain a fine balance between the requirements of tourism and ecology on the one hand and needs of the local communities for jobs, new skills, income generating employment and a better status for women on the other. It also aims to educate the tourist, to inform them, to provide funds for conservation of ecology, causing direct benefit to the economic development and political empowerment of local communities and areas, and foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. New projects have been started for strengthening ecotourism in Uttar Pradesh where visitors avail of improved tourism facilities such as accommodation, field infrastructure etc. This has resulted in promoting ecotourism in the state. In India domestic and foreign tourist arrivals have increased substantially from 2000 onwards. Uttar Pradesh received the big share of these visitors. Among all the states Uttar Pradesh was ranked 2nd in terms of domestic tourist visits and 3rd in terms of foreign tourist visits in India in 2016. This favourable statistics of tourism in Uttar Pradesh is capable of generating employment to both skilled and unskilled workers, directly and indirectly. At the same time it presents a lot of future challenges such as lack of good quality tourism infrastructure, global concerns regarding health and safety of tourists etc. This paper is aimed at exploring the opportunities and challenges of ecotourism in Uttar Pradesh with special reference to employment generating potential.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Opportunities, Challenges, Employment



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Introduction

Since the beginning of human history, urge to travel has been an important human activity. From the earliest historic times man has cherished the desire to discover the unknown, to explore new and strange places, to seek changes of environment and to undergo new experiences.

Food, water, safety, acquisitions of resource, search for new adventures or explore new lands to conquer and occupy were early motives to travel. Later on acquisition of knowledge or education also became a motive for travel. But the idea of travel for leisure has emerged recently in last few centuries.

With a consistent ranking amongst the top states in India in terms of tourist arrivals, Uttar Pradesh was ranked 2nd in terms of total tourist arrivals in 2016. Uttar Pradesh made the second highest contribution (229.6 million) in terms of domestic Tourist Visits in 2016 in India. In terms of Foreign Tourist Visits in 2016 Uttar Pradesh ranked 3rd with a share of 3.16 million foreign tourists. The Tourism industry in Uttar Pradesh has a significant contribution to the state's economic growth. The contribution of tourism to employment generation both direct and indirect is of immense importance to the state

The growing tourist demand is resulting in an increase in pressure on natural and other resources of the state. Unless, attention is paid now for developing tourism in ecologically sustainable manner and maintaining environmental integrity, it may cause irreparable damage.

Unlike conventional tourism, ecotourism has arisen in the last two decades as a form of tourism to benefit the environment and the community. Ecotourism also known as ecological tourism is responsible travel to natural areas and seeks to promote and support the understanding, appreciation and conservation of the environment and culture, raising awareness for biodiversity and for local cultures, emphasizing on preserving their indigenous features. It also promotes employment as well as economic and social development, acting as an alternative income source for economically and socially marginalized people living in hard economic situation.

Main features of ecotourism:

- Travel to area/site having natural attraction.
- Activities with minimal impact on the environment of the tourism destinations.

- Sustainable nature tourism helping in sustainable development, which has a favourable impact on local communities.
- This type of tourism helps in understanding, appreciation and conservation of the environment and the local culture.
- Ethical tourism through the enjoyment of nature and local culture seeks to enrich the experience of tourist.
- This type of tourism does not adversely affect the local biodiversity.
- Ecotourism increases the income of local community and it is social development oriented, which creates community welfare.
- Ecotourism in remote areas increase employment opportunities and is a mean of additional income.
- Ecotourism seeks to encourage environmental protection and respect for diverse cultures.

Objectives

To find out the opportunities and challenges of ecotourism in Uttar Pradesh.

To enumerate the employability potential of ecotourism in Uttar Pradesh.

Materials and methods

The present study is an endeavour to find out the various opportunities available and different challenges being faced by ecotourism industry in Uttar Pradesh. The study also emphasizes on employability potential of ecotourism in Uttar Pradesh.

In Uttar Pradesh tourism industry is an important instrument in the generation of employment, development of infrastructure, foreign exchange earnings, uplift of the rural economies particularly in remote and backward areas earnings and is included among the top export sectors. As a result remarkable funds are allocated in this software tertiary activity so that it may act as an important instrument to foster economic growth. For the present study the required secondary data has been collected from various old research papers, journals, books internet, some of the governmental data etc. The data has also been taken from various documents such as books, newsletters, reports, magazines, journals, newspaper, internet, as well as from existing literature to understand the opportunities and challenges of ecotourism in Uttar Pradesh and availability of employability potential in ecotourism in the state. After this, pertinent statistical tools have been used to find out the necessary required results.

Result and Discussion

Uttar Pradesh is home to some exquisitely beautiful landscapes, forest-vistas, meandering rivers and breathtakingly beautiful waterfalls and many endangered birds and animals. Showcasing these natural treasures for the visitors for them to appreciate the grandeur and generosity of nature, the Uttar Pradesh Government with its strong commitment to conservation is promoting eco-tourism to the wilderness areas of the state.

Uttar Pradesh is the fourth largest state in India with an approximate area of 2,40,928 sqkm. It is also the most populous state in the country with a population of 199.5 million (2011). Uttar Pradesh being the cradle of the great and oldest civilization of the country offers a palette of diverse experiences for the tourists. Uttar Pradesh is one of the most favoured state for tourists in India as it is blessed with a varied spectrum of tourism offerings ranging from wonder of the world Taj Mahal to the unique cultural and religious hotspots like Varanasi, Braj and Awadh regions.

Table1. The Indian and Foreign tourist visits in important tourist places of Uttar Pradesh in year 2012 to 2016.

Year	Indian	Foreign	Total	Percentage Increase (+)/ Reduce (-) in comparison to last year		
				Indian	Foreigner	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2012	16,94,48,596	29,89,347	17,24,37,943	(+) 9.01%	(+) 13.27%	(+) 9.08%
2013	22,78,18,408	32,05,760	23,10,24,168	(+) 34.44%	(+) 7.23%	(+) 33.97%
2014	18,42,77,423	29,09,735	18,71,87,158	(-) 19.11%	(-) 9.23%	(-) 18.97%
2015	20,65,15,617	31,04,062	20,96,19,679	(+) 12.06%	(+) 6.67%	(+) 11.98%
2016	21,35,44,204	31,56,812	21,67,01,016	(+) 3.40%	(+) 1.69%	(+) 3.37%

Source: Dept. of Tourism, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh. UP Tourism Statistics

Opportunities of ecotourism in Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh is a tourist paradise. The majestic Himalayas offer unique opportunities for eco-tourism, mountain climbing, trekking, skiing, etc. Its river system provides scope for manifold water sports and challenging surf riding. Its rich flora and fauna are nature's generous gift. Uttar Pradesh offers diverse ecotourism offerings such as rural, medical, pilgrimage, adventure, jungle safari and various other forms. The growth of opportunities of ecotourism industry in state is being impacted by several industry drivers. These drivers are:

Rich natural/cultural resources and geographical diversity: Ecotourism spots in Uttar Pradesh are divided in 09 circuits.

1. Western Wildlife Circuit
2. Lion Safari and Reverine Circuit
3. Terai Tiger Circuit
4. Budelkhand Adventure Circuit
5. Vindhya Mountain Circuit
6. Western Bird/Wetland Circuit
7. Central Bird/Wetland Circuit
8. Ganges Basin Circuit
9. Eastern Wildlife Circuit

With 35 ecotourism destinations in these 09 circuits Uttar Pradesh has the opportunity to attract a sizeable number of domestic and foreign tourists in this sector.

Major ecotourism destinations in Uttar Pradesh

- Dudhwa National Park
- Pilibhit Tiger Reserve
- Katerniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary
- National Chambal Sanctuary
- Lion Safari Etawah
- Nawabganj Bird Sanctaury

Out of these above 06 ecotourism destinations 04 destinations (Dudhwa National Park, Pilibhit Tiger Reserve, Katerniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary and Lion Safari Etawah) are within driving range of metro cities like Delhi, Noida and Gurgaon which make these destinations a favourable choice of tourists if developed in a planned manner.

Increased consciousness towards health: Urban working class is now giving much importance to health and they prefer to visit places with natural beauty on regular intervals for a healthy break from hectic metro life style. The vedic knowledge of Ayurveda, the Indian medicine system and its importance among the urban people and western world can play an important role in attraction for the growth of eco-tourism in Uttar Pradesh. The unprecedented level of air pollution in Delhi and adjoining areas recently during winters of 2016-17 has also compelled people to think about the hazards of metro life.

Healthy economic growth and rising income levels: Favourable growth in the Indian economy, rise in urban middle-class population and increasing levels of disposable income with increased affinity for leisure and wellness tourism are some of the driving forces.

Changing consumer lifestyles and changing preferences of tourists: With more than 65 per cent of the Indian population falling in the age group of 15-64 years, Indian travelers are more open to holidays and instead of visiting traditional tourist destinations they are now keen to explore newer destinations. Ecotourism destinations of Uttar Pradesh can provide a good option to these tourists.

Easy finance availability: Increased adoption of credit culture and availability of holidays on Equated Monthly Installments (EMI) is another growth driver.

Availability of professional tour and travel planners: In case of visit to ecotourism destinations tour plan and execution is important as these places are often unexplored availability of services like stay arrangements and vehicle can be an issue. Now professional tour and travel planners are easily available at one click of mouse and they take off the burden of minute to minute planning of tour which hitherto was to be done by travelers themselves.

Apart from these big religious gatherings like Kumbh in Allahabad and in Haridwar in adjoining Uttarakhand state present a big opportunity for ecotourism in Uttar Pradesh at repeated intervals where religious tourists prefer to visit places with natural beauties.

Challenges faced by ecotourism sector in Uttar Pradesh

Inadequate support infrastructure: Inadequate support infrastructure at ecotourism destinations in state like inadequate road, rail and air connectivity to various ecotourism destinations are major hurdles. Insufficient availability of hotel rooms and limited availability of hygienic and quality food outlets, restaurants at destinations are other constraints which are affecting tourist arrival figures.

Lack of cleanliness: Uttar Pradesh is a densely populated state and inadequate cleanliness at tourist destinations and surroundings including lack of clean public toilets are major factors which discourage foreign tourists.

Lack of conservation of ecotourism sites: Lack of proper conservation of ecotourism sites either due to inadequate budget or poor policy or corruption in implementation of policies causes environmental degradation and negatively affects the future possibilities of foreign tourist visits.

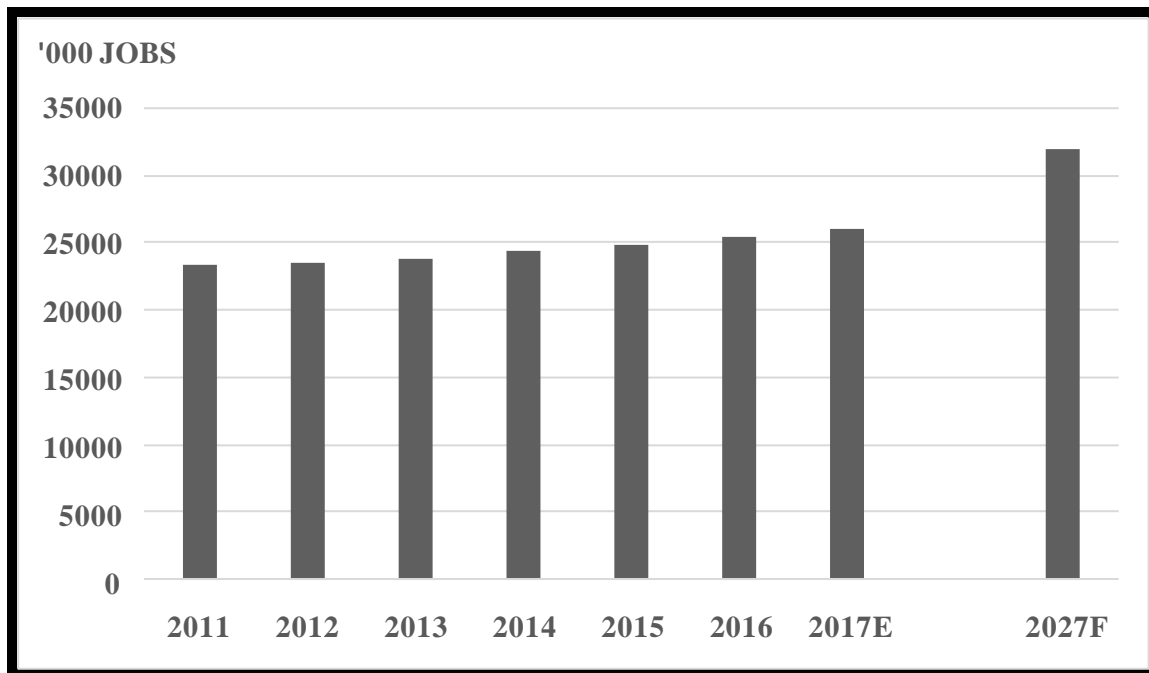
Limited availability of tourist guides: In Uttar Pradesh at tourist places profession of guide is mostly hereditary in nature and youth learn and adopt this profession from their parents. It increases monopoly of few families in tourist guide profession. Limited availability of trained and certified tourist guides increases the risk of exploitation of tourists.

Safety of Tourist: Harassment of tourists from miscreants and notorious elements and safety of tourists especially foreign tourists is major concern for tourism industry. Safety and security of tourists is of paramount importance as it majorly impacts the inflow of foreign tourists in the country. Domestic tourist movements are impacted in states and tourist locations where tourists consider a threat to their safety and security. It holds special significance for India which has been ranked at a low level of 74 amongst 140 global economies on safety and security parameters as per the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2013. A single incident against a foreign tourist become a media headline in today's world of internet and hyperactive media which ultimately creates a sense of fear in minds of foreign tourists as they are very particular about their safety in a foreign land.

Conflict between interest of ecotourism industry and locals: Until the role of local people and their interest is recognized in planning and development of ecotourism destination there is always possibility of conflicts between use of resources for ecotourism and the livelihood of local residents.

Employment potential in ecotourism

The travel and tourism sector supported 25 million jobs in 2012 directly related to the tourism sector in India and it constitutes 4.9 per cent of the total employment in the country in 2012 (Subhash, 2015). Travel and tourism generated 23,394,500 jobs directly in 2016 (5.8% of total employment) in India and this is forecast to grow by 2.1% in 2017 to 25,925,500 (5.8% of total employment). This includes employment by hotels, travel agents, airlines and other passenger transportation services (excluding commuter services). It also includes the activities of the restaurant and leisure industries directly supported by tourists. By 2027, travel and tourism will account for 31,910,000 jobs directly, an increase of 2.1% per annum over the next ten years (Turner and Freiermuth, 2017).

Table 2: Direct contribution of travel and tourism to employment in India

Providing ecotourism employment opportunities for educated youth in rural areas can assist in lessening the migration of young people to urban areas in search of employment and thereby can assist in keeping rural families closer together (Chand et al., 2015). Ecotourism has become a major source of income for local people either through direct employment such as managers, guides, housekeepers, and boat drivers, or from sales of foods, handicrafts, transportation or other services. Few workers abandon other economic activities and shift entirely to ecotourism; other adds ecotourism to traditional economic activities such as forest extraction and farming. This evidence may support the idea that some of the occupations in ecotourism do not require indeed high skill levels, which allow people to participate in more inter-occupation mobility.

Although the empirical evidence on ecotourism employment is quite scarce, existing research indicates that ecotourism plays an important role in providing local people with more immediate opportunities for both direct and indirect jobs, and presumably in improving the livelihoods of local residents. This will eventually have implications in the livelihoods of local people; particularly of those whose paid work opportunities and income sources are somehow limited. From existing literature, it can be claimed that the employment generated by ecotourism is commonly low skilled though it may still represent a viable source of income for many residents (Ogotu, 2002). Through employment ecotourism can cause large changes in the economy of families because it usually occurs in relatively rural isolated areas

and a small increase in income tends to have a more marked effect on the household of the poor (Stronza, 2007). Ecotourism employment may also well represent a valuable first step for empowering residents in tourism destinations (Kiss, 2004). Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to natural areas, to enjoy and appreciate nature that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples (Joshi, 2011). Sustainable development offers high potential for any community within economic, social, cultural, ecologic and physical constraints (Bhuiyan et al., 2012). In Uttar Pradesh educated youth after a proper training can be employed as a tourist guide in ecotourism spots. While the tourism sector in India is targeted to grow at an annual rate of 12 per cent during 2011-2016, adequate training and skill development infrastructure and hence availability of trained manpower has not kept pace with growth. This has led to an existing as well as forecasted shortfall of trained manpower in various segments of tourism sector in India. Organization of trade fairs by state government for local handicrafts in ecotourism destinations can increase the income level of local people.

Important initiatives by the UP state government to facilitate ecotourism

The state government of Uttar Pradesh has made serious efforts to promote tourism in the state because of its tremendous potential to increase in-flow of tourists, both domestic and foreign. The few initiatives have been enumerated below to highlight the state governments on-going focus:

- UP Govt. in 2013 nominated Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation as Nodal Unit/Agency for implementation of ecotourism related activities including planning, formulation and implementation of ecotourism projects.
- In 2015 website <https://upecotourism.in/> has been launched by UP Government to promote ecotourism and to provide all facilities to foreign and domestic tourists for ecotourism at single spot.
- The government has given special attention in promoting Heritage and Eco-Tourism for foreign tourists. These have witnessed increased tourist arrivals in the form of weekend getaways.
- To promote adventure and wild life tourism and attract both domestic and foreign tourist UP Tourism department has taken up an ambitious plan and investments are being made in the Lion Safari Etawah and Dudhwa National Park. This area draws a lot of domestic tourists and wildlife lovers from across the world. A budget of Rs. 5

crores each has been allocated to develop the areas of Lion Safari, Etawah and Dudhwa National Park.

- To promote greenery and educate the people of the state on the benefits of eco-tourism, the UP government conducted a plantation drive named 'Van Mahotsav' which consisted of planting 3.15 lakh trees in 80 different places.
- Special initiative has been taken by the state government to deploy 'tourist police' for safety of the visitors. This facility is already implemented in cities like Agra, Varanasi and Lucknow.
- The Government is encouraging people to provide paying guest facilities to tourists so that tourism can be developed and far reached.

Conclusion

The growing tourist demand is already exerting pressure on our natural and other resources. Unless, attention is paid now for developing tourism in ecologically sustainable manner and maintaining environmental integrity, it may cause irreparable damage. To encourage community support for conservation and the consequent protection of natural resources, a direct connection needs to be ascertained between conservation, ecotourism and the benefits that accrue to the community from it, whether collective or individual. Creating awareness of intangible benefits will also assist in establishing links with conservation and ecotourism, thereby encouraging the local community to take part in sustainable tourism development programmes and get benefits from this promising sector (Chand et al., 2015). In a geographically big and highly populated state like Uttar Pradesh where unemployment is a major issue and where nature is presenting huge opportunities for ecotourism, government's efforts with strong will can create wonders in ecotourism sector and in its ability to create employment opportunities. Initiatives taken by the state government through steps like enhancing air connectivity, development of tourist spots, better management of ecotourism places and others have also opened job prospects across the state. A prominent tourist hub for foreign visitors Uttar Pradesh has the ability to mobilize investments in ecotourism sector from both private and public sources and also attract indirect revenue like tax collections thereby filling state's coffers. All wings of the Central and State government, private sector and voluntary organizations should become active partners within the endeavour to realize actual growth in ecotourism sector if Uttar Pradesh must become an active player in ecotourism sector.

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