

Prospects and Challenges of Ecotourism Development alongside Mughal Road in Jammu & Kashmir

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Abstract

This study is carried alongside Mughal Road, (Jammu & Kashmir) for the determination of ecotourism potential alongside Mughal Road. For this purpose demographic information of visitors and their perceptions and suggestions regarding the developments of the site were collected and recorded. The study analyzed primary and secondary data of the socio-economic aspects of visitors on the Ecotourism Auditing Survey format. The present study is an attempt at analyzing the potential of site for ecotourism, which in due course would improve the socio-economic conditions of the local people by providing them with economic opportunities. It has been established that area alongside Mughal Road has a huge potential for ecotourism. The site is quite rich in natural, religious, cultural and historical sources necessary for ecotourism. Its natural landscape, lingual, cultural and religious multitude with only one of its kind historical heritage provides vast prospects for Ecotourists. At the end certain important suggestions have been made to give impetus to ecotourism in the site. The involvement of villagers and their desire to be the part of site management was also collected through a questionnaire supplied to them. The awareness about the concept of Ecotourism was collected and personal discussions were triangulated. This study assesses the satisfaction of visitors and suggests measures for better management of visitors alongside Mughal Road which may be applied to other ecotourism areas also.

Keywords: Mughal Road, Demographic information, Ecotourism, Ecotourism auditing survey, Visitor management.

Introduction

Tourism is travel for recreational, leisure, or business purposes, usually of a limited duration. Tourism is commonly associated with trans-national travel, but may also refer to travel to another location within the same country. Tourism can bring both benefits and problems to an area. If well planned, developed and managed, tourism generates local jobs and income and provides opportunities to local entrepreneurs to establish tourism enterprises, all of which lead to improved living standards of residents. Tax revenue generated by tourism can be used to improve community facilities and services. Tourism can provide the justification and to help pay for conservation of local natural areas, archaeological and historic sites, arts, crafts and cultural tradition and overall improvement of environmental quality because these are attractions for the tourist. However, if not well planned, developed and managed properly, tourism can result in congestion, pollution and other environmental problems (Bramwell, 1990; Buhalis and Fletcher, 1995). Tourism and environment are closely interrelated. The natural and built environment provides many of the attractions for the tourists and tourism development can have both negative and positive impacts on the environment. Sustainable tourism development depends on protecting the environmental resources for tourism (Boo, 1991, Butler, 1991). The partners for sustainable tourism development are the tourism industry, owners and managers of tourism commercial enterprises, the environmental supporters, advocates for environmental conservation and the community residents, community groups and leader and the local authority. The interaction among these partners are necessary to achieve improved quality of life the community while still achieving conservation of environmental resources for tourism and reasonable profits for the tourism industry.

Keeping these points in view, a new kind of tourism has come into being and is known as Ecotourism. Thus, Ecotourism is a responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people.

Keeping all these points in view, a new kind of tourism has come into being and is known as ECOTOURISM. Thus, ecotourism is a responsible travel to natural areas in harmony with nature, environment and local people and their culture.

According to Ecotourism Strategy the three key elements of ecotourism are; nature based, involves education and is operated on a sustainable basis. On the basis of above mentioned definitions and taking into account the impact of environment, area alongside Mughal Road has a lot of potential for ecotourism development which has yet to be realized in the right prospectus. This unique site has rich flora and fauna and pollution free environment has provided an excellent opportunity to travel loving people a wonderful destination for Ecotourism to enjoy experiences, understand and appreciate nature and the need to conserve wildlife.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives were:

- To determine the potential alongside Mughal Road for both domestic and foreign Ecotourists
- To enumerate the visitors management.
- To explore the so far unexplored ecotourism destinations alongside Mughal Road.

Study area

Mughal Road is a road between Bafliaz (a town in Poonch district) & Shopian (a district in Kashmir Valley) 84 km long passing through Pir Panjal Mt. range at an altitude of 11500ft (3505m) higher than Banihal Pass(2832m). This road brings Rajouri & Poonch district closer to Srinagar in Kashmir valley. Distance between Poonch & Srinagar will be reduced from 588km to 126km. It makes an alternate route to Kashmir valley from rest of India other than overcrowded Jammu-Srinagar Highway through Jawahar Tunnel. (NH 1A). It passes through Buffliaz, Behramgala, Chandimarh, Poshana, Chattapani, PKG, Aliabad, Zaznar, Dubjan, Heerpora and Shopian.

Soils are slightly alkaline in nature; soil h ranged from 6.88 – 8.06 organic matter 0.65-2.07%, nitrogen 0.052-0.6%, lime content ranged from 1.00 to 9.37 % and soil moisture belongs to arid conditions which ranges from 15-35%.

Average minimum and maximum temperature in the district varies from -20°C to 40°C. The temperature starts rising from third week of March and reaches maximum during the month of May. January is the coldest month. The average annual rainfall is about 1225 mm with 56 to 73 average rainy days.

The great diversity of flora is also present *Pinus roxburghii* the most dominant one. Besides, there are attractions like Dhera ki galli(DKG), Pir ki galli(PKG), Noori Chhamb, Hot sulphur spring at Dubjan and lot of other attractions are found alongside Mughal Road.

Research Methodology

The study was carried out on the basis of earlier studies by (Buckley, 1998a, 1998b; Brown 1994). The standard methods were adopted to carry out the study. The methodology includes:

- Collection of secondary data from records available for the purpose of verification.
- Collection of primary data in a structured questionnaire format.

- Focus group discussion and individual with the visitors and village people moving through the site.
- Suggestions were taken from the visitors regarding the development of the site.
- Present conditions of the site were also observed by ocular survey and the requirements were felt.
- Empirical observations of different potential ecotourism destinations.

The data regarding the visitor's response has been collected through a questionnaire survey format, which include:

- Questionnaire directly supplied to visitors.
- Spot survey and transect walk survey.
- Questionnaire survey in individual and in groups.

Results and Discussion

The questionnaires were supplied to the visitors entering to the site. They were requested to cooperate and give proper replies.

In this process, demographic information about visitors was collected. A questionnaire was also supplied to the villagers regarding their participations in site management. Finally the ecotourism auditing survey was carried out on the basis of entry of visitors and their vehicles.

Age and sex ratio: 37% of the visitors entering to the sanctuary were in age group of 21-30 years, followed by 26% in the age group of 31-40 and 19% in 10-20. The least percentage was shared by 41-50 and 51- above age groups with 15% and 3% respectively. Among the visitors 73% were males and 27% were females.

Qualification: The result showed that maximum number of visitors were graduates and post-graduates with 30% contribution, followed by 12th standard, undergraduates, professional, graduates and post- graduates with percentage of 21%, 11% and 4% respectively. Remaining 6% were illiterate and 10% did not respond.

Occupation: The survey indicated that 45% of visitors were students, housewives and retired persons. 26% was Govt. employee. Remaining 15% were busy with business and 14% were belonging to private sector.

Annual Income: Only 78% of visitors responded to this question, among them 45% have more than 100000 Rs, 26% have more than 50000 Rs and 7% enjoy a little income of up to 50000 Rs. Remaining 22% did not responded.

Mode of transportation: The survey indicated that 56% people visited by four-wheelers, 42% by two-wheelers and remaining 4% had no vehicle.

Purpose of visit: The responses revealed that 42% visit for Pir ki galli , 35% for Dehra ki galli, 16% for Noori chhamb and 7% for others.

Number of visits: The survey indicated that 52% of visitors visit once in a year followed by 28% visit twice a year, 16% visit thrice a year and the remaining visit more than 5 times in a year.

Facilities alongside Mughal Road: The sample data showed that 48% of visitors feel inadequate facilities and 35% feel adequate facilities. Remaining 17% denied to respond.

Willing to pay for guide: The visitor's responses showed that 50% of them would pay for guide and 50% denied to pay.

Facilities to be provided by the department: Following facilities should be provided by the site management which is arranged in priority basis as:

- Trained guide.
- Proper drinking water at regular distances.
- Provision of proper canteen.
- Provision of battery operated buses/ rikshaws.
- Restaurants and Huts at pir ki gali.

Villagers perceptions: On the basis of survey, most of the local people approximately 80% were interested in site management', if they were given chance to do so.

Ecotourism Auditing Survey:

The highest number of visitors arrived to the site is observed in the recent year 20013-14 followed by 20012-11 and 2011-12 respectively. Regarding the entry of private four wheelers (Car, Jeep etc.) to the site which also shows an increment, from crossing years, the highest no. was observed in the year 2013-14 followed by 2012-13 and 2012-11 respectively. In case of two wheelers

(Scooter, Motor bikes etc.) the observations reflected similar results as in case of private Four-wheeler.

As the number of visitors increase per year, the revenue generated by the tourists also increase at Dehra ki Gali. The lowest revenue was collected in 2011-12 with a consequent increase in 2012-13 and 2013-14 year.

Summary and Conclusion

Although, it has been observed that the number of visitors increases per year with the average of Indian 2533/year, in the last three years of 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14. Simultaneously observations revealed that the number of vehicles also increases.

Of course, there are some problems in the site e.g. unavailability of drinking water at appropriate distances, absence of proper canteen, absence of toilets, little air and noise pollution, poor Road condition, non availability of huts at pir ki galli etc., but at the same time there are some adequate possibilities which can overcome the above mentioned problems. There are cultural, traditional, scientific and economic aspects present alongside Mughal Road as well.

Recommendations

Suggestions and opinions of the visitors towards conservation values in improvements in the site are mentioned below:

- Appointment of trained guides.
- Proper drinking water at regular distances.
- Provision of proper canteen.
- Ecotourism huts should be built at pir ki galli (Highest spot on Mughal Road).
- Hoardings along roads & eco-spots.
- Nature Trails.
- Creation of viewpoints.
- Built recreation and children parks for entertainment.
- Provide camping sites and Cafeterias.
- Renovation of Sarais & Trails leading to them.
- Provide Ethnic Eco-shops serving local cuisine, dresses, and handicrafts.
- Development of Girjan Dhok-valley of seven lakes.
- Promotion of local culture, handicrafts & local cuisine.

- Car Rally: Beginning in 2010, Mughal Road car rally is being organized every year to promote tourism.
- Winter Sports- the place offers a huge potential for lovers of winter sports
- Provide facility of Cable Car.

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