

Socio-cultural impact of eco-tourism essay sample

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Abstract

Ecotourism is entirely a new approach in tourism. Born in its current form in late 1980s, ecotourism came of age in 2002, when the United Nations celebrated the “ International year of Ecotourism. Today’s market place is becoming greener and more environmentally sensitive than ever, with 85 percent of the industrialized world does citizen believe that the environment is the number one public issue. This attitude has evidently had an effect on the rise in popularity of ecotourism. Ecotourism has emerged as one of the most important sectors of the international tourism industry. It is a responsible travel to natural areas that safeguards the integrity of the ecosystem and produces economic benefit for local communities. The earnings from ecotourism industry results in socio-economic status of the host community.

Destination communities are the basic element of ecotourism. They are the focal point for the supply of accommodation, catering, information, transport and services. Over the last three decades, there has been growing debate on the magnitude of tourism in developing countries, and its impacts and implications in the host regions are enormous. Due to tremendous growth and its adverse consequences in the host region, the concept of tourism has now changed from mass tourism to ecotourism/responsible tourism/nature oriented tourism. Eco-tourism holds a very bright future in Uttarakhand (Uttarakhand) and has acquired great significance in the recent times but this potential has not been tapped effectively. Due to tremendous growth and its adverse consequences in the host region, the concept of tourism has now changed from mass tourism to ecotourism/responsible tourism/nature

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oriented tourism. Seeing this, the present study has focused on the perceptions of socio-cultural impact of ecotourism in Uttarakhand.

Keywords: Ecotourism □ Local communities; Socio-cultural

Introduction

Uttarakhand Himalayas is a site of high biodiversity value, but is facing growing threats from a variety of sources including commercial logging, farming practices and tourism. The state of Uttarakhand is blessed with good forest wealth. Out of the total geographical area the forest area is around 61.1 percent. As concern grows over the loss of both natural and cultural heritage in this region, attention is turning to strategies, which seek to link conservation with tourism development and generate incentives to conserve the resources on which economic benefits depend. The numbers of foreign tourist arrivals in Uttaranchal have increased from 44 thousand to 86 thousand between 2001 and 2006 and domestic tourist arrival has also increased from 95 lakhs to 11 crores between the same periods. No doubt, tourism has contributed to a fast rise in State Domestic Product (SDP) and employment in Uttaranchal. However, the benefits have not reached most of the poor and at the same time it has not been able to attract tourists compared to other hilly states.

Need and Significance of the Study:

Uttaranchal has immense ecotourism potential for growth of tourist traffic. It is undoubtedly India's most beautiful canvas studded with green strokes, wild splash and quaint highlights. What makes Uttaranchal a holidayer's

delight are the sketches of Kumaon and Garhwal. Eco-tourism holds a very bright future and has acquired a great significance in the recent times but this potential has not been tapped effectively. As concern grows over the loss of natural heritage in the area, it appears that this is the ideal time to facilitate ecologically and socially responsible tourism at key destinations to conserve the biological diversity of the area. Therefore the present study evaluates the perceptions of socio-cultural impact of ecotourism in Uttarakhand.

Objectives:

The study has been undertaken with certain objectives in view.

The delineation of objectives helps in forming the correct design and in doing the research as per the requirement of the study.

1. To identify and evaluate the socio-cultural impact of ecotourism on the local people in Uttarakhand.
2. To determine specific recommendations to enhance the awareness of the government, local community and tourist of the impacts on the local people

Study Area:

In the present research, Uttarakhand has been selected as it has immense ecotourism potential for growth of tourist traffic. It is divided into two broad regions Garhwal and Kumaon. The state is comprised of 13 districts, namely, Chamoli, Pauri, Tehri, Uttarkashi, Dehradun, Hardwar and Rudraprayag in the Garhwal region and Nainital, Almora, Pithoragarh, Udham Singh Nagar, Champawat and Bageshwar in the Kumaon region. Of these 13 districts, four <https://assignbuster.com/socio-cultural-impact-of-eco-tourism-essay-sample/>

districts (Nainital, Haridwar, Dehradun and Udham Singh Nagar) have large areas in the plains, whereas the other nine districts comprise the hill region of the state. So, Haridwar, (Rishikesh) and Dehradun, (Mussoorie) districts from Garhwal region and Nainital, (Corbet National Park) and Almora from Kumaon region were selected deliberately by the researcher.

Research Hypotheses:

Two hypotheses have been derived through a thorough review of literature that focused on the socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism.

H2a: There will be a significant relationship between the perceptions of socio-cultural impacts of eco tourism and demographic variables such as age, level of education and income

H2b: There will be difference between positive and negative socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism.

Data Collection Techniques:

The present study makes use of both primary as well as secondary data. The primary data was collected through self administered Questionnaire that lasted from 5th May to 30th June (2008). For the selection of sample, Convenience sampling method was applied in this survey. The sample resulted from a combination of Quota and judgment types for which it was selected by its perceived ability to represent the population and specific criteria. Wide range of data was collected through secondary sources mainly from Directorate of Tourism Dehradun. References from research papers,

books, articles, internets and newspapers were taken appropriately for interpretation of data.

Survey Instrument:

The questionnaire that was used for the local people perception regarding the socio-cultural impact of ecotourism consisted of two sections. The first part of the questionnaire gathered demographic information. The second part consisted of item that utilizes a 5- point Likert scale. The anchors include strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree

Sample size:

. Respondents younger than age 18 were automatically excluded. A total sample size of 110 local people participated in the study.

Data Processing:

In this study the method of collecting and gathering data from a part of population was used by the structured questionnaire. The software approach for the data analysis in this research was SPSS 12. version.

Result of Hypotheses Testing:

This element of the research presents the statistical analysis of the questionnaire responses. The aim of this section is to investigate whether a relationship exists between a number of independent variables and the perceptions of local community, particularly in respect of the socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism. For the current research, and according to the nature of data collected, four statistical tools were used to undertake the statistical

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analysis: Correlation and Descriptive Tests (Mean and Standard Deviation) has been used. The demographic details of local people represent that in general almost 67% of the respondents were of young age (18-32). More than half of the respondents were male (65%) and 35% were female respondents. Most of the respondents have a high level of education.

Hypothesis 1

H1: There will be a significant relationship between the perceptions of sociocultural impacts of eco tourism and demographic variables such as age, level of education and income.

A correlation coefficient measures the strength of linear between two variables. In the study the correlation coefficient measures the strength of linear between the socio-cultural impact of ecotourism and the demographic variables

The result in table 1. 1(see appendix1) shows that there is no significant relationship between age and sociocultural impact as that the sig. value of correlation for the whole set of variables is not statistically significant. In addition the result of the study revealed that there was significant positive relationship between socio-cultural impact of ecotourism and income (. 275*) where the correlation was significant at 0. 05 level.

Undoubtedly, the later result confirms that the level of income influences the perceptions of the local people towards the sociocultural impacts of ecotourism. As a result the hypotheses can be accepted with respect to income. See table 1. 1

Furthermore, it was crucial to identify the overall impacts (either positive or negative). To achieve this, the second research hypothesis was formulated as follows: see table 1. 2

H2: There will be difference between positive and negative socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism.

Table 1. 2 illustrates the results of the descriptive analysis. These results show that positive impacts have exceeded the negative ones, as evidenced by the value of Mean and SD. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted. This result confirmed that there is significant difference between the positive and negative sociocultural impacts of ecotourism as positive impacts have exceeded the negative sociocultural impacts.

In order to obtain an initial greater understanding of the impacts of ecotourism on local communities, it was essential to conduct a thorough review of relevant literature. The review of literature resulted in an interesting new insight into the subject, allowing a useful comparison to be made between the different authors' arguments, opinions, views and conclusions associated with the impacts of ecotourism, as well as more closely defining those impacts which affect the perceptions and attitudes of host communities towards ecotourism. While some of the previous research stated that there are negative sociocultural impacts (see for example, Buchsbaum 2004, Nigam 2002, K. Anil 2007, Alambath 2008; some others asserted that there are positive impacts which far exceed the negative impacts like, Lindberg 1995; Natasha's 1997; Beeler 2007, Vogelsong 2008, Sati 2009, Singhal and Gautam 2010).

Main Findings of the Study:

The study specially focused on a population consisting of residents residing in Uttarakhand and the tourists visiting the destination. The sample for this study was randomly selected stratified on the basis of the number of districts in the region. Both descriptive and analytical results were interpreted to attain some interesting findings of perception of the local community and the tourists. The study addressed the effects of ecotourism on the life of residents in the community. The result was a final usable sample size of 100 residents and 100 tourists.

Regarding the socio-cultural impacts of the ecotourism the result of the hypothesis testing revealed that there was a positive relationship between socio-cultural impact of ecotourism and income of respondents ($r = 0.257^*$), where the correlation was significant at 0.05 level. It was also found that higher income group people had a more positive perception of the socio-cultural impacts than the low-income group people. Further the result of second hypothesis reported a significant difference between the positive and negative sociocultural impacts of ecotourism, as positive impacts of ecotourism on the local people was found more than the negative impacts, Alhasant (2008)¹¹. Further the vast majority of the respondents believed that ecotourism has increased the image of Uttarakhand and its local culture pride; it has created more recreational facilities for local residents.

The result reported here is consistent with previous research findings of Malviya (2005)¹² that tourism can boost the preservation and transmission of cultural and historical traditions, which is pleasant for the residents.

Similarly findings of Nigam (2002)¹³ showed that Tourism in Garhwal has helped in conservation of its cultural heritage since ages. It develops a strong sense of pride amongst the mind of the residents of tourist's destinations. The findings of the study revealed that cultural exchange between residents with tourist is valuable and pleasant and the local people will welcome the tourists coming in the region. The respondents agreed that the standard of living of many people has increased due to tourist spending in the community. This can be supported by the increasing per capita income of the people of Uttaranchal, which was only Rs. 12787 in 2000-2001 rose to Rs. 24585 in 2005-06 (see appendix 3). Vast majority of respondent agreed that ecotourism generates tax revenue and foreign exchange for the government. This can be supported by the data that the number of foreign tourist's arrivals in Uttaranchal, which was only 44429 in 2001 has doubled in 2006 and reached to 85284.

In contrast, the negative socio-cultural impacts associated with ecotourism were evident. Respondents considered that ecotourism is responsible for increased crime in the region. They further agreed that it is responsible for increased alcoholism and prostitution in the region and it has also encouraged the residents to imitate the behaviour of the tourists. A similar study by Bansal and Garg (2002)¹⁴ showed that tourists visiting the destinations leave behind their life-style and spending pattern. The residents of the host countries are tempted to follow this; further prostitution, gambling and smoking may be attributed to the foreign tourism. However the overall findings of the study revealed that the positive socio-cultural

benefits of eco tourism have far exceeded the negative sociocultural impacts at Uttaranchal.

Suggestions:

1. The first crucial element to emerge is the need to educate both tourists and local people about all aspects of ecotourism. This can be achieved by giving the tourist full knowledge about local people place and culture, devising and presenting a code of behaviour, some do's and don'ts for tourists even before they leave their home Countries or State. Equally essential is educating the local people about tourists themselves, such as the cultural/attitudinal differences that can sometimes cause misunderstanding to occur in the interaction between tourist and local. This education could be delivered through formal and informal channels such as newspapers, magazines, leaflets, TV, etc. In order to make the tourists aware of ecotourism in the region, it is also suggested that hoardings (Green Tourism, Ecotourism) be set up at significant parts of the route.

2. Even more important is the direct involvement of representatives of the local community in development decisions affecting their locality. More importantly, a thriving tourism industry links up the hill areas with the rest of the country and reduces social and economic isolation of the people.

3. It is highly recommended that stricter regulations be introduced to control the employment of children in tourism to prevent them from dropping out of school at an early age. Improvements cannot be achieved without acknowledgement of a proper reward for provision of a satisfactory tourism

service. Efforts should be made therefore; to increase the payment to those who work in tourism services this would also enhance their social welfare.

In order to decrease the negative effects on local communities and increase tourist's arrivals following points can be checked while arranging an ecotourism activity in a region or taking part in it.

1. Are local people involved in the tourism industry as employees?
1. Does the organization cooperate with the local businesses?
1. Does it have a respectful attitude to the local culture?
1. Is there respect to nature and how is it protected?
1. How much economic benefit will the local population get from ecotourism?
1. Are tour operators concerned about ecological hotels, transport, and restaurants?
1. Are tour operators giving correct information to the tourists?
1. Are the Guides well trained and registered?
1. Are the tourists aware about culture and tradition of the place they would visit?

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