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The Potential for Ecotourism Opportunities to Reduce Poverty in Yercaud, India

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Environmental Management at Massey University, New Zealand.

Melody Natasha Mendez

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Abstract

Unsustainable development worldwide, is leading to a variety of environmental, social and economic issues. Economic growth which impacts these three pillars of sustainability, affects the current populations’ ability to meet their needs or those of future generations. For many developing countries, tourism is an economic developmental tool that can contribute to their economy. However, unsustainable tourism, such as mass tourism, exacerbates socio-environmental issues and can be contributory factors to poverty and environmental degradation. Additionally, strategies to alleviate poverty and conserve the environment may conflict with each other, reducing their efficacy. These issues can be most pronounced in popular tourist destinations and highlight the need for a win-win solution.

This research investigated the potential for ecotourism in the Yercaud Taluk, India, by identifying human and physical resources - including the natural and cultural features - available for development. It also identified socio-environmental problems to highlight the necessity for a win-win poverty alleviation and conservation strategy. Yercaud is a popular domestic tourist destination receiving large numbers of visitors, further emphasising the need for sustainable tourism and the vital requirement for successful implementation of ecotourism.

A mixed methods approach using surveys, semi-structured interviews, personal observations and an attractions inventory was utilised. Data was captured regarding tourist preferences and destination attractivity factors based on tourist motivations; resident socio-economic data and incidences of poverty based on the presence of certain indicators; the state of the environment; and development requirements for tourist attractions.

Study findings are site-specific, but the framework can be utilised in other tourist destinations. Results revealed that a tourism demand existed for ecotourism and that there are resources available for ecotourism development. However, degradation of natural and cultural resources poses a risk. Most importantly, environmental degradation significantly threatens the continued existence of the Taluk, including its tourism industry. As such, it is recommended that future development is sustainable, preserving biodiversity, the environment and community features.

Keywords: Ecotourism, poverty alleviation, sustainable development, Yercaud, India.
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