



ENVIRONMENT AND BANGUS VALLEY: A PARADIGM OF NATURE BASED DESTINATION

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Abstract

Nature-based tourism (NBT), alternatively known as eco-tourism, is a rapidly expanding area in the tourism travel sector. There are many potential areas in the State of Jammu and Kashmir having tremendous tourism potential which are still unexplored. One of such places is the valley of Bangus situated at an average altitude of 3500 m in Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir. The Bangus valley can provide many attractions to its visitors in terms of scenic beauty, floristic and faunistic diversity and pollution free environment.

The rapid development of Tourism all over the world has led lots of people and environmentalists more and more concerned about impact of tourism on environment, thereby resulting in the emergence of what is called Nature-Based Tourism. Eco Tourism or Nature based tourism is distinguished than other forms of tourism that provides multi dimensional benefits. It is a combination of multi-faceted activities those accelerates economic growth, creates large scale employment, alleviates poverty, generates revenue, supports conservation and preserves cultural and natural heritage. Considering the magnitude of Nature Based tourism and its tremendous resources there is enormous possibility of eco tourism development in the valley of Bangus. Therefore the report investigates the Nature- Based Tourism potential of Bangus valley.

Introduction

Throughout the ages many tourists have sought unique natural areas and outdoor-related activities for their vacations. Today, an even larger portion of our population is seeking nature-related experiences to recreate their spirits. Our customer, the nature tourist, may be seeking discovery, adventure, competition, fellowship, environmental awareness, or spiritual growth. Their activities cover a broad range including hiking, backpacking, camping, canoeing, fishing, hunting, nature photography, scuba diving, and nature tours. They are dependent upon many types of environments that are both public and privately owned. We should always recognize that successful development and operation of a nature-based enterprise requires the same attention to the fundamentals of marketing as any other business. The key to success is a wise combination of product, price, place, and promotion. But unlike many other businesses we are directly affected by the quality of the environment: it is the essential foundation for our product and the place in which we operate. Therefore, the quality of our environment will directly impact our profit and be a determining factor in the long-term success of our endeavors. Nature-Based Tourism has become the buzz word in tourism today. The widespread menace of mass tourism and the growing concern for environment as facilitated the growth of nature based tourism globally. Many destinations in the world have already promoted eco-tourism on a big scale.

The Valley of Bangus is a part of a unique eco-system with a distinct bio-diversity, which needs to be conserved in a planned manner. The valley with its ideal setting will surely capture the hearts and the minds of all visitors to the region. The approach to Bangus, passing through various forest ranges provides an ample opportunity for those in the search of nature and adventure.

Review of Literature

Nature-based tourism, also known as ecotourism or nature tourism, is defined as “tourism that consists of traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestation found in these areas” (Boo, 1990).

Nature tourism promotes more culturally and ecologically sensitive travel which ideally profits all involved. In addition, nature-based tourism can also be effective in promoting conservation and management of natural resources for long-term, sustainable economic development (Kutay, 1989; Edwards, 1988). As Boo (1990), states, “Tourism to protected areas demonstrates the value of natural resources and wildlife to tourists, rural populations, park managers, government officials, and tour operators.” As a result, nature based tourism is now seen as a model of development in which natural areas are planned as part of the tourism economic base and biological resources and ecological processes are linked to social and economic sectors (Kutay, 1989).

Due to the inter-relationship between behavior and attitudes, there is an increased interest in environmental attitudes as predictors of participation decisions, or environmentally based actions. A diverse and rich social-psychology literature on behavioral research has established the role of attitudes as predictors of behavior, behavioral intentions, and as explanatory factors of variations in individual behavior (Ajzen, 1980; Ajzen, 1988; Heberlein, 1989; Ajzen and Driver, 1991, 1992). However, most studies on environmental attitudes have been provided by social sciences outside of economics. These studies typically examine the relationship between environmental attitudes and behavior and analyze the main socio-economic



variables determining environmental attitudes (Buttel, 1987; Dunlap, et al., 1992), Due to its descriptive nature, the information provided in these studies, although information provided in these studies, although useful, does not allow economists to test hypotheses about, further explain, or predict environmental behavior.

The New Environmental Paradigm proposed by Dunlap and Van Liere (1978) was prompted by a general and growing interest in public attitudes towards the environment, NEP is based on the assumption that “implicit within environmentalism was a challenge to our fundamental views about nature and humans’ relationship to it” (Dunlap and Van Liere, 1978). Within the NEP framework, Van Liere and Dunlap developed Likert items assessing the three conceptual domains of the paradigm, i.e., beliefs about our ability to conflict with nature, limits to growth, and the proper role of humans in nature. The overall internal consistency and the predictive ability of the Likert items allowed the authors to consider them as a single entity named the New Environmental Paradigm Scale (NEP). Since its creation, the NEP scale has been extensively used to analyze and contrast environmental attitudes of different groups (Caron, 1989; Hall, 1990; Noe and Snow, 1990). The relationship between environmental attitudes and socio-economic variables constitutes another area of application of the NEP scale (Van Liere and Dunlap, 1980; Buttel, 1987). The NEP scale has also been used to evaluate the relationship between environmental attitudes and environmental knowledge (Arcury, Johnson, and Scollay, 1986; Edgell, 1989; Arcury, 1990). This research sheds light on the tremendous potential of the Destination (Bangus Valley) as a Nature Based Destination.

Aims and Objectives

1. To explore Bangus Valley, Lolab as a nature based tourism destination.
2. Developing strategies for eco-friendly tourism at Bangus Valley, Lolab.
3. To develop management strategies for reducing environmental impact and ensure involvement of stakeholders.

Tourism in Kashmir has been growing for the last several years. ‘Paradise on Earth’ and ‘Switzerland of India’ is some of the tags affiliated with it. Despite the political turmoil prevailing at the place the valley is still one of the preferred destinations of India visited both by the foreign and domestic tourists. The main attraction for tourists in Kashmir is natural beauty and developments for nature-based tourism have already begun. But still there is a long way to go and plenty of resources are yet to be tapped. Also, some issues have been reported in relation to the development of eco-tourism in Kashmir. Thus Bangus Valley in Kashmir is one such potential destination where eco-tourism can be developed through proper strategic approaches. Efforts have to be there from all the stakeholders in eco-tourism sector to think about the sustainability of tourism.

Research Methodology

In order to meet the above objectives the data has been collected from different sources. The primary data has been collected through observations and interactions with the Concerned authorities and local community while as secondary data has been collected from different sources viz:-magazines,journals,research papers,books,newspapers,different websites

Study Site

115 km from Srinagar at an altitude of 3500 m situated on the other side of the famous Lolab Valley is a virgin valley called Bangus. Around 20 kms wide and 15 kms long surrounded by mountains the valley has rugged terrains, dense forests, lush meadows and murmuring streams. The word “BUN” means forest and “GUS” indicates the Grass. The area has the line of control at a very close distance. Bungus Valley has a large number of streams like Roshan Kul, Tilwane Kul, and Dudh Kul, which join the kamil river and further form the lolab Stream. The adjacent villages of Karnah, Keran and Tangdar situated in Kashmir valley are connected by treks and paths to Bangus which offers fascinating and picturesque scenes, 7.5 kms from Chowkibal, Kupwara, Drangyari is another tourist spot which has some unique bird species and some famous historical places. Bangus is being developed as a tourist destination by the concern authorities and a Golf course is to be established by the tourism authority. The JK Tourism has set up tourist Banglows and cottages at several places for the overnight stay and the local transport to these places is not so regular. The place is ideal for trekking, camping and safaris. The study specially focuses on the exploration of Bangus valley as a Nature-Based Destination for tourist activities like camping, sight-seeing, nature photography and nature tours. The valley is replete with natural vegetation and flowers of wild nature. The vast green plains look like natural tapestries, as if spread by divine hands.

Analysis and Interpretation

Situated in the lap of Himalayan Mountains, Bangus is a part of a unique ecological area, comprising Mountain and Grassland with flora, Taiga or Coniferous forest. The valley which is as beautiful as Gulmarg and Pahalgam, but less spoiled and more pristine. The valley is replete with natural vegetation and flowers of wild nature. The vast green plains look like natural tapestries, as if spread by divine hands extreme natural beauty serenity, splendor are few synonyms associated with the majestic valley of Bangus. It has been proposed to be developed as Himalayan Biosphere valley by INTACH, on the following criteria:



The biosphere of the Bungus valley is being established to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement, growing mechanization and ensuring developmental activities does not occupy and modify all areas within the valley, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition. The proposed biosphere is being established as a design, the policy for securing the benefits of an enduring natural environment for the people of present and future generations.

The Valley and the inhabitants living here in and the surrounding areas, provide a unique opportunity for the study and understanding of cultural and biological diversity, and the ways and means by which within a given environment a balanced relationship between the need of humans and their surroundings is fulfilled.

The landscapes of the valley are also fit to be utilized for snow-skiing and heli-skiing during winters.

Some of the main positive attributes of the Bangus valley, in the overall development of Tourism Industry in the state of Jammu and Kashmir are:

- Attractive, virgin geographical location.
- Varied species of flora and fauna.
- Potential for Adventure Tourism.
- Existence of ancient Rural and Pastoral Cultural aspects, with continuing application in day to day life.
- Connected through tracks with many other Pristine, unexplored areas like Qazinag, Lolab Valley etc. and can thus serve as a “Gateway” to vast unexplored areas of Kashmir region.
- Absence of any adverse effect of development viz-a-viz road pollution, waste, haphazard construction etc.in the area.
- Presence of a large variety of Natural products (herbal plants, resins etc) which can be made a part of scheme for promotion of Tourism in the area.

In order to promote the inherent tourism potential of Bangus Valley , it is imperative to develop a set of objectives, which while encouraging visitors to the area, will also simultaneously help in protecting and conserving the existing environment of the Valley.

Strategies for Promotion of Nature Based Tourism at Bangus

Based on the survey / discussion/ meetings with the villagers, tourists and our personal observations, following actions can be taken for promoting Eco-tourism in the area.

- Bangus Valley as a nature based destination need to develop with tourist facilities and special attractions, and also need to emphasize to promote satellite destinations, to cater the needs of all categories of tourists with option of choice of destinations.
- Effective publicity and tourism marketing is vital for eco-tourism promotion. The Jammu and Kashmir Tourism needs to take such similar initiative for innovative way of publicity and marketing of Bangus Valley.
- It needs to promote mass environmental awareness for conservation of biodiversity at Bangus through sustainable use of economic benefits, aesthetic, ethical, cultural and social benefits amongst the locals and host communities.
- The development of specialized human resource is of prior importance to meet the needs and demand of eco-tourism at Bangus.
- Registered association of local guides, porters and ponywallas be formed to avoid cheating and burgling of tourists.
- There should be a permanent check at the entry points into Bangus to maintain the number of tourists and income generated through entry fees.
- To maintain safe and comfortable stay and to increase the number of tourists, Tourist Rest Houses need to be constructed and maintained properly.
- Adequate sewage facilities to be provided at the place for the proper disposal of wastes.
- Awareness need to be developed among the locals about the destruction of vegetation in Bangus. There should be rotational grazing to avoid over grazing of one area.
- Tourist at the base camp should clearly be instructed about maintaining the sensitivity/ fragility of the area.
- Basic facilities like telecommunication, electricity, toilet facilities on the route be provided.
- Tourists must be encouraged to stay with the local people as paying guests, for which local people should provide them all facilities.
- Sustainable tourism in the area compatible with conservation of existing bio diversity.
- Maintenance of the existing structure and functioning of the eco-system.
- Prevention of any lasting damage to biological diversity, ecosystem and natural resource of the area, through any proposed tourism activity.

- Respect for the socio-cultural authenticity of host community, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter –cultural understanding and tolerance.
- Protection of indigenous lively hood, resources and access to these resources.
- Supporting the effective participation and involvement of indigenous and local communities in the development, operation and monitoring of tourism activities.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Awesome scenes, lush green meadows and inspiring forest hills surrounding the valley of Bangus are the nature's most beautiful gifts to main kind. In the process of tourism development and operations the following suggestions must be observed by all the stakeholders to preserve the majestic natural environment of the place:

1. Development of eco-tourism at Bangus Valley must be carried by and under the consultation of all the stakeholders especially the host community.
2. A sophisticated and strategic work-plan to be developed by adequate participation of specialists and experts in tourism and environment.
3. Use of polythene and plastics is unhealthy for the environment of the place and hence must be banned and avoided.
4. Adequate municipal dustbins to be installed at the place to dispose off and recycle the non-degradable items.
5. The local culture and traditions to be respected and preserved.
6. Avoid using pollutants such as detergents in streams or springs.
7. Conservative measures to be taken to preserve the forest wealth from forest fires and smugglers.
8. Better marketing strategies to be applied for the promotion of the site.
9. Adequate infrastructural facilities to be developed but not at the cost of environment.

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