

Synopsis of  
“A Study on the socio-economic, ecological and environmental impacts of Eco Tourism in protected areas of Karnataka”

The total contribution of Travel & Tourism to the Indian GDP was INR6,385.1bn (6.6% of GDP) in 2012 and is forecast to rise by 7.3% in 2013, and to rise by 7.9% pa to INR14,722.3bn in 2023<sup>1</sup>. Off course this is the generic figure that the Government of India and WTTC have provided. There is no sectoral evaluation of the metric in regards to Eco tourism, Heritage tourism and similar, hence one would not be able to comment on the aspect of GDP contribution through Eco tourism. However, considering that multitude of tourists visiting India and the domestic tourists do visit destinations that fall in the categories of Eco tourism and nature based tourism; it is pertinent that studies in the sector will add value and bring about positive growth and development if approached from a 360° angle. Karnataka has been a forefront of many aspects of tourism promotion and off late there has been a qualitative churn and an intensive focus on Eco tourism. The creation of the Karnataka Eco Tourism Development Board (KEDB) in 2013 has provided a fillip to bring in a new structure, a policy, create guidelines and frameworks, awareness and education, and provide opportunities for training and capacity building amongst the stakeholders, besides standards and certification.

In this context the KEDB and the Karnataka Forest Department (KFD) together commissioned a pilot research project which no doubt had its nuances of brevity and also a limit on the spatial coverage, that would support to elucidate extant patterns of the resources used, the aspect of waste generation, rural employment, forest plant and animal community change and the dissemination of the message of conservation. All this with a focus on nature, wildlife and wilderness.

The objective of the study as per the KEDB and KFD directive<sup>2</sup> for the study were as follows:

**Environmental:**

1. Estimation of the demand for tourism resources of the identified NP's and the amounts of residuals (positive/negative) disposed to the environment.
2. Analysis of the environmental impacts of tourism on the local communities around the tourism areas.
3. Identification of tourism activities that are compatible / incompatible with the area and suggesting case specific alternatives.

**Socio-economic:**

1. What is the revenue generated through tourist expenditure in and around the three project sites?
2. What is the impact of eco-tourism on local businesses and tourist accommodation facilities in the three project sites?
3. What are the socio-economic-cultural effects of ecotourism activities on local communities?

**Ecological:**

1. Habitats may be viewed in terms of their biotic as well as abiotic components. For the purpose of this short-term study the researcher will look at the habitat's structural and trophic framework – its vegetation community, together with one abiotic component – soil.
2. The larger objective of the study is to investigate the impact of ecotourism on wild animal habitat and wild animal behaviour.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.wttc.org/site\\_media/uploads/downloads/india2013\\_1.pdf](http://www.wttc.org/site_media/uploads/downloads/india2013_1.pdf) accessed and retrieved on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2013

<sup>2</sup> Undated notification of the Office of the Conservator of Forests (Research), Dharwad,

If the above were the micro objectives, the broad patterns expected to emerge from the study would have two-fold purpose – (1) to advise the design and drafting of context-specific, democratic and environmentally sound policy for governing such tourism practice, and (2) to point out lacunae in our understanding of tourism-related fallouts that need to be addressed by longer term, more in-depth studies which will, in turn, facilitate the improvement of policy.

The hypothesis of tourism ventures in relation to Eco tourism is well appreciated by researchers, non-governmental organizations (NGO); that they do not embody the facets of benefits to local communities and nature conservation; in fact, Eco tourism has by itself become a misnomer, rather, it is to assess the multi-dimensional impacts of extant tourism practice (the regular kind of tourism) in fragile protected landscapes of high aesthetic and biodiversity value in order to construct a policy framework based on which ecologically, environmentally and socio-economically sound ecotourism practice may be ensured on the ground.

The study thereby seeks to examine the nature and impacts of tourism in three major aspects – ecological, socio-economic and environmental- in three protected areas in Karnataka – Bandipur Tiger Reserve, Dandeli-Anshi Tiger Reserve and Bhadra Tiger Reserve. These three sites/landscapes were selected as case studies because they fall at different points along the tourism intensity continuum with Dandeli at the low end (receiving the fewest number of visitors to the Reserve each year), Bhadra higher up the gradient and Bandipur at the high end (with intense visitation and safari pressure almost all year round). In the following report – laid out as three distinct sections, each pertaining to one aspect – research methodology, results and management implications of field studies at each of these sites is presented. The studies were carried out between February and June 2013 by Kadambari Anantram (socio-economic aspect), Ayesha Prasad (ecological aspect) and Freeda Robins (environmental aspect).