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Exploring Eco-Tourism in Dooars: A Sustainable Approach

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Abstract

Eco-tourism has emerged as a crucial component of sustainable development, particularly in ecologically rich and diverse regions like the Dooars area of North Bengal, India. This study explores the potential and challenges of eco-tourism in the Dooars, aiming to promote environmental conservation while providing economic benefits to local communities. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and field observations, this research assesses the current state of eco-tourism activities and stakeholder perceptions, including tourists, local residents, and relevant authorities. Findings indicate that the Dooars boasts significant natural attractions, including rich biodiversity and cultural heritage, yet faces challenges such as environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure, and the need for greater community involvement. The study concludes that a collaborative approach involving local stakeholders is essential for developing a sustainable eco-tourism model that not only preserves the ecological integrity of the Dooars but also enhances the socio-economic well-being of its residents. Recommendations are provided for policymakers and practitioners aimed at fostering sustainable practices that align with global eco-tourism principles.

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Introduction

Tourism is one of the most important sectors generating revenue and employment. Dooars being rich in physical and scenic beauties, makes it one of the preferred tourist destinations. This studies the concept of ecotourism and its impact on local people on their daily livelihood. The data collection method apply was primary and secondary data from journal, books and google.

Location

Dooars a vast region on the foothills of the Eastern Himalaya, is the left side of Teesta River east the flood plain of Easter Assam and North Bengal. The Teesta River form the western margin of the dooars, but the eastern line within Assam is less well defined. Buttan is to the north of the dooars and Bangladesh is to the south. This region is known for its immense biodiversity, wildlife, ethnic people and cultural, Jaldapara National Park, Buxa Tigers Reserve and Gurumara National Park are among the area's important forest. Beside of this forest, dooars is also Tranquil Village, Temples and Historical site. Due to its immensely growing popularity,

dooars has already established itself as a worth visiting place on the tourist map.

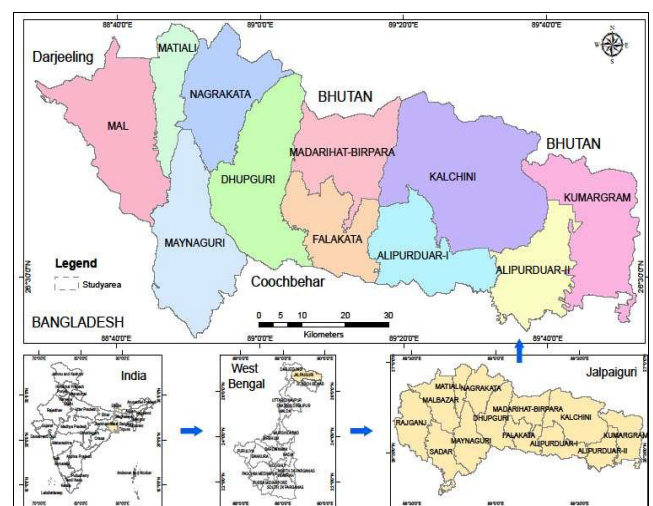


Fig 1: Location Map

Objective of the Study

The study is undertaken with the following objectives.

1. To study the major eco-tourism destination of dooars area.
2. To study the impact of eco-tourism on the dooars economy.
3. To study the various problems and prospects of dooars ecotourism.

What is ECO-Tourism

The concept of eco-tourism is the most sensible one. In many cases the concept of eco-tourism is merged with the concept of nature tourism as well as sustainable tourism. So, to define eco-tourism is not an easy task. The Eco-Tourism Society defines eco-tourism as "purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the eco-system, while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people." Eco-Tourism involves travel to different destination around the world which areas are flora and fauna rich and culturally heritage rich areas are the primary attractions for any tourists. Responsible ecotourism programs include those that minimize the negative impact on the environment and enhance the cultural integrity and protection of local people. It is the promotion of recycling energy efficiency, water conservation and creation of economic opportunities for local communities.

The Basic Characteristics of Eco-Tourism

Eco-Tourism is a very complex phenomenon. On the one hand, ecotourism echoed the concept of greenery and sustainability, on the other hand, Eco-Tourist offers maximum profit to the local people enlightening with the view of conservation. So, for clearing the concept of eco-tourism, the basic characteristic of it is describe as below:

- Eco-Tourism is a sustainable form of tourism, which is completely natural resource-based tourism.
- Eco-Tourism is the tool for conservation of natural resources and sustainable development.
- Eco-Tourism means the travel to undisturbed areas for studying, enjoying and knowing about flora, fauna, geology, ecosystem and cultural manifestation. So, Eco-Tourism is about environmental education.
- Eco-Tourism exerts benefits from bio-diversity conservation.
- Eco-Tourism encourages an understanding of impacts of tourism on the natural, cultural and human environment. It is a form low impact tourism.
- Eco-Tourism generates maximum benefits and minimal impacts.
- Eco-Tourism generates local employment both directly in tourism sector and various supporting sectors.

Principles of Eco-Tourism

- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation of natural environment.
- Provide empowerment for local people and provide finance for them.
- Build awareness about culture and environment.
- Increase positivity among visitors and hosts.
- To direct economic and others benefits to local people by replacing traditional practices.
- To maximise the early and long-term participant

Major Eco-Tourism Destination in Dooars Area

For the proper understanding entre Dooars region we can divide in three segments. This is the following

A) Eco-Tourism Destination in The Eastern Dooars

- **Buxa Tiger Reserve:** Buxa Tiger Reserve is located at 26.39° N and 89.34° 48" E. It lies in Alipurduar district of West Bengal. Its northern boundary runs along the international border with Bhutan, the Sinchula hill range lies all along the northern side of Buxa Tiger Reserve and the eastern boundary touches that of the Assam state. National Highway No: 31 C roughly runs along its southern boundary. Buxa Tiger Reserve was created in 1983 as the 15th tiger reserve in India. In 1986, Buxa Wildlife Sanctuary was constituted over 314.52 km² (121.44 sq mi) of the reserve forests.



Fig 2: Photograph: Buxa Tiger Reserve

- **Boxa Fort:** Boxa Fort is situated at an altitude of 2600 feet and is part of the Buxa Tiger Reserve. The British had used this fort as a high security prison due to its location. This fort is popular amongst trekkers as it is the starting point for various trails. If you are an avid trekker or a light trekker, this place has different kinds of options for you. From the foothills, Buxa fort is an uphill trek of around 2.5kms, which is surrounded by dense forests as you continue your trek towards the fort.
- **Jayanti:** Jayanti is located at 26.7072° N and 89.6113° E. It is situated on the edge of Buxa Forest is a quaint forest village along with the River Jayanti. Jayanti River forms a natural border with the Bhutan hills, the hills on the Eastern Side of the river are known as the Jayanti Hills, and the small villages on the western side known as Jayanti villages are named after the river Jayanti. 30km from Alipurduar Jayanti is often referred to as the 'Queen of Dooars' because of its astounding view, fascinating lush greenery and tranquil ambience.

During British rule, Jayanti became one of the major epicentres of the mining and tea industries in India. It became extremely important to British India's finances. However, it became difficult for the British to supply their commodities as the large European tea and mining industry grew around Jayanti. The construction work of the Jayanti Railway started in 1901 after they asked the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, Nripendra Narayan. Once Maharaja nodded yes, the British built a steel-made railway bridge over the Jayanti River to transport dolomites.

After the independence of India, the passenger train service began. This passenger train used to depart Alipurduar Junction at 08:30 pm and arrive at Jayanti at 9:30 pm.

The next day the passenger train used to depart Jayanti at 8 am and arrive at Alipurduar junction at 9 am. This historic railway service stopped once the Buxa Tiger Reserve was announced in the year 1986. The bridge above the Jayanti River is now in complete ruins. You will get to see only some pillars of it as the river has become shallow due to excess pebbles and rocks.



Fig 3: Photograph: Jayanti River

- **Raja Bhatkhawa:** Raja Bhatkhawa is located at 26.62° N and 89.53° E. It is a small town situated just outside the Buxa Tiger Reserve in the Kalchini Block in the Alipurduar district in West Bengal, India. The name of the place literally means “(the place) where the king had a meal”. The folklore is that the king of the princely state Koch Bihar used to come here for having picnic in the forests.



Fig 4: Photograph: Raja Bhatkhawa

- **Bhutanghat:** Bhutanghat is 45 km distance from Alipurduar in West Bengal is located near the Bhutan border. The name Bhutanghat is known for its scenic beauty and the swiftly flowing River Raidak. Basically, Bhutanghat is located in a mountainous landscape, fringed by hills and covered with elegant green forest. There is a 1904 forest bungalow close to the Riverbank but it is best to stay here during monsoon or just after the rains. Most of the tourist visit here only during the day time and before nightfall they return towards their base in Alipurduar, Jayanti, Raja Bhatkhawa Buxa and other places in the evening. Bhutanghat is an ideal tourist destination for adventurous nature lover tourist and is often serves as an elephant corridor. It is also known to be an extension of the Buxa Tiger Reserve. Bhutanghat is popular for endangered species of animals like tiger, rhinoceros, elephant and other animals include different types of deer, bison, birds and reptiles. The river Raidak itself is the main way for exciting bird watching where tourist can see different species of birds else their melodious note. Bhutanghat road is well connected by roads to rest of India and NH31 is the main high way of the area known for its scenic beauty and pleasing environs.

The trekking towards Bhutanghat from Raimatang is quite interesting as there is more chance to see lots of environs activities.



Fig 5: Photograph: Bhutanghat

- **Raidak:** Raidak is River, it rises in the Himalaya. The Raidak River, also called Wang Chhu in Bhutan. In its upper reaches it is also known as the Thimphu Chhu. It is a trans-boundary river originating in Bhutan that is a tributary of the river Brahmaputra. It flows through Bhutan, India and Bangladesh. It is one of the main rivers in Alipurduar district West Bengal, India.

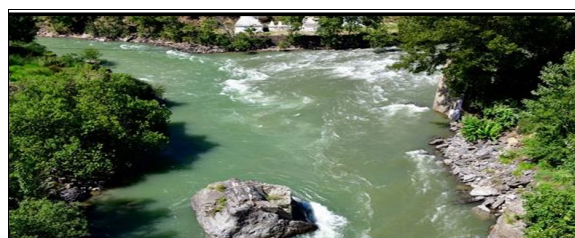


Fig 6: Photograph: Raidak River

B) Eco-Tourism Destination of The Central Dooars

- **Chilapata:** Chilapata Forest is the main corridor used by the elephants to travel between Jaldapara and the Buxa Tiger Reserve. This is a dense forest close to Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary in Dooars. You can come across elephants on your journey as animals roam freely around this place. Amongst the different tourism related activities, angling, birding, safari are the few options that you can opt for.



Fig 7: Photograph: Chilapata Forest

- **Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary:** Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary is located at 26.69° N and 89.27° E. This national park situated at the foothills of the Eastern Himalaya in Alipurduar District of northern West Bengal in India and bank on the Torsa River. It is situated at an elevation of 61Metre and spread across 216.51 km² of vast grassland with patches of riverine forest. It was declared a sanctuary in 1941 for protection of its great variety of flora and fauna. It has the largest population of the Indian Rhinoceros in the state.

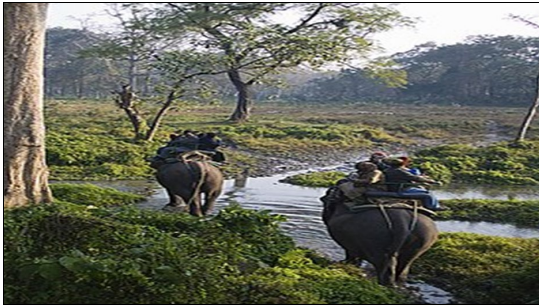


Fig 8: Photograph: Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary

- **Khairbari:** Khayerbari Nature Park is tiger rescue centre just 15 km away from jaldapara. The Park has been developed with the objective of treatment and rehabilitation of leopard and tigers. The leopards and tigers have been kept in a natural environment in this park. Rive Buri Torsa is flowing through the khayerbari nature park. The nearest Railway station is Hasimara.



Fig 9: Photograph: Khairbari

- **Kunjanagar:** Kunjanagar Eco Park is an amusement park which is popular for deer and elephants spotting and if you are lucky, you can sport a leopard as well One can also go around for boating in the nearby waterbody. This Eco Park is close to the Jaldapara sanctuary and is surrounded by rich forests and corn fields.



Fig 10: Photograph: Kunjanagar

- **Toto para:** Toto para is located at 26.83° N and 89.31° E. This village falls under the Madarihat Police Station. It is bounded by the foothills of Bhutan to the north, Torsa River to the east, and the Titi reserve forest on the south-west separated by the Hauri River. The nearest village is Ballalguri, which is about 5 km to the south of Totapara. There is a single lane motorable road leading to this village from the National Highway 31 through Hantapara. The area of the village is about 8.08 km². The village is about 22 km from Madarihat.



Fig 11: Photograph: Toto Para

C) Eco-Tourism Destination Of The Weastern Dooars

- **Mal bazar:** Mal bazar is located at 26.85° N and 88.75° E. It is situated at a distance of 55km from Siliguri and 65km from Jalpaiguri is one of the most important towns of Dooars region, Mal bazar Sited in the Eastern Dooars Mal bazar is the economic point and the main market for the Tea Garden and lately it has gained its prominence in the field of tourism. Strategically located on National Highway 31, Mal bazar provide an easy access towards the major tourist destination of Dooars making it's the base for tourist who wants to explore the wild side of Dooars. Surrounded by Tea gardens and small villages on all sides, Mal bazar acts as the academic, commercial and administrative centre of the surrounding area.

The journey towards Mal bazar is an astounding experience which is filled with picturesque scenery. One of the most astounding vistas offered from Coronation Bridge, finest example of India architecture, during the journey towards Mal bazar is the sight of emerald blue river stream wandering through the lofty mountain hills. Throughout the ride towards Mal bazar visitors are accompanied by the pictorial view of changing vegetation of semi tropical forest region to verdant tea garden dotting the plain giving the visual treat for the eyes. Surrounded with lush tea garden of Raja Tea Estate, Mal bazar before independence use to be a small village and was known for its tea garden among British people. The unique location of Mal bazar has made it the base for many tourists visiting Dooars region since all the tourist destinations of Western Dooars can be accessed from Mal bazar within a drive of an hour or less like Gorumara, home of the famous one-horned Asiatic Rhino, Chapramari, Chukchukia is an ideal vantage point for watching myriad birds and many others places. Form Mal bazar tourist can also make day trip visit to Jhalong, Bidu and Paren which are famous among the traveller for the astounding trekking route towards Neora Valley National Park. There are no dense forested areas or meandering river stream in Mal bazar but it does harbors route which lead the tourist towards the gushing river Murti and verdant semi-tropical forest of Dooars. Although Mal bazar acts as a base towards many pictorial destinations of Western Dooars, the town itself doesn't have much to offer to the tourist except for the warm hospitality and the beautiful Mal Park, a famous relaxing and hangout point of the localities and Kumlai a serene picnic spot of Mal bazar. From trekking through the dense forest to spotting rare animal Mal bazar harbor route which takes the tourist to those astounding destination.

Endowed with rich flora and fauna Dooars is known for its meandering river stream and verdant woodland. Mal bazar is the gateway leading the travellers to the dreamlike destination of Dooars. If you want to spend a weekend amidst the deepest forest while listening to the sound of gurgling river stream and alluring chirping of exotic birds, Mal bazar is the town which will lead you towards those pictorial destinations.



Fig 12: Photograph: Mal bazar Tea Garden

- **Chalsa:** Chalsa is located 8 km from Mal bazar in the western Dooars on the National Highway 31 is an important town of Dooars region, Chalsa. Nestled on the foothills of Himalayas on the way to Dooars from Siliguri the unique location of Chalsa has made it a favored tourist destination of Doors since it acts like a base for the travellers who wants to explore the lesser-known hill stations of Dooars. Sited at the periphery of Gorumara National Park, Chalsa is endowed with rich flora and fauna and is also known as the Gateway towards Dooars due to its proximity with pictorial destination of Dooars. There are many places located at an easy or short traveling distance which can be visited while halting in Chalsa like Bindu. Bindu is the last hamlet of West Bengal located near the Indo-Bhutan border and is known for its cardamom plantation. The hydel electric project built on the River Jaldhaka is another famous attraction of Bindu which have lured travellers from Chalsa towards Bindu. Samsing is another lesser-known hill station of Dooars which can be visited through Chalsa. Located 15km from Chalsa, Samsing with its astounding trekking route towards Neora Valley National Park has caught the interest of adventurer traveling towards Dooars. From trekking towards the store house of medicinal plant to spotting rare animal of Dooars region a visit to Chalsa ensures tourist it all. The quintessential town Chalsa due to its unique location has become a must visit tourist destination for the travellers who want to explore the wild side of Dooars region while traveling to North Bengal.



Fig 13: Photograph: Chalsa

- **Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary:** Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary, situated in the vicinity of Gorumara National Park is another famous tourist attraction in Dooars. Best known for its large elephant population, Chapramari was

declared as a wildlife sanctuary in 1998, Chapramari forest is bounded by shimmering river streams making it an ideal place to partake in angling and boating while travelling in Dooars. Chapramari derived its name from the native language where the “Chapra” stand for variety of small fishes found in northern Bengal, and “Mari” stand for abundance. If you love nature, then the verdant forest of Chapramari is bound to amaze you.

In the vicinity of River Murti, visitors will find a watchtower, the prime attractions of Chapramari. The amazing location of Chapramari watchtower allows the visitors to spot a herd of wild elephants in their natural habitat along with other wild inhabitants of Chapramari Wildlife Sntuary like wild boar, barking deer, gaur and sambar.



Fig 14: Photograph: Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary

Importance and Significance of Eco-Tourism Resource of Dooars Belt

The importance and significance of the eco-tourism resource of Dooars region are as follows

- Eco-Tourism resource helps to increase the glamour of the Dooars area.
- Eco-Tourism resource of the Dooars region helps to shape up the Eco-Tourism industry properly.
- Eco-Tourism resource of the Dooars region gives an encouragement to the national income.
- Eco-Tourism resource of the Dooars region helps to maximize the economic benefit of the host communities particularly those people, who live in and adjacent protected and reserved forest area.
- Eco-Tourism resource highlights the Dooars region in the Eco-Tourism map of India.
- Eco-Tourism resource of the Dooars region stimulates the overall regional development.

Problems Related To the Dooars Eco-Tourism

- It destroys the natural habitat of the dooars area.
- Overuse of valuable fresh water resources of the dooars region.
- It polluted lakes and water bodies of the surrounding area.
- Increase the rate of global warming.
- Create market for more use of drugs.
- Increase crime rates.
- Damage metal and non-metallic road by the vehicle.
- Poor transportation facility system.
- Lack of proper qualified tourist guides.
- Scarcity of trained facility.
- Lack of publicity and information regarding ecotourism in dooars area.

Prospective of Eco-Tourism in Dooars Area

- Ecotourism is the way of environmental education for all.
- Ecotourism should promote moral and ethical responsibilities and behaviour towards natural and cultural environment.
- Ecotourism encourages the participation of local people and generate maximum profit to them.
- Ecotourism needs the qualitative improvement of any destination not quantitative.
- Ecotourism considers the principle of sustainable development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, embracing eco-tourism in the Dooars area is not just a pathway to economic growth but a holistic approach to fostering environmental stewardship and cultural appreciation. As stakeholders-from government bodies to local communities-collaborate to promote sustainable tourism, the Dooars can emerge as a model region that harmonizes ecological integrity with socio-economic development. By prioritizing sustainability, the region can preserve its unique ecosystem for future generations while enhancing the overall quality of life for its inhabitants. Moving forward, it is essential for all parties involved to engage in continuous dialogue, education, and innovation to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of eco-tourism in the Dooars.

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