

Eco-Tourism Destinations of Odisha

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Eco-tourism is conceptually different from conventional tourism or mass tourism. It has evolved over the years as a manifestation of human concerns for protection/conservation of ecology/environment. Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin, a Mexican architect, first tried to define eco-tourism in 1983 as: "That form of environmentally responsible tourism that involves travel and visit to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the objective of enjoying, admiring, and studying the nature (the scenery, wild plants and animals), as well as any cultural aspect (both past and present) found in these areas, through a process which promotes conservation, has a low impact on the environment and on culture and favours the active and socio-economically beneficial involvement of local communities". Later the International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 1990) defines Ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people."

Eco-tourism typically involves travel to destinations where **flora**, **fauna**, and **cultural heritage** are the primary attractions. The terms ecological tourism and nature based travel are synonymous to eco-tourism. It intends to educate 'eco-tourists' the impacts of humans on the environment in order to foster a greater and wider appreciation of our natural habitats. It further seeks to educate travellers the need for conservation of the environment and

simultaneously have respect for different cultures. It also pursues creation of an ecological conscience, encouraging more activism among visitors and thereby creating enthusiastic and motivated actors for the cause of conservation of the environment.

Responsible eco-tourism includes programmes that minimize the negative impacts of conventional tourism on the environment and enhances/strengthens the cultural integrity of the local people. It seeks to improve welfare of the local communities by lending a helping hand in their socio-economic development. This involves creating economic opportunities for the communities to bring about sustainable economic returns. Therefore, it is an activity which promotes employment as well as economic and social development and thus acts as an alternative income source for communities living in hard economic situations.

Unlike the conventional tourist, the eco-tourist seeks to enjoy and learn from the nature and culture he visits while maintaining a responsible attitude. Some of the activities that promote eco-tourism are Animal watching, Bird watching, Plant observation, Mountain trekking, Photographic safari, Forest patrolling with forest staff etc. So eco-tourists are in true sense, nature lovers who are fascinated by ethnic food and local culture. Rather than seeking comforts, they revel in the

nature and love every aspect of wilderness like listening to the sounds from flowing water of a stream or a waterfall, singing insects, chirping birds, barks, roars and trumpets.

Odisha with its rich bounties of nature and scenic natural beauty, has immense potential to occupy a place of pride in the eco-tourism map of the country. Odisha's Protected Area Network is restricted to within 4.25% of the total geographical area of the state, which comprises 2 National Parks, 19 Wildlife Sanctuaries and 3 Tiger Reserves. Most of the eco-tourism destinations are located within these pristine areas. The State's population is a very crucial factor in the preservation of the unspoiled tranquility of Nature. Even then, whatever of that archetype still resides in some of our forest tracts is still very attractive to anybody who has the freshness of mind and the longing to explore and appreciate its values. Some of the ecotourism destinations of Odisha are illustrated below.

Similipal Tiger Reserve in Mayurbhanj district is known as the land of roar and trumpet and a Biosphere reserve. Vast stretch of luxuriant vegetation, predominantly with Sal and more than 1150 plant species, offers ideal shelter for wild animals. The landscape, beautifully studded with numerous small and high hills like Meghasini (1163m) and Khairaberu (1168m), is densely covered with vegetation. Waterfalls like Joranda (150m) and Barehipani (400m) are the two most scenic places in Similipal. A visitor to Similipal can see animals like elephant, crocodile, *sambar*, barking deer and wild pig. Orchidarium at Gudugudia, crocodile conservation programme at Ramatirtha and Khadia tribes in the forest draw the attraction of the visitors. Accommodation is available at Gudugudia, Chahala, Jashipur and Baripada for which one has to contact the Field Director, Similipal Tiger Reserve, Baripada (Phone- 06792-252593, 06792-255939, 9437037580). Cooking facilities are also available in 20 tourist cottages at 8 locations.

Besides, a cafeteria has been opened at Muktapur FRH for day visitors. The park is open for tourist from November to June. But only limited LMV vehicles (40 through Jashipur gate and 20 through Pithabata gate) are permitted per day before 9 AM, to regulate the tourist pressure.

Barehipani waterfall in Similipal

Bhitarkanika Sanctuary in Kendrapara district is at a distance of 162 kms from Bhubaneswar. This deltaic region of Brahmani, Baitarani and Dhamra rivers is a unique natural habitat with mangrove vegetation on the sites of creeks and tidal mudflats only next to the



Sundarbans in West Bengal. Bhitarkanika is home to the largest population of salt water crocodile, water monitor lizard, king cobra, python and many other reptiles and amphibians besides herbivores. World's largest nesting and breeding area of the endangered Olive Ridley sea turtle is in Gahirmatha marine sanctuary, the sea front of Bhitarkaniaka. Migratory birds like bar-headed goose, brahminy duck, pintail, shoveller, gadwall and pelican are prominent among winter visitors. The heronry at Bagagahan is unique where more than 50,000 resident and local migratory wetland birds nest during rainy season. The area is a treasure trove for botanical and zoological studies and research. The floral diversity of this landscape is known to be the largest in India and second largest after Papua New Guinea in the world.

November to February is the ideal period to visit Bhitarkanika when one can see lot of crocodiles basking under sun. To witness mass nesting of Olive Ridley sea turtles one has to visit Gahirmatha beach during February and March. Bamboo cottage, Log cabin, Tent, Dormitory and Forest Rest Houses for accommodation are available at Dangamal, Gupti, Habalikhati and Ekakaula. Normally visitors prefer to stay at Dangamal, which can be approached from Gupti by a reserved motor launch. Restaurant at Dangamal is run by a private tour operator who provides food on prior intimation. One better not forget to take one eco-guide along with him from Gupti if he wants to appreciate the values of the park. Interested eco-tourists may contact the DFO, Mangrove Forest Division (Wildlife),



Riverine Resort and Ecotourist Cottage in Bhitarkanika

Rajnagar, Dist. Kendrapara. (Phone-06729-272460, 9437037370).



Boating in creeks of Bhitarkanika



Mass nesting of Olive Ridley Sea Turtles on Gahirmatha beach

Tikarpara in Satkosia Tiger Reserve is 60 kms from Angul and 190 kms from Bhubaneswar and famous for the natural habitat of gharial and mugger crocodiles in the Satkosia gorge of Mahanadi. It is also a home of tiger, leopard, gaur, giant squirrel, sambar, barking deer, large number of elephants and birds. Bhindhara waterfall, Mahanadi River, gorge and dense deciduous forest, sighting of crocodiles, giant squirrels and migratory birds attract many tourists during winter season. Ecotourists are provided with tented accommodations at Tikarpara, Purunakote and Chhotkei, whereas Forest Rest Houses are available to them at Tikarpara, Purunakote, Pampasar, Labangi and Raigoda. Interested eco-tourists are requested to contact

DFO, Satkosia wildlife division, Angul (Phone-06764-236218, 09437102244) well in advance to get their accommodation facility reserved. Local youth have been organized to form a society to render services to the tourists in providing cooked food and to take them on a boat ride or jungle trekking.



Ecotourist tent at Tikarpara

Chandaka - Damapara Sanctuary being adjacent to Bhubaneswar city has gained a lot of importance for eco-tourism and environmental education in the weekends. Places like Deras, Jhumka, Kumarkhunti and Ambilo are the destinations where bamboo huts, watch towers and Forest Rest Houses are available to provide night shelter to the visitors for watching wild animals. Sighting of elephants, deer, peacock and water birds are common near water bodies. Eco Development Committees have been constituted in the nearby villagers, who get their earning by providing services to the eco tourists and day picnickers by supplying food or cooking food for them. Remains of Bauli gada and Chudanga gada forts of Ganga dynasty are the two historical places in the sanctuary area. The DFO, Chandaka Wildlife Division, Baramunda, Bhubaneswar (Phone-0674-2551600, 9437387071) handles reservation of accommodations inside the park.

Chilika Lagoon is one of the internationally renowned Ramsar sites for its conservation as wetland ecosystem. Visitors rush to the lagoon to witness large number of migratory birds and Irrawaddy dolphin and to enjoy food prepared out of brackish water prawn, fish and crab from October to March, although it can be visited throughout the year. Boating in the lagoon while searching for dolphins near Satapada is a memorable experience. Visiting of Kalijai, Bhagabati and Narayani temples add excitement to the visitors of Chilika. To encourage eco-tourism, training camps of eco-guides and boatmen associations at Balugaon and Satapada



Migratory birds in Chilika

are regularly organized, one can take help of them to know Chilika better without disturbing the birds and dolphins. Chilika is approachable from Balugaon, the railway head and connected with NH-5. It is 90 km far from Bhubaneswar and also from Satpada and 50 Kms from Puri. Accommodations are available at Balugaon, Satapada and Brahmapura, which can be made available to visitors through OTDC and DFO, Chilika Wildlife Division, Gopinathpur, Balugaon (Phone-06756-211012, 09437109889).

Nandankanan Zoological Park is famous for its white tigers. Being located at a distance of only 13 km from Bhubaneswar, the park remains densely crowded in every weekend. Kanjia lake and State Botanical Garden are also visited by tourists for boating, ropeway ride and

night halts. Large number of wild animals and birds are kept in enclosures for enhancing wildlife awareness among the people and educating the students. Some of the added attractions are nature interpretation centre, lion safari, white tiger safari, deer park, water bird aviary, nature trail, Reptile Park, nocturnal house, aquarium, and elephant ride. Reservation for accommodation in Botanical garden is available with the Deputy Director, Nandankanan, (Phone- 0674-2466075, 9437022023).

Debrigarh Sanctuary in Baragarh district is 40 km from Sambalpur and 320 km from Bhubaneswar. The Debrigarh area is like an emerald nestled in the serene blue waters of Hirakud dam. Ushakothi waterfall is visited by a number of tourists and nature lovers where Indian bison, chowsingha and water birds are the prime attractions. Boating in the reservoir gives immense pleasure. Accommodations are available at Dhodrokusum and Barakhandia along with food prepared by the local people, who are involved to render services. November to April is the suitable period to visit. Visitors interested may contact DFO, Hirkud Wildlife Division, Motijharan, Sambalpur, 768001, (Phone- 0663-2548743, 9438113270).

Kuldiha Sanctuary of Balasore district is 31 km from Balasore and 260 km from Bhubaneswar and preferably visited during November to mid February. Sighting of Elephant, Gaur and Giant Squirrel inside dense peninsular Sal forest is a common phenomenon in this sanctuary. Plenty of wild animals and birds are seen near Rissia and Sindhua reservoirs located within the sanctuary. Forest Rest Houses and Tents at Kuldiha and Jodachua provide pleasant night stay facility for the tourists for which one has to contact the DFO, Balasore WL Division (Phone- 06782-256142, 09437062743). Kuldiha fits into a tourism circuit encompassing Chandipur, Remuna, Nilagiri and Panchalingeswar.

Apart from the above places, excellent eco-tourism destinations have also been developed by the Forest Department outside the protected areas like Anjar in Keonjhar district, Ansupa in Cuttack district, Sidhamula in Nayagarh district, Mahavinayak near Chandikhol in Jajpur district, Nrusinghanath in Bargarh district, Manchabandha in Baripada district, Olasuni in Cuttack district and Pakidi in Ganjam District. One trekking path from Harishankar to Nrusinghanath has been developed to attract nature lovers to make them aware about medicinal plants of Gandhamardan hill. Reservation for these places can be obtained from respective DFOs.

Eco-tourism is also known as Responsible tourism. One should be aware that we are entering the land of wild animals as intruders. In the name of tourism they should not be disturbed and their habitat should not have any adverse impact due to our use of their territory. Noise pollution is one of the major disturbances as we often use noisy vehicles, too many vehicles inside a limited stretch of land and sometimes use loud speakers and tape recorders for our amusement in the vicinity. Day picnickers cannot be called as eco-tourists as they visit parks primarily to eat, dance and play rather than to enjoy and soak in the wilderness. The second and most important environmental hazard is accumulation of garbage in the eco-tourism zones. Polythene carry-bags, food wrappers, plastic water bottles, waste papers and kitchen wastes not only make the environment ugly and polluted but also has hazardous effect on the wild animals' health; ruminants die of polythene choke if by chance they ingest it along with food stuff. As eco-tourists we must pose ourselves as responsible visitors so that there should be no adverse impact on the wild environment while enjoying, feeling and appreciating the serenity and thrill in the nature and learning a lot from them.

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