

Green Tourism Environmental Sustainability in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Green tourism, which is also known as eco-tourism or sustainable tourism, represents one of the most important methods of achieving a balance between tourism development and environmental conservation along with socio-economic well being. Tamil Nadu has many advantages for developing green tourism initiatives due to its rich biodiversity, large areas of forest, coastal ecosystems and cultural heritage. Using secondary data sources, The purpose of this study is to examine how green tourism can help promote environmental sustainability in Tamil Nadu by reviewing existing green tourism policies and their impacts on the environment. This research has indicated some primary eco-tourism efforts, including management of protected areas, community involvement in tourism, and utilization of sustainable energy. In addition, it has provided some examples of government initiatives such as the Tamil Nadu Ecotourism Policy, and Trek-TN. Also, the findings show that green forms of tourism assist with biodiversity, job creation, and rural economic

on the environment, as well as increasing the information and awareness amongst local people. However, there are still many issues that need to be addressed in order to help with the continued success of eco-tourism, including over-tourism, lack of adequate facilities, unequal distributions of the benefits for communities impacted by the tourism, and poor systems in place for monitoring long-term sustainability. Finally, this research identifies ways to ensure continued development of eco-tourism in Tamil Nadu include integrating various aspects of eco-tourism efforts into one plan, greater government support, use of technology, and continued growth of community

Keywords: Green Tourism, Environmental Sustainability, Eco-Tourism, Community-Based Tourism, Biodiversity Conservation, Tamil Nadu

Introduction

The field of tourism has provided significant support to the development of local and regional economies, as well as job creation around the globe. Along with these positive contributions comes the negative impact from the ongoing expansion of this sector, including depletion of resources, pollution, destruction of the natural environment, and loss of cultural standards. In order to respond to these negative impacts, green tourism (also known as eco-tourism

or sustainable tourism) is being developed as a viable solution that promotes responsible and environmentally conscious travel, preserves natural resources, and fosters inclusive community development.

The Government of Tamil Nadu believes that all tourist activities in the state should be ecologically and culturally friendly, sustainable and include: (1) maintaining environmental health and resiliency through appropriate design while developing and operating tourism products and services; (2) promoting and marketing ecologically and culturally friendly tourism products and services; and (3) creating local jobs and providing economic benefits to local communities through tourism. In addition to these three goals, the Tamil Nadu government will continue to work with stakeholders to develop additional policies to integrate all aspects of tourism within a single system, including the development of sustainable tourism products that promote biodiversity, sustain cultural heritage and provide employment, especially in rural areas. Specifically, through the establishment of partnerships with government and non-governmental organisations, the state will continue to establish policies to

Further information regarding Tamil Nadu Ecotourism Policy (2017) and Tamil Nadu Tourism Policy (2023) is available on the Tamil Nadu government website (www.tnstourism.gov.in).

The various challenge that affect Tamil Nadu's tourism sector in meeting the requirements for promoting environmental sustainability exists regardless of the numerous efforts that have been made by the government at various levels to promote growth. Continued overpopulation of areas such as Mahabalipuram, Yelagiri, and several coastal states due to excessive amounts of pollution, water shortages, degradation of habitat, etc., have resulted in the unfortunate accumulation of large amounts of waste and pressure on several of the state's natural resources and their use.

The issue of not having sufficient enforcement of the existing regulations, the ailing tourism economy due to seasonal fluctuation, and the lack of sharing the profits made by tourism with the local people continues to create a serious issue in Tamil Nadu.

This current study will review the role of green tourism in assisting Tamil Nadu with its goals of promoting environmental sustainability, using data collected through secondary research to determine the tourism trends, economic impacts, protected areas, and other indicators of sustainability for the state and show the likely future development of green tourism.

Review of Literature

In his analysis of Mamallapuram's ecotourism practices, Varghese (2024) discovered that while knowledge of sustainable tourism is growing, limited infrastructure and unsafe garbage disposal continue to be significant obstacles. The report examined how tour operators may help contribute to sustainable tourism in Tamil Nadu by implementing eco-friendly techniques and practices that assist communities by promoting environmental programmes such as minimising waste, conserving energy and using local resources (Balaji and Milton, 2025).

RabiyathulBasariya (2025) reported that the growth of ecotourism in the hill stations of Tamil Nadu has resulted in an increase in sustainable tourism jobs and wildlife protection; however, RabiyathulBasariya (2025) also noted the lack of adequate monitoring of sustainable ecotourism and unequal benefit from it for the local community.

In examining the contributions of community-based tourism homestays to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Pasanchay and Schott (2021) noted the importance of community-based tourism homestays to preserve traditional culture and economic incentives, which aligns with rural tourism models in Tamil Nadu.

Statement of the Problem

Tamil Nadu has a thriving industry for tourism but does not have enough room for its expansion before it destroys what little environment remains. The natural environment is destroyed when so many tourists visit locations like Yelagiri or Mahabalipuram, isn't that right? You get tons of garbage, and everything gets strained, especially the water. Rules we had aren't being followed either—so these places that are protected are still losing their trees and wildlife. And people living here, they can't stand on the money because sometimes the tourists show up, and sometimes they don't. We have policies about eco-tourism, but nobody is minding that locals actually get the benefits and we keep an eye on how much harm we are doing. That's hard to do forever.

Research Gap

There is information available on sustainable tourism as a whole, but a lack thereof when it is divided by country to look at a place like Tamil Nadu. There is a lack of knowledge about their utilization of technology such as virtual reality to help minimize their carbon footprint for a “green tourism.” There is a lack of information available about why agri tourism is used by farms, as well as their motivation behind it. Also, the impact is widely available, but again divided by certain district areas such as Ramanathapuram. Moreover, information is needed regarding the recovery from the pandemic and “how they are working together to deal with the crowds of tourists.”

Research Methodology

Essentially, this entire process has been something that has essentially been put together using already existing data that has already been lying around. We essentially didn't add any new data to this process or anything like that. We essentially went through a bunch of different articles using a bunch of different official documents from various government sources and everything. Essentially, a full picture of this entire process—that of sustainability from tourism in this part of India, particularly in this state of Tamil Nadu—was what essentially needed to go forward in terms of what this entire process had DDDCA?

Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural effects of green tourism practices.
2. To examine the key initiatives/policies promoting the growth of green tourism in Tamil Nadu.
3. To determine the main obstacles and research needs concerning environmental sustainability in tourism.
4. To assist in the creation of policy guidelines that will encourage improved and long-term growth in “Green Tourism” in Tamil Nadu..

Green Tourism and Environmental Sustainability in Tamil Nadu

The following data and statistics were all obtained from research performed by individuals throughout Tamil Nadu; however, actual visitation statistics for Tamil Nadu are recorded at locations throughout the state and used will be discussed. In addition, the record of eco-tours through Tamil Nadu has been well documented; therefore I am using my research to represent these records as local tourism records. The records of these individuals were developed using data of official sources or through various independent research methods or third-party confirmation based on the most recent available data on tourism and local surveys on both local and regional opinions about eco-tours.

Tourist Arrivals in Tamil Nadu (Domestic and Foreign)

The data shown here reveals that, after the pandemic, people are returning again to eco-tourism sites, and this is positive news. There are many people who are visiting eco-tourism destinations like biosphere reserves and the Western Ghats, contributing significantly to this overall increase in visitor numbers.

Year	Domestic Visitors (Million)	Foreign Visitors (Million)	Total Visitors (Million)	Notes
2019	494.87	6.87	501.74	Pre-pandemic peak; high foreign influx to heritage and eco-sites.
2020	140.70	0.50 (estimated decline)	141.20	Sharp drop due to pandemic; limited eco-tourism activity.
2021	115.30	0.06	115.36	Lowest recorded; restrictions impacted sustainability projects.
2022	218.58	0.41	218.99	Recovery begins; growth in domestic eco-visits to hills and reserves.
2023	286.01	1.17	287.18	Strong rebound; Tamil Nadu ranked 2nd nationally in domestic visits (12.63% share).
2024	306.84	1.16	308.00	Continued growth; focus on sustainable sites like Nilgiri Biosphere.
2025	241.09	-	-	Provisional; indicates sustained domestic interest in green tourism.

Source: Secondary data Grab On

Economic Impacts of Tourism in Tamil Nadu

Tourism provides the local community with jobs and money. The eco-projects that we develop especially the green ones need to create reliable streams of income so that we can maintain our conservation efforts.

Metric	Value	Year/Period	Notes
Contribution to GSDP	12%	2023-2025	Supports ~2.5 million jobs; green tourism aids rural economies.
Tourism Revenue (TTDC)	₹243.31 crore	2023-24	Fivefold increase from ₹49.11 crore in 2020-21; includes eco-tourism earnings.
National Tourism GDP Share (Tamil Nadu Portion)	Part of national ₹19.13 trillion	2023	Projected to ₹22 trillion nationally by 2025; TN's services sector at 54%.
Investment in Sustainable Infrastructure	Over ₹100 crore	2023-2025	Upgrades at eco-sites like Mamallapuram and Kanyakumari; public-private partnerships.
Employment in Tourism Sector	15.87% of workforce dependent	2023-2024	Includes eco-guides, homestays; 33.33% direct dependency in surveyed communities.

Target GDP Share	12% by 2030	Projected	Government goal via sustainable policies.
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Source: secondary data ministry of tourism

Protected Areas and Biodiversity Metrics

Tamil Nadu’s green tourism sector relies heavily on having all the protected parks to succeed.

Category	Metric	Value	Notes
Forest Cover	Percentage of geographical area	17.59%	Includes Western/Eastern Ghats; key for eco-tourism.
Protected Areas	Percentage of forest land	30.92%	37 areas covering >7,000 sq km.
Biosphere Reserves	Number	3	Nilgiri, Gulf of Mannar, Agasthyamalai; focus on biodiversity conservation.
Tiger Reserves	Number	4	Anamalai, Mudumalai, Sathyamangalam, Kalakad-Mundanthurai.
Sustainability Initiatives	Renewable Energy Adoption	40% in agritourism farms	Includes solar, EVs; 25% rainwater harvesting, 20% wastewater reuse.
Project Funding (Swadesh Darshan/ PRASHAD)	Total Sanctioned for TN Sites	~₹300 crore (cumulative)	E.g., ₹30.02 crore for Mamallapuram immersive experience (2024).

Survey-Based Insights on Sustainability Impacts in Tamil Nadu

Data collected from a mixed-methods study on sustainable practices shows the three areas: environmental, economic, and socio-cultural.

Impact Area	Key Metric	Value/Percentage	Notes
Environmental	Encourages responsible behaviours	High agreement (factor loading 0.873)	Policies preserve natural beauty; but 82.2% note degradation from over tourism.
Economic	Job creation and business benefits	80.0% variance explained	Revenue improves infrastructure; 33.33% directly dependent on tourism.
Socio-Cultural	Cultural preservation	57.5-71.4% agreement	Enhances cross-cultural understanding; some commercialization noted.
Community Participation	Involvement in planning	86.4% factor loading	Skill programs available; improves quality of life ($R^2=0.659$ in regression).
Challenges	Overtourism and degradation	Prevalent in 19.05-25.4% income brackets	Inadequate enforcement; strongest predictor of well-being (Beta=0.342 for environmental impact).
Household Income Distribution	Above ₹1,00,000	25.4%	Tourism boosts higher brackets; 10.32% below ₹10,000.

Conclusion

Green Tourism (also known as Eco-Tourism), demonstrates how Tamil Nadu can be more environmentally sustainable and provide individuals living in rural communities with an economic future through environmentally friendly Eco-Projects. Eco-Tourism benefits the environment, native wildlife and provides job opportunities for individuals living in rural areas, preserves native cultures and raises awareness about natural resource issues. The Tamil Nadu government has supported the establishment of regulations and protected areas designated for protection; however, the cooperation and support of the local communities involved were crucial to the success of this type of tourism.

However, there are several major concerns. There are times when too many tourists come to the same area which creates negative impacts, regulations are often not enforced as well as they could be, there are infrastructure issues, and the distribution of monies may not be equitable amongst all parties. If Tamil Nadu wishes to continue to utilize Green Tourism, they will need to:

1. Better manage the tourist traffic at each location
2. Establish and enforce stricter environmental regulations
3. Utilize technology that does not produce greenhouse gas emissions
4. Have the Government, Businesses, and Local Communities collaborate with one another to ensure that the projects being developed are successful.

In addition to the above four items, the State should also continually monitor their progress and provide training to ensure that Green Tourism continues to positively contribute to the growth of Tamil Nadu while protecting the environment.

Findings

- A lot of the time, when we are doing what I would call “green” tourism, we can find this type of tourism in many different parts of Tamil Nadu, but often in the hills or near one of the sensitive forest regions that have been named as Biosphere Reserves. In fact, green tourism has really taken off in Tamil Nadu over the last few years.
- Tourism done in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner provides protection for the plant and animal life in these forested areas while also creating a greater awareness of the importance of environmental conservation among both the tourists visiting these areas and the residents living nearby.
- When the community gets involved in running the trips, the locals end up doing better. Their income levels have increased and these areas are experiencing an increase in their quality of life.
- The Government is also getting involved, investing money into Recovery Programme Projects such as Swadeshi Darshan to improve infrastructure, manage tourist destinations more effectively, etc.
- These areas are also slowly incorporating alternative energy sources, rainwater harvesting and improved waste management systems throughout their eco-tourism businesses and agricultural enterprises. Overall, all of these areas are improving (as evidenced by steady but gradual improvement).

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