

Latest Trends in Hospitality and Tourism Industry.

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Research Topic: Development of Niche Tourism Through the Aquamarine Conservation at Velas

Key words: niche tourism, conservation of environment, sustainable tourism development.

Introduction: Generally one feels that tourists enjoy sun, sand and sea and would be happy enjoying the routine holidays year after year. Contrary to this belief, tourists are also attracted towards something which is unexplored, away from routine and something which is not tried before.

The difference between new and old tourism has given rise to new forms of tourism which allow tourists to enrich their experiences and educate themselves rather than just enjoying the holidays. Agro tourism, adventure tourism, sports tourism, storytelling tourism are a few examples to name such new forms of tourism emerging out of tourists needs. Some of these forms of tourism require active tourist participation, some are educative, and some demand a spirit of adventure and courage.

The deviation of tourism from masses to classes has brought about a phenomenal change in tourism development pattern. A niche tourism which is segment catering to the specific needs of tourists is developing now. Such tourism may have less number of takers as compared to popular tourism but it is a qualitative change in the experience of a tourist which makes it worth.

Since such tourism has limited number of takers the other advantage is negative effects of mass tourism could be avoided at a destination. Sustainability of a destination in the long run could be achieved through development of niche tourism. Conservation of fragile eco systems and environment is also possible when tourism development consumes less resources at a destination. Tourism development at Velas could be one such development favouring healthy growth of tourism at a destination and aiming conservation of aquamarine life at the same time.

Objective of the research

1. To understand the factors leading to development of niche tourism which is a recent phenomenon in tourism.
2. To study the development of niche tourism at Velas and the factors contributing to the growth of tourism at a destination.

Research Methodology

Primary data collection:

1. Site visit,
2. Interviews with NGO activities at the destination.

Secondary data collection

1. Books.
2. EBSCO HOST.
3. JCC@UGC INFONET.
4. News paper articles.
5. Web search.

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By : Dr. Suvarna Sathe.

Introduction.

Though tourism as an industry is contributing to the GDP and it is considered as a smokeless industry there are certain trends that are developing to avoid the impacts of tourism at the destination. There is a gradual shift in tourism demand from mass to niche tourism. Special Interest Tourism (SIT) which encompasses various niche tourism segments is an emerging field. This trend has resulted in various new forms of tourism like adventure tourism, eco tourism, wild life tourism etc.

Tourism is a major social phenomenon of the modern society with enormous economic consequences. Realizing that the true potential of tourism lies in the responsible practices on both demand and supply sides of the tourism chain, the Ministry of tourism has adopted the “sustainable tourism” route and incorporated it into the innovative “Rural Tourism Project.”

In recent years the concept of mass-tourism seems to be on the verge of decline. The leisure time and increase in the disposable income has led to “Niche Tourism” amongst the tourist worldwide.

This phenomenon has given rise to new and innovative types of tourism like ethnic tourism, adventure tourism (e.g. river rafting), under water tourism, eco-tourism (Olive Ridley turtles nesting sites in Konkan) wine tourism (Nasik), spiritual tourism (yoga and meditation), food tourism, garden tourism and so on.

The niche categories of tourism mentioned above are highly popular amongst the tourists who would want an exposure and experience different than tourism popular amongst mass tourists. They would certainly not want “a touristic bubble” to be carried with them. The growth in number of such tourists has been a motivating force in the development of “niche tourism”.

Hypotheses of the Study.

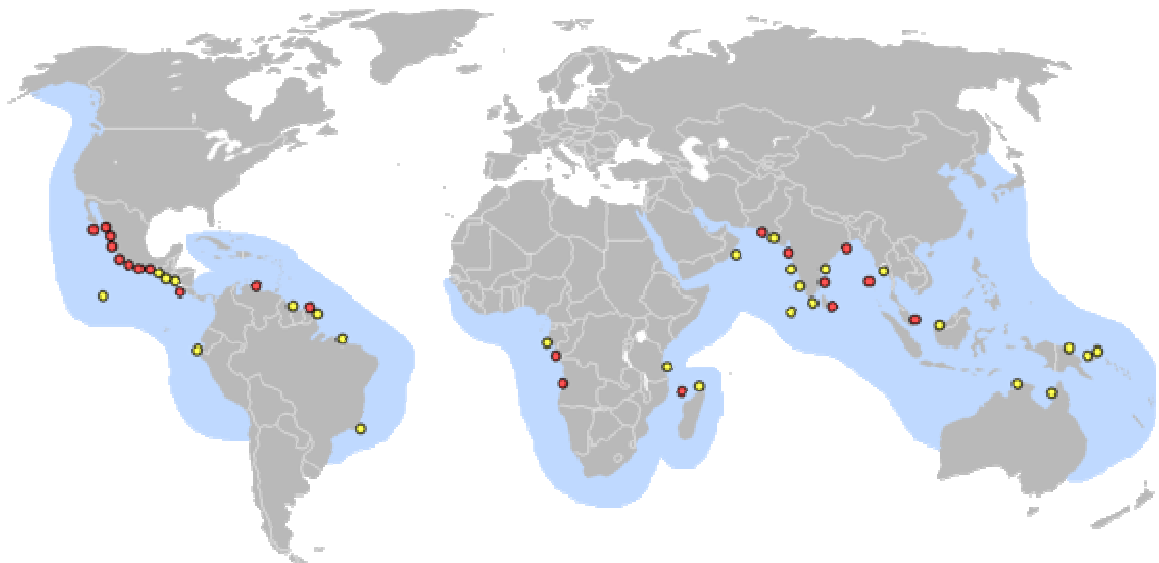
1. The niche tourism development at Velas is a sustainable tourism development.
2. It is possible to conserve the fragile aquamarine habitat of Olive Ridley Turtles at Velas through tourism development.

Need for conservation of Olive Ridley Turtles.

The location is Velas, a remote village in Mandangad taluka in Ratnagiri district. The occasion is the Turtle Festival, a celebration of Nature's wonder in which baby turtles of the Olive Ridley are released into the sea by Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra's (SNM) volunteers.

The marine turtle conservation movement has been underway in Maharashtra since the past nine years. That the message of turtle conservation reaches a wider audience and the local community becomes stakeholders in conservation are the main objectives of this unique eco-tourism initiative. Considering the importance of sea turtles in the marine ecosystem, Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra undertook protection of marine turtles and their eggs and ensured the subsequent safe release of their hatchlings. Since the past nine years, the NGO has successfully implemented the project in 36 villages across the coast of Maharashtra, protecting 681 nests and releasing more than 30,465 hatchlings into the sea. Velas has always topped the list with the highest number of nests amongst all these villages

Distribution



Lepidochelys olivacea distribution map. Red circles are major nesting grounds. Yellow circles are minor nesting beaches. (Source: www.Wikipedi.com).

The Olive Ridley sea turtles are considered the most abundant, yet globally they have declined by more than 30% from historic levels. These turtles are considered endangered because of their few remaining nesting sites in the world. A dramatic decrease of 28–32% in

the global population of Olive Ridley turtles within only one generation (i.e. 20 years) is observed.

Olive Ridley turtles are best known for their behaviour of synchronized nesting in mass numbers, termed *arribadas*. In the India Ocean, the majority of Olive Ridley nests are in two or three large bundles near Gahirmatha in the Orissa. In 1991, over 600,000 turtles nested along the coast of Orissa in one week.

Threats to Nesting Sites

Some of the Olive Ridley's foraging grounds are contaminated due to sewage, agricultural runoff, pesticides, solvents and industrial discharges. These contaminants have been shown to decline the productivity of the benthic community, which negatively affects these turtles that get their nutrition from these communities. Another major threat to these turtles are power plants; juvenile and sub-adult turtles becoming entrained and entrapped within the saltwater cooling intake systems. However, the greatest single cause of Olive Ridley egg loss results from *arribadas* in which the density of nesting females is so high that previously laid nests are inadvertently dug up and destroyed by other nesting females. In some cases nests become cross-contaminated by bacteria or pathogens of rotting nests. For example, in Playa Nancite, Costa Rica, only 0.2% of the 11.5 million eggs produced in a single *arribadas* event successfully hatched.

Threats to Hatchlings

Known predators of Olive Ridley nests include raccoons, coyotes, feral dogs and pigs, Hatchlings are preyed upon as they travel across the beach to the water by vultures, frigate birds, crabs, raccoons, coyotes, iguanas, and snakes. In the water, hatchling predators most likely include oceanic fishes, sharks, and crocodiles.

Adults have relatively few known predators, other than sharks and killer whales responsible for occasional attacks. Females are often plagued by mosquitoes during nesting. Humans are still listed as the leading threat, responsible for unsustainable egg collection, slaughtering nesting females on the beach, and direct harvesting adults at sea for commercial sale of both the meat and hides.

Other Major Threats

Other major threats include mortality associated with boat collisions and incidental takes in fisheries. Trawling, gill nets, ghost nests, long line, and pot fishing, have significantly impacted Olive Ridley populations, as well as other species of marine turtles During 1993–2003, more than 100 000 Olive Ridley turtles were reported dead in Orissa, India from fishery-related practices. In addition, entanglement and ingestion of marine debris is listed as

a major threat for this species. Coastal development, natural disasters, climate change, and other sources of beach erosion, have also been cited as potential threats to nesting grounds¹. Additionally, coastal development also threatens newly hatched turtles through the effects of light pollution.¹ Hatchlings which use light cues to orient themselves to the sea are now misled into moving towards land, and die from dehydration, exhaustion or are killed on roads.

The Olive Ridley is classified as vulnerable according to the International Union for The marine turtle conservation movement has been underway in Maharashtra since the past nine years. That the message of turtle conservation reaches a wider audience and the local community becomes stakeholders in conservation are the main objectives of this unique eco-tourism initiative.

Role of NGO at the Destination.

In Raigad district Pokarna Charitable Trust, Pune is SNM's partner. Founded in 9 February, 1992 by Chairman Mr. Jayant Kanade and Secretary Mr. Bapu

Katdare, Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra (SNM) has a mission of Nature conservation through field protection, awareness, education and scientific based action.

Since 2002, SNM is working on conservation of marine turtles, especially, on Olive Ridley along the coastline of Maharashtra. During the period 2002 -2003 to 2008-2009, 530 nests of Olive Ridley are protected and 25000 hatchlings from nests are released into seawater of Arabian Sea.

The aim of NGO is to work at grass root level for various conservation projects and to increase the peoples participation .SNM encourages tourism at the destination in order to achieve its aim.

The table given below indicates the number of turtle nests and the eggs in the year 2008-09. It also shows the number of actual hatchlings finally successful in making it. It can be observed that approximately only 50% of the eggs are hatched. In spite of the close vigilance of the NGO and the conservation efforts by the local people and the government the ratio of survival of hatchlings is very low. This makes the conservation efforts more necessary.

Turtle Total Nests, Eggs and Hatchlings - 2008-2009 :- (Table Number 1)

Sr. No.	Village	Nests	No. of Eggs	No. of Hatchlings
	Ratanagiri Dist.			
1	Velas	45	5152	2524
2	Anjarla	2	154	61
3	Kelshi	15	1643	739
4	Kolthare	10	128 + in-situ	634
5	Dabhol	18	1948	837
6	Murud	6	700	287
7	Karde	1	in-situ	42
8	Guhagar	1	151	36
	Raigad Dist.			
9	Murud Janjira	1		0
10	Diveagar	35	4250	1742
11	Harihareshwar	9	904	424
12	Maral	11	1214	558
	Thane Dist.			
13	Navapur	1	48	0
	Total	155	16292	7884

Number of Nests as on January 2013(Table No 2).

Sr. no	Place	No of nests
	Ratanagiri	
1	Velas	3
2	Anjarla	1
3	Murud	1
4	Kolthare	1
5	Karde	1
6	Tavsal	1
	Raigad	
1	Dive Agar	0

The figures in the above table are in the month of January, 2013 which is too early to predict the total of the forthcoming season as the main season is in February.

The project, **Marine Turtle Conservation and Awareness through community Participation in Maharashtra**, has been implemented in 5 coastal villages of Ratnagiri district and aimed to marine turtle conservation increase community participation, upliftment of standard living of the local community. Development of livelihood activities.

Since 2004, SNM is felicitating individuals and organisations' for their outstanding performance towards conservation of marine turtles. The award includes Rs. 5000, a trophy and certificate.

Kasav Mitra Mandal (Local Participation in the Conservation Efforts).

A group of villagers had established Kasav Mitra Mandal at Velas village in Mandangad Taluka, Dist- Ratnagiri, with the help of SNM, to provide accommodations & food for tourists with reasonable charges & small amount from it is used towards the Marine Turtle conservation program.

These members provide home stay and can be contacted directly over the phone. It is required for the tourists to provide relevant information including their arrival date, period of stay, number of persons accompanying etc. Also, one must ensure that one is present on the beach sharp at 7am and at 6pm for witnessing the release of turtle hatchlings into the sea. The volunteers release the hatchlings (if emerged), and are happy to answer all the questions regarding marine turtles.

While at Velas the villagers make it a point to insist the tourists to visit the Marine Turtle Knowledge & Information Centre as well as the Marine Turtle Research and Conservation Centre to learn more about sea turtles.

Efforts to Improve Tourism by NGO and Local Community

This year, Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra, in joint collaboration with the Forest Department, Ratnagiri, Kasav Mitra Mandal Velas and the Velas Gram Panchayat is proud to announce the Turtle Festival beginning from Sunday, the 19th of February, 2012. The event will be held until the emergence of hatchlings continues. For the convenience of the tourists the [website](#) or the [face book page](#) of the NGO will be updated on the dates of emergence before visiting.

The sites will be updated twice daily. Once the hatchlings begin emerging from the nests, they do so for the subsequent two days, on which they may be viewed. The aim is that the message of turtle conservation reaches a wider audience and the local community. Accommodation facilities are made available for tourists at a rate of Rs.320 per person per day. These charges include dormitory style accommodation, simple vegetarian lunch and dinner, breakfast and tea thrice a day. Mattresses are available with some members, however, carpets (satanjis) will be provided by all members. Separate rooms are also available- details of which are given on request.

Other Tourist Attractions in the Vicinity.

Velas is the native place of the great diplomat, the late Nana Phadnavis and his monument can be seen in the village. Sightseeing opportunities are aplenty- Himmatgad at Bankot which houses the tomb of the wife of the British officer Arthur will open up a window into history; the Bankot creek offers bird-watchers with a chance to view migratory birds up and close, while the bountiful natural beauty at Harihareshwar and Kelshi will leave the visitor spell-

bound. The ferry boat at Harihareshwar will carry your vehicle across to neighboring Vesvi in a matter of minutes, from which Velas is but a half hour's drive.

Other Activities Related to Conservation of Nature by Local Bodies and NGO

- Organizing the "Konkan Friends of Birds" meet.
- Running a Nature library for students (free of cost).
- Conducting Nature education programs in Maharashtra.
- Arranging Nature trails for students periodically.
- Undertaking study of medicinal plants.
- Tree plantation.
- Arranging exhibitions and slide shows about nature.
- Maintaining a list of birds found in Konkan.
- Status survey of birds.
- Study of breeding biology of birds.
- Caring for injured birds.
- Running a Students nature club.
- Prevention of Indian swiftet nests robbery.
- Study of white bellied sea eagle.
- Vulture conservation program.
- Mangrove protection program.

Proposed Projects

1. Permanent Marine Turtle Rehabilitation and Research Centre.
2. Nature Education Centre.
3. Vulture Conservation Centre.
4. Identification and protection of Indian Swiftet breeding colonies in India.
5. School nature Club chain throughout Konkan.
6. Publication of CD/DVD of local flora and fauna.

Effects of Tourism Development on Local Population

One of the major effects was that a source of income for the locals was created by getting them to participate in the festival.

This goal was achieved due to the multitude of jobs at the festival site such as:

- Working as volunteers and sponsors for events
- Arranging food and accommodation for tourists
- Setting up of the program venue and canopy, erecting refreshment stalls, etc.

The participants of Velas village in the festival arrangement included 3 Mahila Bachat Gats, 2 youth mandals, Grampanchayat members, 12 local villagers engaged in looking after lunch/dinner and lodging arrangements and 5 youths for erecting the refreshment stalls.

There was an approximate turnover of Rs. 50,000/- during the two day festival in the small village of Velas. A lot of confidence and awareness about turtles has been created among villagers as they believe that Velas is becoming famous due to turtles and the Turtle Conservation project must be implemented at their village. This is a great achievement of this festival.

Unlike the tourism development in other places where local participation is negligible and tourism consumes the local resources giving rise to a conflict between host and guest interests, tourism development at Velas is proving a boon to the villagers. It is also helping in conservation of nature and aquamarine protection at Velas.

Turtle Festival is organized since 2006 every year at Velas in Mandangad Taluka, Ratanagiri district. This is the consecutive seventh Turtle Festival held from 19/02/13. Such festival is organized jointly with the Forest department and the Gram Panchayat, Velas. Enthusiastic tourist / visitors including doctors, business- entrepreneurs, housewives, journalists, scientists, researchers, etc. have enjoyed the Turtle Festival. Nearly 1000 visitors attended it every year and the number is increasing every year. As Velas is situated at remote area there is no facility of lodging, boarding etc. Easily available. Hence the villagers have to host them. For this purpose the locals have formed their SHGs, Mahila Bachat Gats, youth groups, etc. Through NGO help the tourists / visitors are accommodated by charging reasonably. Moreover the villagers can sell their own products like Kokum, kokum juice,

amba poli, seasonal fruits like mangoes, cashew nuts etc. and earn for their livelihood. As such they have seen their income through the Turtle Festivals and their participation in the project work is increasing considerably.

Observations from Primary and Secondary Data Collection.

1. The nestling sites of Olive Ridley turtles are endangered throughout the world due to natural and manmade disasters.
2. It is necessary to conserve this endangered species to maintain the balance of fragile aquamarine ecosystem.
3. Observing hatchlings of turtles and their nestling sites is enjoyed by the tourists, and such kind of tourism is developing by the combined efforts of NGO's, local bodies and local people at the destination.

But the number of tourists is limited as it requires a special interest by the tourist in the activity.

4. Tourists are encouraged to participate and ask questions about the conservation project. Exhibition, slide shows and interactive sessions are arranged for the same.
5. The "Turtle Festival" at Velas is supported by the forest department acknowledging the work of NGO's in the effort of conservation. It helps in preventing unauthorized and illegal activities like stealing eggs from the nests.
6. Tourist traffic and activity is not disturbing the turtle nests and breeding grounds as tourists about tourists arrive at the destination only on a set day when hatchlings are to be released in the sea. Otherwise the nestling sites are not open to the tourists. Web site updates and blogs are used widely to inform the approximate dates to visit the destination.
7. Basic facilities are provided to the tourists at the local residents houses. Simple homemade food is also served at a reasonable rate. No special infrastructure (hotels, resorts) are built for the purpose.
8. Local youths get trained as guides and earn a good amount of money. Also local products get market by the tourists. Revenue generated from food and accommodation adds to the sustainability of the local people.
9. The NGO (SNM) also gets support from local community as they see a chance of betterment of life through tourist arrivals in season. Tourists also fund the NGO for their turtle and other conservation projects at the destination.

Conclusion

Hypothesis one and two stand true after the analysis of primary and secondary data as mentioned in the observations. The niche tourism development at Velas is a sustainable type of tourism development in many ways. It is supporting the local population in sustaining their livelihood from tourism, it is helping in the conservation of a endangered species, it is creating awareness amongst the common people about the need to protect our environment.

It is possible to conserve the fragile aquamarine habitat of Olive Ridley turtles through tourism development as the tourist activity does not interfere with nestling and hatching of eggs of the turtles. In fact the cognisance of the conservation efforts are acknowledged by the government and support is given by the forest department to protect the turtle nestling sites. Tourists also contribute by funding the activity.

Suggestions

The coordinated efforts by the locals and NGO has been a key factor in the success story at Velas. More such endangered species are in need of public support to conserve them. In the Konkan region itself the vultures, white bellied sea eagle, swiftet nests and mangroves are on the verge of extinction. More such efforts through sustainable tourism development could save the environment. Tourism can be a tool to protect and conserve our precious environment.

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