
UNIT 9 ECOTOURISM

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Learning Objectives

The learners after reading the unit should be able to:

- define ecotourism;
- determine the relationship between ecotourism and sustainable development; and
- discuss the impact of ecotourism based on the case studies in the unit.

9.0 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier unit we had discussed about tangible and intangible heritage its meaning, definitions and its preservation and conservation. With times in the world of tourism a new aspect has been added besides preservation and conservation. The concept deals with tourism being made available not only to the present generation but leaving behind a heritage and legacy that would allow the next generations to sustain themselves. The aim is to be responsible for the environment that we are living in and preserving and conserving our natural heritages. This unit shall deal with the definitions of ecotourism and its concepts. Four case studies from the Indian sub-continent would leave space in the young minds to understand how ecotourism can be developed in the already existing heritage of the nation.

9.1 DEFINING ECOTOURISM

The first formal definition of 'Ecotourism' was perhaps given by the Mexican architect Hector Ceballos-Lascurain. Ecotourism has been defined as "environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations" (Ceballos-Lascurain 1996). According to this definition, ecotourism can involve both cultural and environmental tourism and, bring benefits to the local population which is also an integral part of the activity. Various definitions on ecotourism were floated since then. Most of the definitions perceive ecotourism as a special form of tourism that has three important criteria:

- a. provision for environmental conservation that includes participation of community in a meaningful way;
- b. profitable to the host community; and
- c. self-sustaining.

Carrier (2005) had stated that ecotourism is noteworthy as it is one of the 'fastest growing sector in the tourism industry'. Ecotourism is sometimes referred to as alternative form of tourism; it is also used synonymously with cultural tourism. It can be formally defined as, "a form of tourism that is consistent with natural, social and community values. It allows both hosts and guests to enjoy positive and worthwhile interaction and shared experiences. Instead of condemning the impact of tourism on local communities, there is a tendency to applaud ecotourism as panacea for achieving a wide array of social, economic, and environmental goals." (Stronza 2001: 274). In contemporary times, anthropologists are paying increasing attention to forms of tourism such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, community-based-tourism, or simply alternative tourism.

Ecotourism is inspired by the culture and natural history of a particular area. The combination of natural and cultural resources can contribute towards generating revenue for the state; at the same time provide economic opportunities to local residents. Since anthropology is a discipline that is particularly involved with the study and understanding of cultures and local communities, it can play an important role as far as planning and implementation of tourism projects is concerned. Anthropologists can identify the local needs, the livelihood potentials, the cultural elements that are supportive of tourism and those that are likely to cause impediments. They can design forms of tourism that does not cause too much disruption to local lives and those actions that can be positively harmful to the local communities. Professional anthropologists can therefore become involved in the tourism sector, expanding the relevance and potential of the discipline.

Carrier and Macleod (2005: 315) say that "Ecotourism involves travel to enjoy and engage with attractive and interesting surroundings which is often identified as natural. It also involves travel to enjoy and engage with attractive people and their activities often identified as exotic or indigenous, in a way that respects and supports them". In this way they are emphasising the

human desire to seek out the exotic and the unknown. Anthropologists, were also said to do the same, but they have done so professionally, in order to know more and more about human ways of living and also about varieties of worldviews, in order to have a deeper comparative understanding of human behaviour. However, the tourists are only superficially interested in the local cultures. Anthropologists are genuinely interested in the local communities and often apply their knowledge for the wellbeing of the people. But for tourists it is just a touch and go affair. Many of them are not at all bothered about what happens to the local communities and this is a genuine drawback of eco/cultural tourism.

In recent times, ecotourism ventures are on demand; this could be due to the saturation of old and often visited tourist destinations and the desire for new experiences. It is important to note that in many parts of the world, areas and lands that are labelled as wilderness, and occupied by indigenous peoples have been opened up to the tourism industry. However, there is a concern; these more remote, less developed areas that ecotourists seek are vulnerable to cultural disruption and environmental degradation (Cater 1993: 85).

Check Your Progress 1

1. Define ecotourism.

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9.2 EMPOWERMENT AND DISEMPOWERMENT

Ecotourists are more likely to make use of services and accommodation which are owned by the local residents. This ensures that the local economy is benefitted. It is to be noted that ecotourism should be able to fulfil the following:

- a. protect environment;
- b. benefit conservation of local cultural items;
- c. benefit local economy;
- d. empower local communities;

To ensure that local people gets their due benefits from ecotourism, some control over it should be handed over to the local people.

There will be empowerment of the local people if their voices are taken into consideration. They should be able to decide what forms of tourism facilities and wildlife conservation programmes should be developed in their respective regions. The local community should become an important stakeholder in decision making and for claiming benefits.

9.2.1 Political Empowerment

The voices and the concerns of the local community should be able to guide the development of any ecotourism project from the conceptual stage to its implementation. It is pertinent to give voice and decision-making powers

to diverse interest groups within a community and power to be distributed among all diverse groups divided by age, sex and class. All the stakeholders within a community need to have representation on community and broader decision-making bodies. In order for the local communities to exert some control over ecotourism, power need to be delegated to the level of the community. It is to be ensured that even the most marginal groups within the community get the benefits.

9.2.2 Social

Social empowerment refers to a situation in which a community's sense of cohesion and integrity has been confirmed or strengthened by any collective activity whose benefits are distributed among the group members-ism. Strong community groups, including youth groups, and women's groups, may be signs of an empowered community. Social empowerment is perhaps most clearly a result of ecotourism when profits from the tourism activity are used to fund social development projects, such as water supply systems or health clinics, in the local area.

Now let's check if there are any disadvantages to ecotourism. It has been reflected that social disempowerment may happen if ecotourism activities result in crime, begging, overcrowding, displacement from traditional lands, loss of authenticity of local culture, and emergence of prostitution (Mansperger 1993). These consequences are quite likely to happen in the situation of tourism of any kind, including ecotourism. Certain internal power differences within the local community that lead to inequities in distribution of the benefits of ecotourism, may lead to social disempowerment of certain segments and disproportionate benefits to others. Conflicts and dissatisfactions may arise due to feelings of jealousy and ill-will as a result of inequities of distribution of economic benefits and opportunities.

9.2.3 Psychological

A community is said to be psychologically strong, when its members are positive about the future, have strong faith in the potentials and abilities of its residents, self-reliant, independent, and take pride in their traditions and culture (Scheyvens 1999: 248). One needs to understand that in many small-scale societies, maintaining a group's sense of belongingness, self-esteem and well-being is very important. This maintenance is ensured by preservation of their tradition. One of the key features of ecotourism is sensitivity to cultural norms and respect for local traditions. This sensitivity and respect can be empowering for local people.

On the other hand, ecotourism can be disempowering if it interferes with cultural norms of the local people. For example, interfering with the vital relationship between the local people and their land, may have demoralising effects. The Yagua Indians of the Peruvian and Colombian Amazon who were relocated by their tour operators, to places which were more convenient and more accessible to tourists is a case that can be cited here. Eventually the Yagua became more dependent on money received from cultural performances. Their obligations to tour operators for cultural performances led to insufficient time to cultivate, hunt and fish, also not forgetting the unavailability of land to cultivate slash-and-burn agriculture. It is said that the Yagua are now seriously afflicted by different forms of ill-health, thus leading

to apathy and depression which is now quite common. These feelings, disillusionment and confusion, are indicators of psychological disempowerment of a community (Scheyvens 1999: 248).

We can also take a look at local community’s access to resources in area proposed for ecotourism to determine economic empowerment or disempowerment. For example, if certain areas of land are identified as protected areas for the sake of ecotourism, it eventually reduces the access to agricultural lands as well as hunting grounds. Protection of wildlife species may even result in destruction of crops and cause harm to livestock and people. Local people should have equitable distribution of benefits, however there is a concern, local people will willingly support conservation of protected areas only if it is simultaneous with their own development.

9.2.4 Community-based Ecotourism

Since the term ‘ecotourism’ is fluidly used by various writers, some have suggested that the term ‘community-based ecotourism ventures’ should be used to differentiate those ventures that are environmentally sensitive, and the local community have higher degree of control over ecotourism activities (Liu 1994; Ceballos-Lascurain 1996). This is totally different from ecotourism ventures that are controlled by outside operators, and it is also different from the contexts in which the government claims most of the revenue generated through ecotourism. (Akama 1996).

The need to promote the quality of life of people and conservation of natural resources is important for a community-based approach. In order to make ecotourism economically and socially sustainable, it is imperative that members of local host community be trained. A community-based approach seeks to revive reverence for traditions, at the same time boost local livelihoods by providing source of income for unemployed members of local host community.

An important way to establish responsible community-based ecotourism is to approach it from a sustainable development perspective, which takes into consideration social, environmental and economic goals. Instead of prioritising only economic or environmental impacts of community-based approach, it is important to take into consideration the social dimensions of experience of tourism too.

Check Your Progress 2

- 2. “Community should become an important stake holder in ecotourism”. State whether the statement is true or false.

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- 3. “Ecotourism can be disempowering if it interferes with the cultural norms of the community”. State whether the statement is true or false.

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4. What is the community based approach in ecotourism?

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9.3 ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development is becoming an important focus for transnational, and NGOs especially in developing countries. This is the result of increased awareness of the need to preserve the environment (Grieves et. al, 2014). The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), published the Brundtland Report called ‘Our Common Future’. The Brundtland Report defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (1987:43).

As regards to marginalised indigenous communities, the guidelines stated in the report are not specific enough to implement sustainable development policies. Preservation of environment and elimination of poverty remain important domains of sustainable development, yet an increasing emphasis has also been made on participation of local community and their control in sustainable development endeavours. There is a focus on ecotourism, sometimes known as sustainable tourism, to sustain natural resources of indigenous communities. These ecotourism endeavours strive to rope in mechanisms that ensure that the benefits produced by ecotourism should profit the indigenous local community rather than external agencies. (Grieves, et.al., 2014). It is to be noted that such kind of partnership between indigenous communities and outside agencies, however noble it may sound on paper, are often encountered with conflicts and imbalance of power.

According to Subramaniam (2008: 245) ecotourism has a vital role to play in sustainable development in India. It has also a pivotal role in developing an agenda for inclusion of non-urban communities, which are excluded and marginalised to some extent in most programs of development. In order to achieve this, a shift in attitudes is required; there has to be a shift from regulation control to empowerment, from patronage to partnership, and from linear government-led structures to alliances with diverse stake holders. Subramaniam (2008:246) also argued that in the context of India, the need to emphasise on the aspect of improving the well-being of local communities should be addressed through ecotourism venture. In order to reap the value of the benefits of ecotourism, there is a need to embrace all non-urban communities in the country too.

Check Your Progress 3

5. Define sustainable development.

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9.4 ECOTOURISM IN INDIA

9.4.1 Nagaland: Community Participation

The Naga society is mostly community based. In most of the Naga villages, important decisions related to cultivation, conservation of forest and other important socioeconomic issues are being made collectively. If ecotourism has to succeed in Nagaland, then local participation has to be tapped strategically. The Nagaland Communitisation of Public Institutions and Service Act 2002 (Act no. 2 of 2002) “provide for empowerment of the community and delegations of the powers and function of the state government to the local authorities by way of participation of the community in matters connected with the management of local public utilities, public services, and the activities of the state government connected with education, water supply, roads, forest, power, sanitation, health and other welfare and development schemes and also to provide promotion of community based schemes”.

The State Tourism Department is promoting community participation in Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Development; however, it offers some facilities but not sufficient to cater to the entire inflow of the tourists, both foreign and domestic. Therefore, the villagers have started to open paying guest accommodations which are also popularly known as ‘Homestays’. The interest of the state to promote tourism in Nagaland is also directed at weaning people away from shifting cultivation, because it does not produce as much revenue for the state as tourism does.

9.4.1.1 Ecotourism in Khonoma Village

Ecotourism initiatives in Khonoma village are a great success. The village council banned logging and hunting considering the fact that these activities were contributing to environmental degradation. Hence the need for conservation of environment was the first step that was initiated. Despite being initiated and funded from government scheme ecotourism in the village is still identified as a community initiative because it is the members of the community who took lead in planning and implementation of ecotourism ventures. The sense of ownership in the community is high; this has to do with the fact that land ownership solely lays with the people and not with the government (Kinny and Lanusosang 1996:158).

9.4.1.2 Amur Falcon Conservation

Every year, huge number of Amur Falcons from Siberia stops over in the state of Nagaland, on their way to Africa (Kinny and Lanusosang 1996:158). It is considered to be one of the biggest falcon roosts in the world. The conservation programme of migratory bird Amur Falcon is mainly implemented by a local NGO-Natural Naga, Nagaland Wildlife and Biodiversity Conservation Trust, working with the Nagaland Forest Department along with three village councils in Wokha district. The village councils in Wokha district prohibited hunting and killing of Amur Falcons and made it illegal and punishable. This prohibition along with the support of members in village community helped in conservation of the migratory birds in Nagaland. It has also started attracting hundreds of tourists and curious scientists. The success of such initiatives has made other villages realise the importance of tapping the natural resources for sustainable livelihood.

9.4.1.3 Wildlife and Bird Sanctuaries

Nagaland has a number of Wildlife/Bird Sanctuaries that are located and scattered in different parts of the state. The chief ones are: Intanki National Park in Peren district, Fakim Wildlife Sanctuary in Tuensang district, and Ghosu bird Sanctuary in Zunheboto district.

Despite immense potentials for sustainable tourism in the state, there are a number of factors that have emerged as obstacles in the way of desired development. Peace and security are important factors for any kind of development. The entire North East region of India has insurgency problems. With the signing of ceasefire agreement in 1997 and Peace Accord in 2015, the situation has improved to some extent in Nagaland. Nonetheless fear and insecurity still exists in the minds of tourists. The state has plenty of constraints in the form of poor connectivity, lack of communication facilities, poorly developed infrastructure and entry formalities like Inner Line Permit and restricted Area Permit. At present, the state is totally dependent on the central assistance for development of ecotourism ventures. Sustained peace and security are essential for the future of tourism in this region.

9.4.2 Kerala: Ecological Sustainable Tourism

The state of Kerala also known as God's own country is one of the most famous eco-destinations in India. It has many destinations known for their natural beauty and exquisite landscape. The Western Ghats region of Kerala has a protected area that includes two National Parks and 12 Wildlife Sanctuaries. These sanctuaries and parks are important destinations for ecotourism. The Western Ghats of Kerala have natural advantage because of their beauty and density of forests and wild life. The major ecotourism ventures in Kerala are broadly classified as backwaters, beaches, hill stations and wildlife sanctuaries. Kerala is rich with evergreen forests and its rich biological diversity is of added advantage to boost ecotourism. Due to construction of dams and other related projects, water bodies have formed within the forest. These are being used for recreational facilities. Various activities like mountaineering, trekking, bird watching etc. are being initiated by the Government of Kerala as part of marketing campaign. In Kerala, ecotourism destinations have range of choices.

9.4.2.1 Parambikulam Tiger Reserve

The word Parambikulam is derived from two words; 'parambu' (reeds) and 'kulam'(waterhole). In this reserve there is a teak plantation which is managed scientifically. Within this plantation the great Kannimara tree stands against time. This tree is considered to be the oldest and largest of its kind and is worshipped by the tribals as they believe it to be a symbol of the Gods and its magnificence is amplified by the sheer magnitude of its size and reach. Parambikulam tiger reserve is one of the emerging ecotourism destinations in the country with attractive tourism packages like eco meditation, elephant song trial, bear path trail, Camps, Tree top hut, Island Hut, trekking, full moon census, Bamboo Rafting etc., All these activities are organised by local tribal communities. The economic benefits from ecotourism are reaped by the locals. Some important source of income are bamboo handicrafts, bee wax balm, carry paper bags, honey processing and other souvenirs. The locals create environmentally friendly souvenirs with the intention of making

the reserve plastic free. The communities owned ecotourism enterprises and take care of their resources (Vinodan & Manalel, 2011: 103).

9.4.2.2 Aralam Wildlife Sanctuary

Aralam is the only wildlife sanctuary in Kannur, spreading over a 55 sq. km area of forests in the Western Ghats. The forest offers pleasant trekking options. The Aralam witnesses the remarkable natural phenomenon of butterfly migration. Like in Parambikulam, the ecotourism efforts at Aralam are a community-based affair too. Regular nature camps are held in Aralam with special emphasis to children. Conservation of natural resources are given importance as that is what the younger generation will inherit.

9.4.3 Gujarat: Development of Ecotourism Circuit

Gujarat has a great wealth of wildlife and is considered an ideal place for a wildlife getaway (GOG 2017). Gujarat offers opportunities to see a wide range of wildlife including the Asiatic lion, Indian wild ass, endangered antelopes and a variety of deer. It is also one of India's most important regions for bird watchers as it has many rare and endangered species of migratory bird's wildlife sanctuaries. It also has India's first marine national park. The forest department has various Ecotourism sites placed amidst the dense jungles for nature enthusiasts.

The state occupies a special status among Eco-tourists for its per-historic Dinosaur nesting sites in Balasinore, remains of Indus Valley Civilization at Dholavira and Lothal, heritage and cultural monuments and artifacts. Gujarat has its own distinctiveness as it is the only remaining habitat for species like the Asiatic Lions and Wild Ass (<https://www.ecotourismgujarat.com>).

9.4.3.1 Great Rann of Kutch

The natural history of the Rann is unique and has international conservation significance. Fossils of different periods - Pre-Jurassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous are found. There is an area rich in wood and marine fossils, and it is managed as fossil park. The visitors find the fossils of big sized trees interesting. The migrating birds can be seen crowding various water bodies during winter.

9.4.3.2 The Gir Forest National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary

This wildlife sanctuary in Gujarat was established in 1965. It is the only home of the pure Asiatic Lions (*Panthera leo persica*) and is considered one of the most important protected areas in Asia. The ecosystem of Gir comprise of diverse flora and fauna.

9.4.3.3 Ecotourism in Dang District

Dang is a tribal dominated district located in extreme south of Gujarat. It has mountain ranges and dense forest. Bhil, Konkani, Varli, Kotwaliya, Kathodi and Gamit are some of the major tribes in Dang district. The Dang district has been declared as Ecotourism spot by the state. The district is adorned with rich forests, small and large waterfalls, beautiful landscapes and tribal unique culture. Saputara, in southern part of Dang, is known as abode of serpents, offers rich wildlife for ecotourists. Saputara museum gives out interesting information about topography and anthropology of Dangs (Vnasiya & Mahida 2012).

9.4.4 Assam: Potentials and Challenges

Assam, is considered to be hotspot for tourists for its natural beauty and favourable climatic condition. The state is famous for varieties of flora and fauna, historical monuments, pilgrim centres, tea gardens and colourful cultural festivals which are considered as tourism ventures. There are various national parks, wildlife and bird sanctuaries and biosphere reserves in Assam, which are potential resources for tourism.

- i) **Kaziranga National Park:** The Kaziranga national park has a large number of hilly terrains, marshes, plains, and water bodies where many species of unique flora and fauna, inhabit. The Great Indian One-horned Rhinoceros to tiny turtles are sight to behold and where one can gather an exhilarating experience of adventure sports too.
- ii) **Manas National Park:** Located on the banks of the Manas river, Manas National Park is a world heritage site and an important tiger reserve of India. It is marked by highland savanna, moist deciduous and tropical semievergreen trees. The park is also a forest of endangered and rare flora and fauna. The existence of rare species also attracts tourists, both national and international.
- iii) **Nameri National Park:** Nameri National Park is located at the foothills of the eastern Himalayas. Main activities in this park include bird watching, trekking, angling (fishing) on the Jiabharali (river) etc. It is to be noted that angling for the golden mahseer has been the trademark of Nameri ever since the colonial regime. Every year, the Jiabharali attracts anglers from all over the world. Regulated angling is permitted on a 'catch-record and release' basis.
- iv) **Majuli:** Once the largest river island in the world, situated in the Brahmaputra river of Assam, today falls under the endangered list owing to heavy erosion. Majuli is the melting pot of various ethnic communities like Ahoms, Kacharis, Brahmins, Koch Rajbongshi, Bonais, Koibartas, Nepalis etc. It is considered to be the cultural capital and the cradle of Assamese civilization known for the *Satras* (monasteries) that have been the seat of learning for the past five hundred years. Pottery done in Majuli shows resemblance to the ones found in ancient Harrappan Civilisation. Pottery is made from beaten clay and burnt in driftwood fired kilns (Devi, 2012). The preservation of the unique culture of various ethnic groups inhabiting Majuli island is pertinent for ecotourism ventures. The craft of mask-making; the finest boats are a part of the island activities. A wetland, Majuli is a hotspot for flora and fauna, harbouring many rare and endangered species including migratory birds that arrive in the winter season. The colourful cultures, migratory birds, Ali-ai-ligang festival, pottery making, mask making, Paal Naam and Raas Leela festival, crafting of masks, are some major attractions which boost ecotourism.

Other places in Assam which have huge potentials for ecotourism ventures are Haflong, Maibang, Umrangso, Panimoor, Chandubi Lake, Rani Reserved Forest, Hajo, Darranga, Mayong, Bardowa, Bordowa (Devi 2012). The state of Assam has huge potential with respect to ecotourism ventures.

Check Your Progress 4

6. “Naga society is mostly community based”. State whether the statement is true or false.

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7. Which state is known as God’s own country?

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8. Why does Gujarat have a special status among eco tourists?

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9. Which national park in Assam is a part of the World Heritage Sites?

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9.5 IMPACT OF ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism is expected to usher in lasting economic benefits to a local community. Many households in a community earn cash through ecotourism. Das and Hussain (2016: 241) argued that ecotourism generates economic welfare by positively and significantly affecting household budget. Taking into consideration the extent of poverty and backwardness in the periphery villages of Kaziranga National Park (KNP) Assam, the ecotourism venture sounds feasible and desirable. According to Das and Hussain (2016: 255), the people living in the periphery villages of KNP would have continued to practices less profitable agriculture or similar activities if not for ecotourism. Income generated from traditional livelihood may not be sufficient due to low level of investment, small size of agricultural land holdings, animal raids and flood etc. There is potential of ecotourism boosting the local economy in Kaziranga National park. Ecotourism provides a range of employment possibilities for the periphery villages of KNP in the form of opening restaurants, crafting handicrafts, making local preserved food, hosting cultural programmes, souvenir sales and production, eco-lodge, home stay accommodation, tours and transportation, and guiding services (Das & Hussain, 2016).

The Naga villages in the state of Nagaland are community based. Decisions pertaining to cultivation, preservation of forest, and important socio-economic issues are collectively made. If there is any break-through of ecotourism in Nagaland, it is because of community participation. The village of Khonoma in Nagaland deciding to go green and abandon their traditional activities of hunting animals and collecting wood from the forest is a huge boost to the eco conservation and ecotourism venture. Community members have taken a lead in planning and implementation of the Green village project. Ecotourism is flourishing in Nagaland because of the effort of community with assistance from the government (Kinny and Lanusosang 2016: 158).

Harmon (2003 c.f. West 2016) discusses intangible values derived from protected areas in Gujarat: 'recreational, therapeutic, spiritual, cultural, identity, existence, artistic, aesthetic, educational, peace, and scientific research and monitoring'. These values are seen as potentials to change the social lives and well-being of the people who visit parks and the people living in them.

9.6 SUMMARY

Ecotourism has been perceived as tourism based on natural and cultural resources, which is sustainable, promotes conservation, meaningful community involvement and environmentally sound. All the four states that have been taken up as case study are different from one another. For example, the community participation which is very prominent in Nagaland and Kerala may not work in other states, whereas the luxury of national parks and water bodies in Kerala and Assam is absent in Nagaland. Some tourists may prefer camping vis-à-vis hotel accommodation in Gujarat, whereas some may prefer the homestay in Nagaland for different experience. Ecotourism in all these four states of Assam, Nagaland, Gujarat and Kerala has huge potentials as both the state and community are equally interested in saving the eco system at the same time, preserve cultural and heritage of its indigenous people too. Keeping in mind the diverse cultures and geographical features of India, each state may need different strategy while formulating ecotourism framework.

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9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. See section 9.1
2. True
3. True
4. See section 9.2
5. See section 9.3
6. True
7. Kerala
8. See section 9.4.3
9. Manas National Park



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