

POTENTIAL BENEFIT OF ECO-TOURISM OF DOOARS IN ALIPURDUAR DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

Ecotourism is a fast growing industry in the world and it has a large scale of potentiality in global human activity. Ecotourism is a such sector, which can develops tourism .India has a huge scope of eco-tourism potentiality. Eco-tourism helps to minimize negative impact on nature and wild life. Aims of eco-tourism is to increase consciousness and sustainable use of nature. Generally ecotourism deals with living parts of natural environments. The article is going to present a clear scenario of various potentiality of ecotourism in dooars region of Alipurduar district in the state of West Bengal and justify the related problems for future prospects of the study region.

Keywords: Eco-tourism,dooars,flora and fauna.

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Introduction

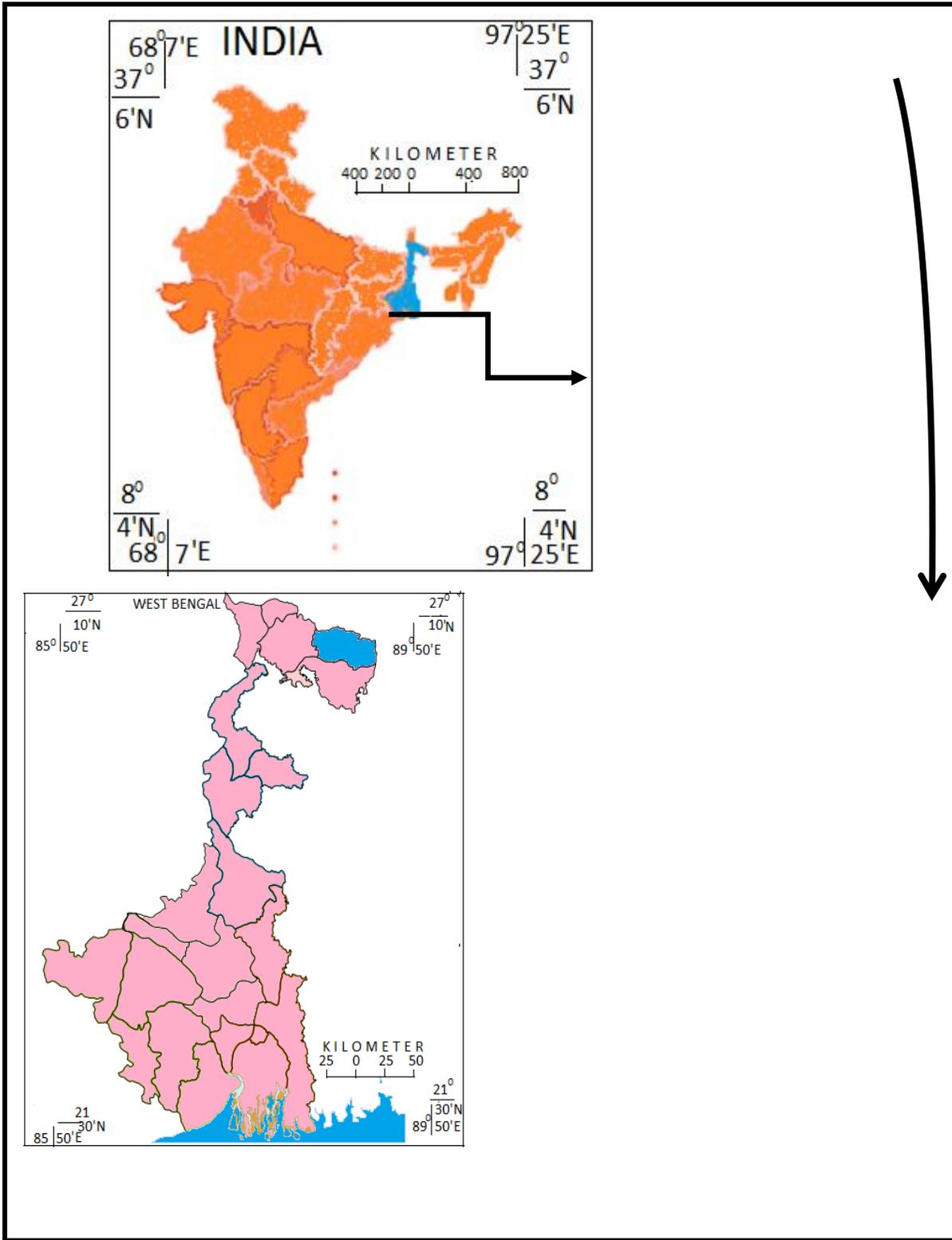
Ecotourism is a new concept of tourism. It generates employments and helps to develop social, cultural and economic sector in and around of tourist sites. The word “Ecotourism” can be divided into “eco” and “tourism”. The word “eco” denotes “ecology” or “eco-system” which would specify that eco-tourism concept is intensively linked with environmental science. Hector Ceballos-Lascurain defined ecotourism as “travelling to relatively undistributed or uncontaminated natural areas with specific objectives of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well many existing cultural manifestation (both past and present) found in these areas.” In, Indian scenario ecotourism is rapidly growing its graph day by day. West Bengal has also a huge potentiality of ecotourism. Alipurduar district of West Bengal is well known for its natural beauty and has vast scope of ecotourism. The word ecotourism has twin goals :i) conservation of natural environment and wild life and ii) promoting welfare of local people. Well planned ecotourism can be benefited both wild animals and residents in around the tourist place.

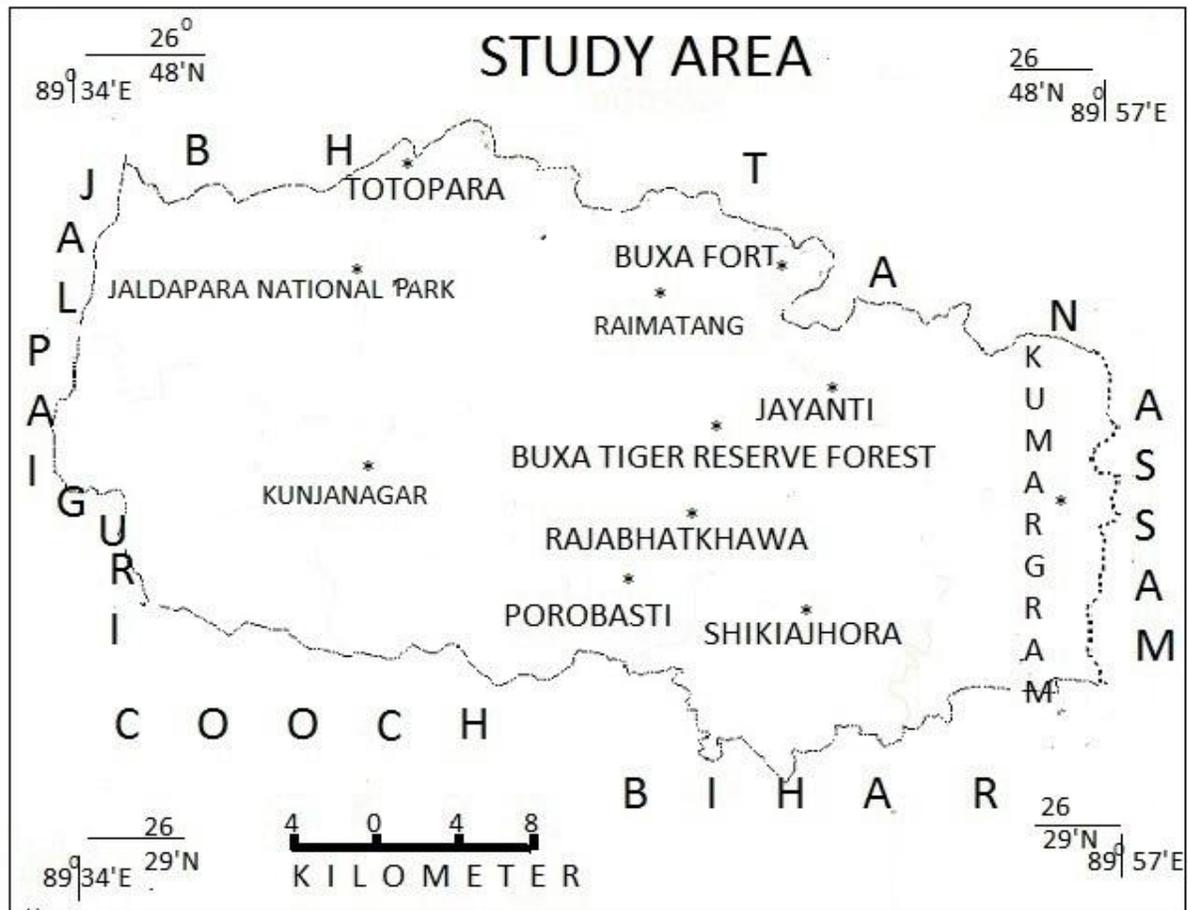
Study Area

Alipurduar is a land locked district bordered by Jalpaiguri in the west Coochbihar in the south and Assam in the east of West Bengal. Alipurduar is known as “Queen of Dooars” and “Gateway to Bhutan”. The district is extended between 89°34′ E - 89°57′ E longitude and 26°29′N- 26°48′N latitude.

The district having a total geographical area of 3,136 sq.km. Physiographically, the district is characterized by hills, foothill and flood plain. The elevation of the study region is varied between 30-2000 meters. The district enjoys humid tropic climate with the average annual rainfall of the district is 2600mm and temperature lies between 32°C in May and 10°C in January. The major rivers of the study area are Torsa, Kalijani, Raidak, and Sankosh etc. Rivers are very narrow and current of the flowing water is high enough and also changing its course frequently. The district is also rich bio-diversity and has mammoth covetous natural prettiness.

LOCATION MAP





Objectives:

The core objectives of the study are as following:

- 1) To find out the distribution of potentially eco-tourism area in and around the dooars region of Alipurduar district in the state of West Bengal.
- 2) To analyse the impact of ecotourism on economy of local resident.
- 3) To find out the problems of the study area.
- 4) Suggested recommendations to solve problems for future prospects of the study area.

Methodology

In order to study the potentiality of Eco-tourism of Dooars region in Alipurduar district the methodology adopted is a rationalistic. The primary data collected by detailed observation of

eco-tourism sites in dooars region. Secondary data are collected from tourist guide books, government websites, west Bengal forest department, relating research journals relevant books etc. Collected data tabulated and analyzed rationally and represented with the help of MS excel and Arc GIS software.

Result and Discussion

Potentially Of Eco-Tourism area in Dooars Region:

Each and every part of Dooars region is full of spectacular pictorial sights. Dooars is a paradise of nature where every aspects bonds with another. Due to lack of one resource, the entire ecotourism concept will abolish from Dooars. Dooars region lies at the alluvial floodplain of the outer foothills of Himalayan and north of the Brahmaputra river basin .This region is very wide and full of flora and fauna. It stretch about 360km. from the Tista river in West Bengal to the Dhansiri river in Assam. Dooars region is the gateway to the Bhutan and it is the part ‘‘ Teri-Duar Savanna’’ and grassland eco region.

Table 1: Tourism of Dooars at a glance:

CATEGORY	INFORMATION
Area	3136 sq. Km.
Average temp.	Maximum 31°C Minimum 10° C
Average rainfall	350cm. to 450cm.
Important rivers	Tista, Torsha, Raidak, Sankosh, Kaljani
Important tourist spot	Rajabhatkhawa, Buxa tiger reserve forest, buxa fort, Chilapata forest, Shikiajhora, kumargram, Porobasti, Jaldapara etc.
Floras	Sal(Shorea robusta), teak(Tectona grandis), simul(Bombax ceiba), gamar(Gmelina), sishu(Dalbergia sissoo) etc.
Faunas	Tiger, Leopard, Wild dog, One Horned Rhinoceros, Spotted Deer, Barking Deer, Birds, Snakes, Butterflies etc.
Visiting time	Through out the years except rainy season

Source: Ghosh, A. (2006): ‘‘Mohamoyee Duars’’

The potentially important ecotourism sites of Dooars in Alipurduar district are as following:

Buxa Tiger Reserve Forest: Buxa tiger reserve forest(fig.1) is situated in Alipurduar district. This forest covers an area of 760 sq.km. Buxa tiger reserve forest was set up in 1983 as the 15th tiger reserve in India. Northern boundary of this forest is connected with international boundary of Bhutan, eastern boundary touches with Assam and NH-31C runs through this forest. Buxa tiger reserve forest is full of flora and fauna. There are 450 species of trees, 250 species of shrubs, 400 species of herbs, 9 species of cane, 10 species of bamboo, 150 species of orchids, 100 species of grass and so on. So many important wild animals are found in Buxa tiger reserve forest such as: 284 species of bird, 73 species of mammals, 76 species of snakes. Buxa forest have highest number of fish species among the North Bengal region. Tiger, bear, giant, gaur, chaital, leopard, wild buffalo, regal python are found here. Buxa Tiger Reserve forest is fringed by 34 tea garden, which have a great capacity to attract tourists.

Buxa Fort: Buxa fort(fig. 2) is located in Buxa Tiger Reserve forest at an altitude of 2844ft. It is abandoned fort. This fort is located 30km. from Alipurduar town. The region is famous and popular among nature lovers and tourists for trekking through following routes:

- i) Buxa fort to Santalabari(5km.)
- ii) Buxa fort to Rovers point(3km.)
- iii) Buxa fort to Lepchakha(5km.)
- iv) Buxa fort to Chunabhati(4km.)

Rajabhatkhawa: Rajabhatkhawa(fig.3) is surrounded with deep dense forest, located outside of the Buxa Tiger Reserve forest. Rajabhatkhawa is well known for Rajabhatkhawa museum and also famous for Nature Interpretation, Wild life rehabilitation and medical centre for wild animals. It has an average altitude of 221mt. NH-31C is passes through this area. Rajabhatkhawa is situated 14.3 km. from Alipurduar.

Raimatang: Very beautiful picnic and tourist palce Raimatang(fig.4) is situated besides the Raimatang river. The area is surrounded by hill, forest, tea garden, seems like a marvellous place made by nature. The distance between Raimatang and Alipurduar is 45 km.

Shikiajhora: Shikiajhora (fig.5) becomes an important ecotourism centre very recently. The area is situated besides the small Shikiajhora river and surrounded by dense forest. Boating is available for tourists in dense deep forest, therefore it is known as “Mini Amazon of Dooars”. National Highway 31 C passes besides this tourist place.

Chilapata Forest: This dense forest is located 20 km. distance from Alipurduar and very near to Jaldapara National Park in Dooars of Alipurduar district. Chilapata forest (fig.6) serves as a corridor between Jaldapara National Park and Buxa Tiger Reserve forest. This forest is home of large rhinoceros and very rich in wildlife. New species continued to be found in this area. One archaeological interesting attractive place “Nalraja Garh” built in this area during Gupta empire.

Jayanti: Jayanti (fig.7) is located at the foothill of eastern Himalayan belt along the Jayanti river. It is a small village having picturesque sights and often known as “Queen of Dooars”. Popular trekking to the visitors of 13 km. from Buxaduar to Jayanti through dense forest is wonderful. Mahakal cave in Jayanti hill which is known as karst depositional landform is special attraction to geographers.

Kumargram: Kumargram (fig.8) is situated in the eastern corner of Alipurduar district bordering Assam and Bhutan. It is an assembly constituency in Alipurduar district. Kumargram is an important ecotourist destination of Dooars region. The site is popular for dense canopy of forest, beauty of foothill, roaring Sankosh river etc.

Bhutanghat: It is very interesting and attractive destination for wild lovers. The area is close to the tri-junction of Bhutan -Bengal and Assam border offers a great adventure for tourists and situated on bank of Raidak river. Bhutanghat serves as an elephant corridor and sometimes gangs of elephants come to drink water of Raidak river. Narathali lake is very close to Bhutanghat (fig.9). Bhutanghat is full of rainforest, tea garden and many pictorial sights.

Jaldapara National Park: Jaldapara national park (fig.10) is situated in Alipurduar district covering an area of 217 sq.km. and lies at the foothill of Eastern Himalayas. Jaldapara national park is situated at an altitude of 61m and banks of the Torsa river. Jaldapara national park is famous for Indian one-horned rhinoceros, Indian leopard, Indian elephants, sambar, barking deer, wild boars

are the other important animals of this national park. There are many watch towers for visitors. The national park is savannah type with tall elephants grasses.

Porobasti: Porobasti (fig.11) is located in Kalchini block of Alipurduar district in the state of West Bengal on the bank of Poro river. It is a tribal village based mainly on forest economy. Sub-tropical deciduous semi-evergreen forest, unending tea garden and pictorial scenario are the main attraction of this area.

Kunjanagar: Kunjanagar (fig.12) eco-tourism site is located 8 km. from Falakata town in Alipurduar district. Most attraction for tourists in Kunjanagar is eco-park. It is also a famous picnic place where boating is available. Visitors will use watch tower and animal rescue centre within the premises of Kunjanagar eco-park.

Totopara: Totopara (fig.13) is surrounded by Torsa river in east, foothill of Bhutan in north and Hauri river and the Titi reserve forest in south-west separated by Hauri river. Totopara is a hilly village of famous and unique Toto tribe. It is an important area for Geographers to make primary field survey.

Hatipota: Hatipota (fig.14) is well known for tremendous beauty of nature because the area is covered by unending green tea garden, dense forest, wild animals, blue hills etc. Hatipota has own capacity to attract visitors for its own nature canvas. Hatipota is an enchanting spot of Dooars and located 15 km. ahead from Raidak.

Table 2: Distance of Eco-tourism sites from Alipurduar

TOURIST DESTINATION	DISTANCE(IN km.)
Buxa Tiger Reserve Forest	17
Buxa fort	24
Rajabhatkhawa	14.3
Raimatang	45
Shikiajhora	14
Chilapata forest	22
Jayanti	30

Kumargram	65
Bhutanghat	49
Jaldapara National Park	48.4
Porobosti	10
Kunjanagar	46
Totopara	56.2
Hatipota	28.9

Source: Calculated by author

Images of Eco-tourism area in Dooars region of Alipurduar district:

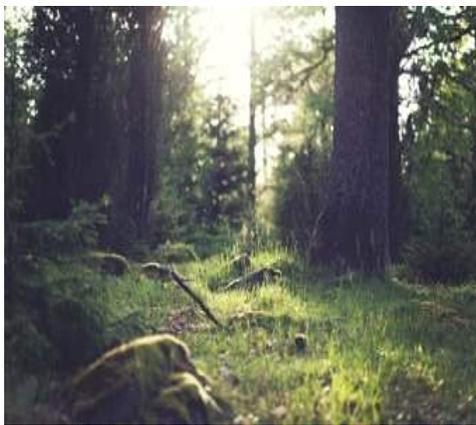


Fig. 1 : Buxa Tiger Reserve Forest

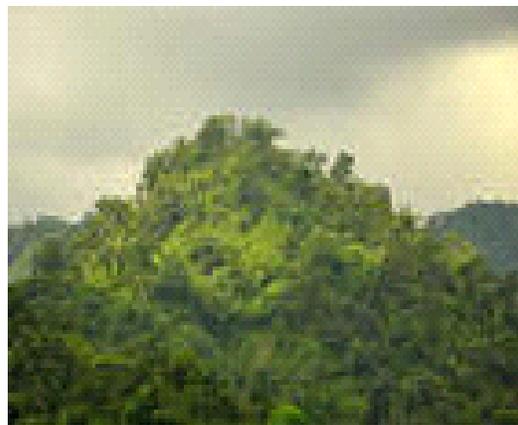


Fig. 2: Buxa Fort



Fig. 3: Rajabhatkhawa



fig.4 Raimatang



Fig. 5: Shikijhora



Fig. 6: Chilanata



Fig. 9: Bhutanghat



Fig. 10: Jaldapara National Park



Fig. 11: Porobasti



Fig. 12: Kunjanagar



Fig. 13: Totopara



Fig. 14: Hatipota

Impact Of Eco-tourism on Local Economy and Potential Benefit: Above discuss Eco-tourism site has a great impact on economical condition of local people in and around the tourism sites. These are as following:

i)Source of Income:Local people are well known about their birth places.Therefore they became a part as a guide with visitors during their tours in respect of charges.Tourism promotes connection of business.Local resident of tourist site earn money through small shops throughout the year.They also take charges of boarding,lodging,housing,cooking etc.

Eco-tourism sites also offer engagement of local people in furnishing and equipment industries, souvenir industries,farming and food supply.

ii)Infrastructural Development:The tourist place will not be attracted to the visitors if there is lack in infrastructure. Due to good transport and communication system,better water supply,availability of food,tourist place became housefull through out the year.

Due to infrastructural development,resident can enjoys high standard facilities.

iii) Mixture of Culture:Tourism sites promotes cultural collaboration.This area has chances and mixing of different cultural group.Eco-tourism helps cross culture awareness for both local and and set up bridges of understanding of cultures,festivals and food habits of various tribes.

iv)Sustainable uses of Resources: Eco-tourism is a sustainable form of tourism.It is completely natural based tourism.The development of eco-tourism is completely based on sustainable use of natural resource.

It is our duty to protect natual environment.Local people are trained propely who guided tourist during tours and gives accurate information to tourists about biological diversity,conservation techniques and sustainable use of natural environment.

v)Gain International knowledge:Eco-tourism brings international knowledge to the local people.There are some important eco-tourism sites in Dooars region which bring foreign people. In this aspects,eco-tourism serves as a vehicle of international knowledge by way of bringing diverse people face to face.Thus develops social and cultural aspects among all people of the world.

vi)Market:Eco-tourism also creates a small market based on handloom and handicrafts of different local tribe .By selling their attractive product to tourist earn money.

vii)Promotion of Area: Eco-tourism site “puts a place on the map on the map”.Tourism gives locality a chance to show itself and raise its profile on world map.

viii)Earning Foreign Money: Attractive tourist places of Dooars region earns a huge amount of foreign exchange.It is very helpful for development of socio-economic condition of that area and contributes upliftment of countries economy.

Problems of the study area:Problems of the study area are following:

i)Lack of financial support:Due to lack of various support such as financial,proper guidance some ecotourism centre of Dooars region can not develop their sites properly in Indian tourist map.Proper support would help to develop the region properly and also help to preserve local culture,traditions,arts forms,heritage.Exm: Kumargram,Raidak.

ii)Inadequate Infrastructure:Due to inadequate infrastructure such as transport and communication,water facilities,tourist did not prefer to visit some tourist sites. Exm:Shikiajhora.

iii) Trained Guide: It is a rising problem.Some of the ecotourism faces lacking of proper guide.Though some youth are engaged in this sector ,but they are not professional and well trained.

iv)Lack of Planning: There has also some area in dooars region which can arise as a ecotourism site.But due to proper planning the area can not establish as a tourist site till now.This areas found along the NH-31C in between of tea garden and some small rivers.This areas has great potential as an upcoming tourist spot.

Recommendations: According to my opinion the following suggestion is need to implement to minimize problems related ecotourism:

i) Necessity proper advertisement through fairs, governments programs to develop less important sites.

ii)Necessity of government financial support for infrastructural development.

iii) Clustering of tourism sites and visitors management plans which will develop eco-tourism destinations.

- iv) Promoting educational tours for school and colleges students; arrangement of summer camp and adventure packages like trekking, hill climbing, rafting etc.
- v) For development of ecotourism area emphasis should be given to implement Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model because it brings together government agencies and public sectors.
- vi) Proper information about area, road map etc. should be added in government official sites, tourist map so that it will be easy to access for tourist.
- vii) Professional and well known trained guide should employ so that tourist can enjoy their tour and acquire their knowledge about history, geography, culture of the area.

Conclusion

Eco-tourism meets the goal of sustainable tourism. Dooars region of Alipurduar district is very suitable and has a huge potentiality in ecotourism, in spite of that some regions are still lack behind and not develop its area properly. Core barrier is inadequate infrastructure, government planning, local interest and sustainable awareness. If these problems are minimized, Dooars ecotourism will be more preferable than now to visitors. It will improve the unemployment scenario of Dooars region and socio-economic upliftment. Government can earn more revenue through Dooars ecotourism. Proper systematic planning by the government with collaboration with non-government organisations (NGOs) and local club towards developing ecotourist sites and making social awareness, that the clean and green pictorial environment of Dooars arise as a “Heaven of Nature” to tourists.

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