

ZONING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS – A STUDY OF MUNNAR

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ABSTRACT

The term 'ecotourism' is generally used in the context of tourism in ecologically sensitive areas like the protected areas. Ecotourism has been formulated and studied as an instrument for sustainable and equitable tourism. Ecotourism is thought to encourage both conservation and development and synergistic relationships between tourism, biodiversity and local people. Overdevelopment of ecotourism has resulted in a series of problems which also degrade an environment. Natural resource attractions can be jeopardized through improper uses or overuse. Physical site alteration and disturbance of biota; removal and redistribution of materials; pollution; loss of biodiversity and a host of other problems result from unplanned and uncontrolled tourism development. It is in this context that zoning of ecotourism spots for development activities assumes importance. Proper identification of ecologically fragile areas based on ecosystem, biodiversity and landscape and topography patterns is the major subjective research that has to be undertaken to zone the destinations and state down guidelines for their pattern of development. Munnar, 'the Kashmir of South India' in Kerala has become a very popular ecotourism destination in recent times and is also suffering from unplanned and haphazard development. Hence, this paper reveals the use of zoning in ecotourism destinations taking the major tourism spots of Munnar as a case study.

KEY WORDS: Ecotourism, Zoning, Ecosystem, Biodiversity, Landscape and topography patterns