

**Volume 6, Issue 1 (XXXVI)**

**January - March 2019**

**ISSN 2394 - 7780**



ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये  
UGC  
University Grants Commission  
Journal No.: 63571

**International Journal of  
Advance and Innovative Research**  
(Special Issue)

*S. Lawa*



**Indian Academicians and Researchers Association**

**[www.iaraedu.com](http://www.iaraedu.com)**



**Journal - 63571**

### UGC Journal Details

**Name of the Journal :** International Journal of Advance & Innovative Research

**ISSN Number :**

**e-ISSN Number :** 23947780

**Source:** UNIV

**Subject:** Multidisciplinary

**Publisher:** Indian Academicians and Researchers Association

**Country of Publication:** India

**Broad Subject Category:** Multidisciplinary



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## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF KONKAN

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## INTRODUCTION

Maharashtra has almost 720km of coastal area known as the Konkan region. It is one of the most beautiful places in India. It is blessed with beaches, the Sayadhri mountain range and evergreen forest. Tourism has begun to develop recently in Konkan, making it a very attractive tourist destination but also making it vulnerable to the after effects of a being most viited tourist place.

The tourism industry in general, includes the supply-chain like accommodation units, tour operators, MSME providers of visitor services, transporters and nature tour outfitters etc. The challenge before all of them is to preserve the cultural identity and natural and historical heritage of the region and also to diversify the livelihood of the local population. The real challenge is balancing conservation of bio-diversity and also maintaining professional quality of visitor experiences. This paper analyses the scope of sustainable tourism in Konkan.

## MEANING OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Sustainable tourism refers to tourism with responsibility. In 1988, the United Nations World Tourism organization (UNWTO) defined sustainable tourism as 'leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems'. Sustainable tourism is one that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. In 1992, the 'Earth Summit' in Rio established the triple principles of environmental, economic and social sustainability. Since then, the principles of sustainable tourism have been adopted by the tourism industry worldwide.

In 1995, United Nations conference on Environment and Development has elaborated and expressed the sustainable development approach in travel and Tourism Agenda-21. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has adopted the sustainable approach to tourism and applied sustainable development studies.

Konkan region is a gifted region in Maharashtra with abundant forest area and wildlife, many historical forts, virgin beaches, old temples, lush green valleys and seasonal waterfalls which have become important attraction for the tourists. This paper analyses the various attractions of the Konkan region and suggests steps towards maintaining these places for overall sustainability of tourism industry. The following are the attractive destinations for which Konkan is known. All are natural endowments and need care and conservation.

- 1. Beaches :** There are many undiscovered beautiful beaches in Konkan most of which are virgin beaches. Guhagar, Harihareshwar, Alibag, Kihim, Ganpatipule, Karde, , Revdanda, Murud, Srivardhan, Velneshwar, Hedvi, Bhandarpule, Ratnagiri, Bhatye, Malvan, Tarkarli, Bagmandla, Diveagar, Kelshi, Vengurla – Mochemad, Kunkeshwar, and Mithbav are some famous beaches. These are yet to be fully commercialized and have a good scope to increase tourism in these places.
- 2. Forts:** The forts in Konkan are also the tourist attractions for their archeological, engineering and morphological, historical value. These forts represent the vision and mission and struggle of the visionary king Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to establish Swarajya. The Kulaba fort, Revdanda fort, Korlai fort, khanderi fort, Underi fort, Janjira fort, Bankot fort, Suvarnadurga, Kanakdurga , Gopalgad fort, Jaygad fort, Ratnadurga, Purnagad, Sindhudurg fort and Vijaydurg forts are the famous forts in Konkan region.
- 3. Temples:** Siddhivinayak temple in Nandgao, Suvernaganesh, Rupnarayan temple in Diveagar; temples in Harihareshwar, Ballaleshwar (Pali); Bhagwati devi temple in Ratnagiri, Kunkeshwar, Redi Ganpati, Marleshwar and Ganpatipule etc are the famous temples that attract religious tourist in Konkan. The festivals of Ganeshchaturthi and Shimga (Holi) are celebrated very enthusiastically which attract the domestic tourists.
- 4. Waterfalls:** Waterfalls of Marleshwar, Garambi, Nivali, Pandavgat, Peb and Gavlideo are very famous. The water falls are the result of heavy rainfall in the western ghats and the short length rivers flowing through the mountains These are the major tourist attractions during rainy season.





5. **Konkan Railway:** Travelling by Konkan railway itself is an adventure. The length of the Konkan railway route in Maharashtra is 381.181km. An interesting fact about Konkan railway is that the scenic beauty of this route prompted, train routes being modified to enhance tourism in this region. The presence of Arabian Sea and Sayadhri Ghats on either side of the track leads to a large number of tunnels and bridges throughout the route. There are more than 2000 bridges and more than 90 tunnels on this route. Karbude tunnel was the longest rail tunnel in India before Pir Panjal tunnel. The Karbude tunnel is 6.5 km long and one of the India's biggest engineering marvels is located near Ratnagiri. Apart from tourism industry the Konkan railway has increased the pace of industrialization and commercialization in the region.
6. **Scuba Diving :** Malvan scuba diving offers excellent underwater visibility for scuba diving near Sindhudurg fort as well as near Tsunami Island of Tarkarli. It is simply out of the world experience for its beautiful aquatic life, colorful and rich corals. These sea water sports have become a huge attraction for both domestic as well as foreign tourist.

These beautiful and natural gifts of the Konkan region are the most attractive tourist spots. These places also face a threat from the tourists that visit them. Tackling the problems like environmental hazards, increase in waste products, avoiding damage to wild-life, ensuring no disruption in socio-economic and cultural setup and conservation of architecture and ecological balance in the host region will truly help to achieve sustainable tourism in Konkan. There is a need for proper training programmes for the locals to encash the increasing fame of the Konkan amongst tourist. The following steps can be taken by the government to conserve the natural scenic beauty of this region along with encouraging tourism industry.

The beaches in Konkan are lonely, deserted, uncommercialized, with very clean waters; as many of them are not even known to the tourist. There is a huge scope for the locals to commercialize such beaches. Along with proper promotion of such places, it is important that the natural beauty and cleanliness of sea water at these beaches is maintained. This would sustain the quality of the place as well attract many more tourist. Encouragement to tourism at the cost of nature is self-destructive. The role of the local residents in implementation of such environmental sustainability tourism policy is more. This requires proper training to the local residents about conservation of their natural endowments.

Similarly, the coral reef in Tarkarli, Malvan in Sindhudurg attracts tourists interested in sea water sports. There is a need of conservation of such coral reefs and promoting them to attract more tourists. Awareness among the local residents and tourists about cleanliness and waste management will help maintain the clean waters and marine life. The government must invest in discovering such coral reefs and developing the required infrastructure for development of tourism as a part of sustainable tourism.

The maintenance of historical places like forts and temples and renovating them is essential to enhance their life and value. Such places are testimonials for the past and hence attract different tourist from various study fields like history and archaeology, engineering science, asthetics, sculpture and arts etc. The forts like Janjira, Suvarnadurga and Ratnadurga etc. are the historic naval bases of the kingdom of Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Many forts exemplify the best engineering of all the times. Konkan is full of such cultural and historical heritage and there is a need to preserve this jewel.

The government of Maharashtra has implemented some power projects in the Konkan region which are affecting the flora and fauna of the place. Power projects like Enron, Dabhol Power have already affected the mango and cashew plantations. The proposed Jaitapur Nuclear power project and the following proposed Coal-Based Power Projects in Konkan are in Shahapur, Raigad(Tata), Bhopan, Dapoli(GMR), Dhopave, Guhagar(NTPC), Jaigad, Ratnagiri(JSWEL), Ranpar, Ratnagiri(Finolex), Munage, Devgad (Ultramega), Dhakore, Ajgaon, S'wadi(Ind BharatPower) etc. All these power projects are a potential danger to the cultivation, the fruits and crops and environment in Konkan region apart from the production of electricity. People against these projects are mainly the environmentalist and the local residents who are worried about the sustainability of these decisions of the government.

The report prepared by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) in Pune was flawed. It showed cashew and mango orchards and paddy fields at the project site as wasteland. Due to such ambiguity in the process the local residents have agitated against several mega projects in Konkan region.

The sustainable tourism will thrive in Konkan only if the government and the local residents work hand in hand for environmental, social as well as economic sustainability. Each one of these conditions complement one another and no development is complete if any one of these factors is missing. There is wide scope in Konkan to develop its undiscovered tourist places. But it is the government that should decide how it wants to perceive



Konkan in the near future; as a nature hub and a well known tourist attraction for its flora, fauna and marine life or, a power production hub with the consequences of environmental degradation and destruction of biodiversity.

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