

Ecotourism Practices In Selected Tourist Destinations: A Study In Manipur

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Abstract:

Acknowledging the significance of ecotourism and its advantages, this research investigates and evaluates the ecotourism practices in the chosen tourist destinations of Manipur that contain significant potential from the viewpoints of stakeholders. Additionally, it discusses how travellers and management view the growth of the tourism industry. A thorough exploratory research study was carried out on ecotourism practices in particular tourist destinations utilizing personal interviews, and structured questionnaires, purposive sampling, and extra secondary data from websites, books, journals, and libraries were administered in this investigation. Based on the results, the business firm/practitioner and visitors acknowledged that the chosen locations had a lot of potential for the sustainable growth of tourism industry as sustainable ecotourism attractions that will leverage the financial and social gains. In an effort to promote sustainable ecotourism, this study aims to identify the finest ecotourism practices in the destinations of Manipur that have been chosen. The research recommends prioritizing ecotourism practices. It encourages locals' involvement, encourages visitors to support conservation, and ensures proper maintenance to protect heritages of natural and cultural importance in the tourist destination.

Keywords: ecotourism, responsible tourism, sustainability, community participation.

1. Introduction

Ecotourism constitutes a specific category of tourism inspired by a place's cultural heritage, especially its indigenous cultures. It emphasizes sensitivity, participation, and appreciation while concentrating on developing areas. It entails utilizing wildlife and natural resources to safeguard regions and improve the prosperity of the local economy. An organized strategy is used in ecotourism, where locals promote destinations, enforce laws, and use the money earned to fund land management and community improvement (Ziffer, 1989). The unfavourable development policies of governments and society, especially from an ecological perspective, aided in the spread of the ecotourism idea. However, ecotourism is actually a very old concept, having first appeared in the latter part of the 1960s and the early 1970s when researchers commenced to express concerns concerning the improper utilization of natural resources (Fennell, 2008). Ecotourism can be used as a means of both sustainable development and conservation, particularly where locals reside, urged to protect the environment for future generations (Wallace & Pierce, 1996). In literal terms, Manipur, known as "A Jewelled Land" due to its diverse topography and rich flora and fauna, is also known as "Switzerland of the East." Located in the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot, the state offers a variety of topography, including forests, rivers, lakes, hilltop islands, streams, and valleys. It is home to centuries-old indigenous social behaviours, unique civilizations, rich traditions, and heritage. Developing an ecotourism policy is crucial due to the state's potential and recent visitor growth. Despite its small size, Manipur contains numerous wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, including the second-largest freshwater lake in India, Loktak Lake which is a unique selling proposition (USP). Sacred groves owned by communities are a significant part of the state's religious and cultural legacy. The state's renowned rich cultural legacy and unique biodiversity make it a must-visit destination for both locals and tourists. Human activities like bathing, laundry, and utensil cleaning, along with urban waste, fertilizers, and pesticides, have all contributed to the degradation of the lake's water quality. Lake pollution has resulted from urbanization, and people working on household chores is a major risk. The socioeconomic well-being of the local community has been impacted by the lake's degradation of natural aesthetics and socioeconomic well-being. In response to sustainable practices, ecotourism which support both economic growth and environmental preservation emerged in the 1980s. Good management, regulation, and policy are essential for ecotourism locations to succeed. Sustainable and resilient destinations are crucial for global economic competitiveness

and environmental preservation. They must adapt to environmental changes, with crisis management for quick changes and sustainability for gradual ones. Climate change requires identifying trends and adjusting policies, and innovation and best practices from other European mountain chains are essential (Paunović & Jovanović, 2017). Policy and planning should place a high priority on sustainability in order to guarantee the sector's long-term viability and environmentally responsible operations. Incorporating an international certification program could enhance the ecotourism industry by guaranteeing more sustainable practices and improved resource management (Jaini et al., 2012). Food security, sustainable development, and ecosystem services are all greatly aided by India's protected areas. Investments in these sectors have the potential to maintain ecosystem benefits, create jobs, and strengthen local economies. It is imperative to tackle contentious matters and execute infrastructure projects in order to save the country's cultural heritage and attend to the problems encountered by its citizens (Maan & Chaudhry, 2019). There is a relationship between the value that citizens place on tourism development, their sense of community, and supporting sustainable tourism expansion by them. The study emphasized the value of participation of the host population in the development of tourism, especially in regions looking to create sustainable tourism as a means of boosting economies (Bajrami et al., 2020). Tianjin's rural ecotourism employs a questionnaire survey and the SWOT analysis method. Possibilities include increased demand, backing from the government, and fusing tourism with historical and cultural elements. Competition and a range of traveler needs are threats (Shang et al., 2020). Since national parks protect the environment and make resources for travel and education easier to reach, they can be very helpful in advancing social education and environmentally conscious travel (Sica et al., 2021). To attract young children to tourist places, it is recommended to provide child-friendly restrooms, rest areas that are appropriate for outdoor activities, and reduce crowding (Qiu et al., 2020). Both the environment and human welfare depend on having a clean environment. Walkability, bicycle tourism, tourism mobilities, and other green logistics strategies for sustainable tourism can help respect human rights and address environmental issues. These solutions seek to implement individuals' entitlement to a clean environment in a balanced manner (Perkumienė et al., 2020). The research highlights how important it is to promote sustainable tourism through visitor value orientation, destination management, social responsibility in tourism, and the development of sustainable tourism. It draws attention to the necessity of efficient sustainable policies and management to lessen the negative effects of tourism, such as tourists' anti-environmental behaviour. Cultural exchange, environmental preservation, host community well-being, and sustainability education can all be facilitated by sustainable tourism (Khan et al., 2021). In Manipur, India, the study looks at rural communities as long-term participants in rural tourism. When it comes to learning new things and comprehending human behaviour, anthropologists are invaluable. In order to protect rural areas and grow the tourism sector, the study emphasizes the necessity of support from the government and community involvement in tourism planning (Ursa, 2021). The significance of three fundamental institutional elements—local agency, supranational institutions, and governance frameworks—for the sustainable growth of cultural heritage tourism. It highlights how path dependence shapes sustainable development and how the agenda changes in relation to governance structures (Mzembe et al., 2023).



Fig. No. 1 Tourist Footfall in Manipur (2010-2023)

Source: Department of Tourism, Government of Manipur

The above figure depicts Foreign Tourist and Domestic Tourist Visits in Manipur for the last thirteen years from 2010 to 2023 which shows drastic changes during the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 as well as decline of tourist footfall from 2023 due to prevailing political situation in the state.

2. Objectives:

- a. To study the practices of natural conservation and culture heritage preservation at the selected destinations.

- b. To study the socio-economic benefits to host communities, environmental awareness and low impact activities at the selected destinations.
- c. To suggest strategies for the development of ecotourism and strengthening its roles at the selected destinations.

3. *Review of literature*

Hetzer argues that negative government and societal policies, particularly ecological ones, contributed to the growth of ecotourism, a long-standing concept that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Fennell, 2008). Ecotourism, a sustainable tourism approach, promotes natural history and indigenous cultures in underdeveloped regions, involving local residents in promotion, regulation, and revenue support (Ziffer, 1989). Ecotourism involves visiting natural settings for research, leisure, or volunteer work aid, promoting conservation and sustainable growth, particularly in regions where the local communities conserve resources available to other people (Wallace & Pierce, 1996). Taiwan's tourism sector is thriving, with the government promoting it to boost economic income and sustainability, leveraging coastal tourism for resources, housing, and recreational opportunities (Wang et al., 2016). An all-encompassing ecotourism strategy is needed, considering socioeconomic, cultural, and ecological Perspectives (Okan et al., 2016). Sustainable and resilient destinations are crucial for global economic competitiveness and environmental preservation (Paunović & Jovanović, 2017). Loktak Lake, a natural wonder with significant socio-economic, cultural, artistic, and historical significance, is a prime ecotourism destination due to its vulnerability to ecosystems (Shantibala Devi, n.d.). Sustainable tourism policy research has grown by 50% in five years, with Europe being the primary focus, emerging Asia and Africa, and climate-sensitive regions also experiencing growth (Guo et al., 2019). The study on sustainable tourism, involving local citizens, businesses, and government officials, has limitations as it only analyzes the perspectives of the people living there (Hsu et al., 2019). The study in Cameroon highlights the preference for handicrafts and cultural heritage sites as ecotourism options, with women more likely to participate, but cultural norms restrict their participation (Kimengsi et al., 2019). Ladakh's communities are embracing ecotourism initiatives, adopting the Human-Heath-Predator approach, which has boosted their attitudes towards snow leopard conservation and increased wildlife's importance (Kimengsi et al., 2019). Ecotourism, a key conservation strategy since the early 20th century, promotes economic growth and nation-building through tourism and recreation in US National Parks, preserving natural wonders (Stronza et al., 2019). The study explores sustainable marine ecotourism in Pangandaran Region, highlighting the need for improved coastal resources quality, transportation accessibility, comprehensive information, and suitable accommodations (Nurhayati et al., 2019). India's protected areas are vital for ecosystem services, food security, and sustainable development, requiring investments to generate employment, boost economies, and preserve cultural heritage (Maan & Chaudhry, 2019). Laiharaoba, a two-millennium-old Meitei tradition in Manipur, honors the deity Umanglai, preserving and commemorating ancient Meitei culture through a complex and significant ceremony (Devi, n.d.). A study reveals a link between citizens' support for sustainable tourism growth, community sense, and perception of tourism development's value, emphasizing the significance of local community attention in boosting economies (Bajrami et al., 2020). This paper analyzes Tianjin's rural eco-tourism, highlighting opportunities like rising demand and government support, while threats include competition and diverse traveler needs (Shang et al., 2020). The research highlights the importance of psychological empowerment for women's happiness and the potential of ecotourism for positive change, urging support for microfinance initiatives and entrepreneurial networks (Ertac & Tanova, 2020). The study aimed to design a trademark for Gargano National Park, focusing on responsible and inclusive tourism principles, demonstrating its potential for catering to specific access needs and promoting sustainable tourism (Sica et al., 2021). The study explores young children's preferences for facilities and services in tourist destinations, emphasizing the need for health/hygiene management strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic (Qiu et al., 2020). The study explores the cognitive aspects of rural tourism destination images, aiming to aid destination coordinators and marketers in creating effective and sustainable positioning strategies (Leković et al., 2020). The study aims to enhance e-Tourism research through meticulousness, originality, and fair contributions to society, addressing negative aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Gretzel et al., 2020). Green logistics solutions for sustainable tourism, including bicycle tourism, intelligent velomobility systems, and walkability, can balance environmental concerns and uphold human rights for human welfare (Perkumienė et al., 2020). The research depicts the importance of sustainable tourism policies, destination management, development, tourist value orientation, and social responsibility in mitigating negative impacts and promoting wellness, environmental protection, and cultural interaction (Khan et al., 2021). The study explores ecotourism development in Penang Hill, focusing on stakeholders' long-term sustainability perspectives, emphasizing the importance of economic and conservation collaboration between management and commercial sectors (Salman et al., n.d.). The study evaluates environmental conservation awareness among national park visitors and investigates the correlation between the New Ecological Paradigm Scale (NEP) and intention to engage in environmentally friendly activities (Jeong et al., 2021). The study investigates how rural communities contribute to rural tourism in Manipur, emphasizing the need for community involvement and government support to preserve rural areas (Ursa, 2021). The government is promoting rural development and rehabilitation by involving citizens and encouraging peasants to participate in eco-tourism, known as "tourism rice," to increase economic opportunities (Sun et al., 2021). Caribbean island destinations, the world's most tourism-dependent region, are navigating the pandemic's consequences and implementing strategies to sustain their businesses and maintain global competitiveness (Lewis-Cameron & Brown-Williams, 2022). Tourism empowers women, navigating caste, class, patriarchy, and conservation governance. Ecotourism modifies external frameworks, while intersectional feminism explores women's agency in tourism, considering cultural, market, and social status interactions (Pandya, n.d.). A study reveals a positive

correlation between forest villagers' perceived relationship orientation and ecosystem services payments, suggesting integrating ecotourism, agrotourism, organic farming, local food culture, and handicraft marketing for sustainable development (Gültekin, 2022). The Phayeng strategy aims to empower underprivileged forest residents by promoting sustainability practices and local knowledge to address the global decline of forest populations (Trichao Thomas et al., 2023). Reviving smallholder hill farming involves rural youth, promoting agri-ecotourism, and improving food production methods to increase consumption and employment opportunities, benefiting lower socioeconomic status individuals (Rana & Bisht, 2023).

4. The Study Site:

Keibul Lamjao National Park situated on Loktak Lake, is the only floating national park globally. It is the final natural habitat of the Manipur "Sangai" dancing deer. The region's rich flora and fauna, as well as its cultural history, make it an attractive destination for nature enthusiasts and offers economic opportunities. An important landmark in India's Freedom Struggle history, Moirang saw the inaugural raising of the Indian National Army flag on April 14, 1944, and tourists are reminded of the sacrifices made by INA soldiers under Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at the INA Museum, which houses war relics. The Ibudhou Thangjing Temple, an ancient temple dedicated to the god Thangjing, attracts many tourists annually. Sendra Park and Resort, located 30 kilometers from Imphal, offers cozy cottages with stunning views of Loktak Lake. The resort offers a getaway from the hustle of metropolitan life, provides guests with a stunning view of the boathouses and working fishermen casting their nets into the water, offering a serene escape. The region's attractions provide numerous opportunities for visitors and generate economic benefits for the host population and tour package developers. In order to attract more tourists, it is crucial to preserve and maintain these assets through genuine ecotourism practices and active marketing.

5. Methods and Methodology:

Exploratory research study was adopted to conduct a more detailed investigation of ecotourism in the chosen tourism sites. Data collection was carried out involving a structured survey questionnaires with a total of 111 respondents (81 respondents are tourist and 30 respondents or participants from tourism stakeholders including local communities and business practitioners). Purposive sampling was used for the selection of respondents based on research participants' willingness to engage, time restrictions, and geographic closeness. The primary source of data for this research were personal interviews and survey questionnaires. Both structured and unstructured questionnaires were employed, with open-ended and closed-ended items using a five-point Likert scale. Apart from the mentioned primary data that was used, additional secondary data from books, journals, libraries, and websites were also included.

6. Results and Discussions

6.1 Respondents' Profiles

The following Table 1 lists the demographic characteristics. 52 (46.85) and 59 (53.15) of the total responders are male and female, respectively. Most of the responders are of 21-30years (62.16%), followed by 31-40 years (19.81%), below 20 years (9.9%), 51 and above years (5.4%) and 41-50 years (2.7%).

Regarding educational level of the respondents, majority of them were of Graduate (49.5%) followed by Post Graduate (35.1%), Higher Secondary (11.7%) and Matriculate (3.6%). When it comes to household income, the majority of respondents make less than 15,000 and 35,000 & 50,000, and between 15,000-35000 and 55,000 & above.

Features		Frequency (N=111)	Percentage
Gender	Male	52	46.85
	Female	59	53.15
Age Group	Below 20	11	9.9
	21-30	69	62.16
	31-40	22	19.81
	41-50	3	2.7
	51 and above	6	5.4
Educational Level	Matriculate	4	3.6
	Higher Secondary	13	11.7
	Post Graduate	39	35.1
	Graduate	55	49.5
Household Income	below 15000	29	26.1
	35000-50000	29	26.1
	55000 and above	26	23.4
	15000-35000	27	24.4

Source: Primary data

6.2 Conservation of Natural Resources

Findings from Tourists: The finding revealed tourists must be environmentally conscious while visiting the tourist places since its SD is .713. Eco-friendly services and facilities at the tourist sites must be improved and increased since its SD is .793. There should be proper signage that instructs tourists not to cause any harm to the natural environment since its SD is .973. Encouraging friends, family and colleagues to be eco-conscious while visiting the tourist places is necessary to support ecotourism since its SD is .880. There is still room for improvement for proper waste disposal facilities and management at the tourist sites since its Sd is .901.

Findings from Business Practitioners: The findings revealed that the existing tourism practices promote conservation of natural resource and the existing tourism practices contribute to conservation and management of natural areas since their SDs are .498. and .507 respectively. There are proper waste disposal facilities in and around the destination and there is regular cleaning and maintenance in and around the destination since their SDs are .346 and .758 respectively. Efforts must be given to promote eco-tourism in the destination since its SD is .305.

Statement for Tourist	Std. Deviation (N=81)	Statement for Management	Std. Deviation (N=30)
Tourists must be environmentally conscious while visiting this place	.713	The existing tourism practices promote conservation of natural resource	.498
There are eco-friendly services and facilities at the tourist sites	.793	The existing tourism practices contribute to conservation and management of natural areas	.507
There are proper signage that instructs tourists not to cause any harm to the natural environment	.973	There are proper waste disposal facilities in and around the destination	.346
You will encourage your friends, family and colleagues to be eco-conscious while visiting this place	.880	There is regular cleaning and maintenance in and around the destination	.758
There are proper waste disposal facilities at the tourist sites	.901	Efforts must be given to promote eco-tourism in the destination	.305

Source: Primary data

6.3 Support for Local Communities:

Findings from Tourists: Provision and availability of local souvenirs and local cuisines at the tourist sites can be improved since there SDs are .813 and .8.06. there is low availability of local transportation facilities at the tourist sites since its SD is 1.001. the local community can engage and participate in ecotourism development and activities since its SD is .676. Tourists must follow the instructions given by the locals and employees about environment and culture conservation at the tourist sites since its SD is .691.

Findings from Business Practitioners: The existing tourism practices direct benefits to the community's economy and other aspects that support customs rather than supplant them (farming, fishing, social systems, etc) and it can be improved since its SD is .568. Locals' involvement in the decision-making process for ecotourism practices and development can be improved since its SD is .858. The existing tourism practices give locals and those working in nature tourism unique opportunity to take advantage of, visit, and discover more about the treasures that other tourists come to see since its SD is .305. The existing tourism practices increases awareness and understanding of the destinations' natural and cultural system since its SD is .379. The existing tourism practices allow local people to involve in eco-tourism operations, provision of knowledge, services, facilities and products since its SD is .403.

Statement for Tourist	Std. Deviation (N=81)	Statement for Management	Std. Deviation (N=30)
There are local souvenirs available at the tourist sites	.813	The existing tourism practices direct benefits to the community's economy and other aspects that support customs rather than supplant them (farming, fishing, social systems, etc)	.568
There are local cuisines available at the tourist sites	.806	The existing tourism practices maximise locals' involvement in the decision-making process	.858

There are enough local transportation facilities available at the tourist sites	1.001	The existing tourism practices give locals and those working in nature tourism, unique opportunity to take advantage of, visit, and discover more about the treasures that other tourists come to see	.305
You have witnessed maximum number of local people engaged in tourism services at the tourist sites	.676	The existing tourism practices increases awareness and understanding of the natural and cultural system of the tourist destinations	.379
You have followed the instructions given by the locals and employees about environment and culture conservation at the tourist sites	.691	The existing tourism practices allow local people to involve in eco-tourism operations, provision of knowledge, services, facilities and products.	.403

Source: Primary data

6.4 Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Findings from Tourists: The tourists witnessed cultural and heritage values and there are unique culture and traditional customs and values of the local people at the tourist sites since their SDs are .505 and .661 respectively. Tourists agreed that they must respect the cultural norms, beliefs and values of the local people at the tourist sites and they were given proper instructions not to touch or harm the items kept for archaeological importance since their SDs are .544 and .749 respectively. The tourists witnessed or engaged themselves in indigenous festival like *Lai Haraoba* at the tourist sites since its SD is 1.058.

Findings from Business Practitioners: It is evidence from the study that it is important to preserve the cultural heritage in the destination for tourism promotion since its SD is .000. There is proper maintenance and control at the tourist sites so as to protect the rich natural and cultural heritage of the tourist destinations since its SD is .407. Traditional values must be preserved as a part of tourism promotion at the tourist sites since its SD is .183. It is important to encourage the visitors to respect the local customs and traditions at the tourist sites since its SD is .000. It is important to avoid activities that may damage or degrade cultural sites since its SD is .183.

Statement for Tourist	Std. Deviation (N=81)	Statement for Management	Std. Deviation (N=30)
You have witnessed cultural and heritage values while visiting the tourist sites	.505	It is important to preserve the cultural heritage in the destination for tourism promotion	.000
You have witnessed unique culture and traditional customs and values of the local people at the tourist sites	.661	There is proper maintenance and control at the tourist sites so as to preserve the region's unique natural and cultural assets	.407
Tourist must respect the cultural norms, beliefs and values of the local people at the tourist sites	.544	Traditional values must be preserved as a part of tourism promotion at the tourist sites	.183
You have been given proper instructions not to touch or harm the items kept for archaeological importance	.749	It is important to encourage the visitors to respect the local customs and traditions at the tourist sites	.000
You have witnessed or engaged yourself in indigenous festival like <i>Lai Haraoba</i> at the tourist sites	1.058	It is important to avoid activities that may damage or degrade cultural sites	.183

Source: Primary data

6.5 Education and Awareness:

Findings from Tourists: The tourists are less aware about environment conservation and sustainability since its SD is .732. They witnessed education, awareness, promotion or advertisements on eco-friendly tourism practices and responsible tourism since its SD is .725. There are less proper signage about instructions, information and guidance about environmental and culture preservation since its SD is .675. They have followed and encourage locals and guides to support the local conservation efforts at the selected destinations since its SD is .695. The tourists recognised the rich natural and cultural values of the tourist places they have visited since its SD is .805.

Findings from Business Practitioners: There is provision of educating tourists about the importance of environment conservation since its SD is .490. The destination provides information for ecotourism practices since its SD is .563. The existing tourism practices encourage the visitors to support local conservation efforts since its SD is .507. The tourism staff are aware of the importance to encourage moral and ethical obligations to the environment, both natural and cultural since its SD is .621. Education can be used as a valuable management tool for the natural areas since its SD is .254.

Statement for Tourist	Std. Deviation (N=81)	Statement for Management	Std. Deviation (N=30)
You are aware about environment conservation and sustainability	.732	There is provision of educating tourists about the importance of environment conservation	.490
You have witnessed education, awareness, promotion or advertisements on eco-friendly tourism practices and responsible tourism	.725	The destination provides information for ecotourism practices.	.563
There are proper signage about instructions, information and guidance about environmental and culture preservation	.675	The existing tourism practices encourage the visitors to support local conservation efforts	.507
You have followed and encourage locals and guides to support the local conservation efforts at the selected destinations	.695	The tourism staff are aware of the importance to encourage moral and ethical obligations to the environment, both natural and cultural	.621
You have recognised the rich natural and cultural values of the tourist places you have visited	.805	Education can be used as a valuable management tool for the natural areas	.254

Source: Primary data

6.6 Low-Impact Activities:

Findings from Tourists: The tourists have witnessed disturbances to the natural environment in the tourism settings at the selected destinations since its SD is .971. It is important to appreciate the natural beauty and cultural and traditional values of the destination without damaging or degrading it since its SD is .722. The tourists have witnessed eco-friendly tourist services and facilities and preservation of cultural and traditional resources at the selected destinations since its SD is .709. Their visit will contribute minimal impact to the surroundings, both natural and cultural at the selected destinations since its SD is .689.

Findings from Business Practitioners: Low-impact activities such as nature walks, sightseeing and other non-intrusive activities are allowed at the tourist sites since its SD is .379. It is important to reduce disturbance and adverse effects on the environment, both natural and sociocultural that can damage the destination and degrade the cultural values of the destination since its SD is .254. Tourism must depend on environmentally conscious infrastructure that preserves native flora and fauna and blends in with the surrounding natural and cultural milieu. since its SD is .850. There are proper waste and sewage disposal system for minimising negative impacts to the surrounding environment since its SD is .498. The existing tourism practices use eco-friendly products to cater the tourists as well as maintenance of the tourist places to avoid and minimise negative impacts on the environment since its SD is .466.

Statement for Tourist	Std. Deviation (N=81)	Statement for Management	Std. Deviation (N=30)
You have witnessed minimum disturbance to the natural environment in the tourism settings at the selected destinations	.971	Low-impact activities such as nature walks, sightseeing and other non-intrusive activities are allowed at the tourist sites	.379
It is important to appreciate the natural beauty and cultural and traditional values of the destination without damaging or degrading it	.722	It is important to reduce disturbance and adverse effects on the environment, both natural and sociocultural that can damage the destination and degrade the cultural values of the destination	.254
You have witnessed eco-friendly tourist services and facilities and preservation of cultural and traditional resources at the selected destinations	.709	Tourism must depend on environmentally conscious infrastructure that preserves native flora and fauna and blends in with the surrounding natural and cultural milieu.	.850
Your visit will contribute minimal impact to the surroundings, both natural and cultural	.689	There are proper waste and sewage disposal system for minimising negative impacts to the surrounding environment	.498

		The existing tourism practices use eco-friendly products to cater the tourists as well as maintenance of the tourist destinations to avoid and minimise negative impacts on the environment	.466
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Source: Primary data

7. **Suggestions:**

7.1 **Suggestions for Tourists**

1. **Conservation of Natural Resources:** In various tourist attractions at the selected destinations, the finding revealed tourists must be environmentally conscious while visiting the tourist places since its SD is .713. Eco-friendly services and facilities at the tourist sites must be improved and increased since its SD is .793. There should be proper signage that instructs tourists not to cause any harm to the natural environment since its SD is .973. Encouraging friends, family and colleagues to be eco-conscious while visiting the tourist places is necessary to support ecotourism since its SD is .880. There is still room for improvement for proper waste disposal facilities and management at the tourist sites since its Sd is .901.
2. **Support for Local Communities:** In various tourist attractions at the selected destinations, provision and availability of local souvenirs and local cuisines at the tourist sites can be improved since there SDs are .813 and .806. there is low availability of local transportation facilities at the tourist sites since its SD is 1.001. the local community can engage and participate in ecotourism development and activities since its SD is .676. Tourists must follow the instructions given by the locals and employees about environment and culture conservation at the tourist sites since its SD is .691.
3. **Preservation of Cultural Heritage:** In various tourist attractions at the selected destinations, the tourists witnessed cultural and heritage values and there are unique culture and traditional customs and values of the local people at the tourist sites since their SDs are .505 and .661 respectively. Tourists agreed that they must respect the cultural norms, beliefs and values of the local people at the tourist sites and they were given proper instructions not to touch or harm the items kept for archaeological importance since their SDs are .544 and .749 respectively. The tourists witnessed or engaged themselves in indigenous festival like *Lai Haraoba* at the tourist sites since its SD is 1.058.
4. **Education and Awareness:** In various tourist attractions at the selected destinations, the tourists are less aware about environment conservation and sustainability since its SD is .732. They witnessed education, awareness, promotion or advertisements on eco-friendly tourism practices and responsible tourism since its SD is .725. There are less proper signage about instructions, information and guidance about environmental and culture preservation since its SD is .675. They have followed and encourage locals and guides to support the local conservation efforts at the selected destinations since its SD is .695. The tourists recognised the rich natural and cultural values of the tourist destinations they have visited since its SD is .805.
5. **Low Impact Activities:** In various tourist attractions at the selected destinations, tourists have witnessed disturbances to the natural environment in the tourism settings at the selected destinations since its SD is .971. It is important to appreciate the natural beauty and cultural and traditional values of the destination without damaging or degrading it since its SD is .722. The tourists have witnessed eco-friendly tourist services and facilities and preservation of cultural and traditional resources at the selected destinations since its SD is .709. Their visit will contribute minimal impact to the socio-cultural and natural environment at the selected destinations since its SD is .689.

7.2 **Suggestions for Business Practitioners:**

1. **Conservation of Natural Resources:** In various tourist attractions at the selected destinations, the findings revealed that the existing tourism practices promote conservation of natural resource and the existing tourism practices contribute to conservation and management of natural areas since their SDs are .498. and .507 respectively. There are proper waste disposal facilities in and around the destination and there is regular cleaning and maintenance in and around the destination since their SDs are .346 and .758 respectively. Efforts must be given to promote eco-tourism in the destination since its SD is .305.
2. **Support for Local Communities:** In various tourist attractions at the selected destinations, the existing tourism practices direct benefits to the community's economy and other aspects that support customs rather than supplant them (farming, fishing, social systems, etc) and it can be improved since its SD is .568. locals' involvement in the decision-making process for ecotourism practices and development can be improved since its SD is .858. The existing tourism practices provide give locals and those working in nature tourism unique opportunity to take advantage of, visit, and discover more about the treasures that other tourists come to see since its SD is .305. The existing tourism practices increases knowledge and comprehension of natural and cultural heritage importance since its SD is .379. The existing tourism practices allow local people to involve in eco-tourism operations, provision of knowledge, services, facilities and products since its SD is .403.
3. **Education and Awareness:** In various tourist attractions at the selected destinations, there is provision of educating tourists about the importance of environment conservation since its SD is .490. The destination provides information for ecotourism practices since its SD is .563. The existing tourism practices encourage the visitors to support local conservation efforts since its SD is .507. The tourism staff are aware of the importance to encourage moral and ethical

- obligations to the environment, both natural and cultural since its SD is .621. Education can be used as a valuable management tool for the natural areas since its SD is .254.
4. **Preservation of Cultural Heritage:** In various tourist attractions at the selected destinations, it is of great significance to preserve the cultural heritage in the tourist destination promotion since its SD is .000. There is proper maintenance and control at the tourist sites so as to safeguard the regions' rich natural and cultural assets since its SD is .407. Traditional values must be preserved as a part of tourism promotion at the tourist sites since its SD is .183. It is important to encourage the visitors to respect the local customs and traditions at the tourist sites since its SD is .000. It is important to avoid activities that may damage or degrade cultural sites since its SD is .183.
 5. **Low Impact Activities:** In various tourist attractions at the selected destinations Low-impact activities such as nature walks, sightseeing and other non-intrusive activities are allowed at the tourist sites since its SD is .379. It is important to reduce the disturbance and adverse effects on the natural environment as well as socio-cultural environment that can damage the destination and degrade the cultural values of the destination since its SD is .254. Tourism must depend on environmentally conscious infrastructure that preserves native flora and fauna and blends in with the surrounding natural and cultural milieu since its SD is .850. There are proper waste and sewage disposal system for minimising negative impacts to the surrounding environment since its SD is .498. The existing tourism practices use eco-friendly products to cater the tourists as well as maintenance of the tourist destinations to avoid and minimise negative impacts on the environment since its SD is .466.
8. *Principal problems and challenges with ecotourism operations at the chosen locations:*

Types of problems	Problems and Challenges
Environmental issues	Lack of effective waste management Activities like directly releasing of solid waste and other pollutants into Nambul and other rivers resulted in polluting Loktak Lake The Ithai barrage construction has significantly impacted the environment of Keibul Lamjao National Park due to the degradation of Loktak Lake e.g. decline in the production of variety of fishes.
Socio-cultural Issues	The potentials of sociocultural heritage as sustainable ecotourism attractions were not fully utilised due to lack of effort to protect, conserve and promote the resources.
Local Community Issues	Inadequate knowledge of responsible tourism and sustainability Less participation in tourism industry Lack of assistance in terms of training, awareness, working capital, etc
Management Issues	Lack of effective sustainable management regulations for tourism ecosystem/stakeholders.
Sustainability	Poor sustainable infrastructure development for sustainable tourism practices.
Education and Awareness	Inadequate human resource development in terms of tourism and hospitality industry Lack of tour guides

9. *Recommended strategies:*

1. **Conservation of natural resources:** Building, remodeling, and upkeep of parks lake, hills, parking structures, etc. are also included in the infrastructure development. Activities related to the water based, such as boat excursions, safaris in the National Park, Phumdis (floating biomass), and canoeing, kayaking, and other similar activities, should be planned and promoted. Introducing a range of ecotourism activities like nature walks, camping, glamping, trekking, cycling, bird watching, village tours, etc. that offer visitors a memorable experience as well as opportunities for enjoyment is another area that requires focus. Waste produced by large towns that are located in the periphery could be treated by conventional sewage treatment facilities. Tourism planner should carry out carrying capacity check and Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) from time to time.
2. **Support for local communities:** Extra efforts ought to be made to support and advertise the regional craftsmen. This would not only draw attention from ecotourists but also support the traditional industries like handicrafts and handloom, which are vital ecotourism products. There is no plan for educating the local people about ecotourism. The existing tourism practices direct benefits to the community's economy and other aspects that support customs rather than supplant them (social systems, agriculture, fishing, etc.). It is needed to maximise locals' participation in the process of determining decisions. The existing tourism practices should allow local people to engage in ecotourism activities and provide information, facilities, services, and products. We can actively encourage homestay in various areas of the selected destinations and vicinity as this not only fixes the lodging issue, but it also increases locals' income and supports the delicate eco-system. In addition to the destinations' ecotourism development strategy, proper efficient waste management program can be implemented. In order for the Manipur host people to comprehend the positive as well as negative effects of tourism, it is also imperative that they participate in an ecotourism awareness campaign.
3. **Preservation of cultural heritage:** Tourists must respect the local cultural norms, beliefs and values of the local people at the tourist destinations. Infrastructure development also encompasses building, remodelling, and upkeep of parks, monuments, museums, public restrooms, parking structures, etc. It is important to avoid activities that may damage or degrade cultural sites in destination sites.

4. Education and awareness: There must be provision of educating tourists about the importance of environment conservation. The destinations should ensure to provide information for ecotourism practices. Existing tourism practices should encourage the visitors to support local conservation efforts. There must be enough signage about instructions, information and guidance about environmental and culture preservation. The tourism stakeholders should be aware of the importance to encourage moral and ethical obligations to the environment, both natural and cultural. Education can be used as a valuable management tool for the natural areas. To ensure education, awareness, promotion or advertisements on eco-friendly tourism practices and responsible tourism. There is no plan for educating both tourists and the local people about ecotourism. The general public has a poor understanding of sustainability and ecotourism.

5. Low impact activities: The ecotourism planners in the state must recognize and appreciate the ecotourism resources and products. Low-impact activities such as nature walks, sightseeing and other non-intrusive activities are allowed at the tourist sites. Activities related to the water, such as boat excursions, canoeing, kayaking, safaris in the National Park, and other similar activities, should be planned and promoted. The existing tourism should practice the use eco-friendly products to cater the tourists as well as maintenance of the tourist attractions to avoid and minimise negative impacts on the environment. There must be proper waste and sewage disposal system for minimising negative impacts to the surrounding environment. Ecotourism must depend on environmentally conscious infrastructure that preserves native flora and fauna and blends in with the surrounding natural and cultural milieu. It is important to minimise the disturbance and negative impacts on the natural environment as well as socio-cultural environment that can damage the destination and degrade the cultural values of the destination. The tourists' visit should contribute minimal impact to the environment of natural and socio-cultural at the selected destinations.

10. Conclusion:

It is imperative that the government give ecotourism the attention it deserves, and the first step in that direction should be developing a conducive ecotourism policy for the industry. To ensure that limited resources are used as efficiently as possible, initiatives for infrastructure and ecotourism destinations must be prioritized. Tourism has shifted towards nature-based visits in recent years, with unaltered ecosystems, landscapes, forests, biodiversity, and diversity of ethnicity and culture becoming significant tourist attractions. To truly appreciate nature and its cultural aspects, responsible travel is needed, honouring the sanctity of the natural world while accommodating visitor requests. Ecotourism, which supports the conservation of the natural resources, host culture, and the natural world, is essential. Manipur, located in the southern offshoot of the Himalayas, is a cultural and naturalists' paradise with its diverse ethnic groups and beautiful landscapes. However, the state's delicate ecology and mountainous terrain pose challenges, requiring a low-tourist, high-income approach and limiting visitor numbers. The only viable path is to transition to participatory tourism, supporting biodiversity, ecology, and conservation of cultural heritages.

It is imperative that the Department of Tourism, Government of Manipur assess the ecotourism tactics implemented by other states and attempt to implement them in the selected destinations while taking into account the local environment and conditions. To draw in and make it easier for ecotourists to enter, the fastest, safest means of communication and ecofriendly transportation within a predictable time frame are required. Improvement of road infrastructures are necessary to further develop ecotourism in the selected destinations. The government ought to lead the charge on this or support regional business owners. The State Government should ought to understand that the money spent on developing ecotourism infrastructure should be viewed as an investment in order to generate income in the future.

Bishnupur district holds great potentials for ecotourism with sustainable development. The urgent need for the various destinations in Bishnupur to be developed as true ecotourism destination will not be less worth than the rest among the world's most popular destinations for ecotourism. The places have its own pristine untouched natural resources, unique selling proposition (USP) like- Loktak Lake, Sangai in Keibul Lamjao National Park, significant historical structures (Vishnu Temple, Imphal Peace Museum, Ibudhou Thangjing Temple, INA Headquarter, INA Museum, etc), unique culture and traditions that make it perfect choices of ecotourism destinations. Since resources and the potentials can't only be the criteria to present them as ecotourism destination, proper infrastructure with sustainable development practices, providing, maximum economic benefits to the host communities as well as proper awareness and education to the hosts as well as guests. The study reveals the existence of potential resources but there is still lack and room for improvement in areas of ecotourism practices such as proper waste disposal facilities, proper signage, awareness, local guides, minimal impact to ecological environment, etc. according to the responses of the tourists and witness of the researcher. Further the study supports that priorities can be given to ecotourism practices like provision of proper waste disposal facilities, regular cleaning and maintenance, tourism practices which contribute to protecting and overseeing natural regions, maximise locals' involvement in the process of making decisions and their direct receipt of financial and other benefits, promote tourism practices that encourage the visitors to support local conservation efforts, to look upon mismanagement of tourism carrying capacity especially during Manipur Sangai Festival, a calendar festival of Manipur and overall provision of proper maintenance and control so as to protect the rich natural and cultural heritage, minimise negative impacts on the environment.

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