

# "ASSESSING STUDENTS AWARENESS AND ADOPTION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES: IMPLICATIONS FOR SHAPING A GREENER FUTURE FOR INDIA'S TOURISM INDUSTRY"

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores sustainable tourism, which aims to reduce the harmful environmental, social, and economic effects of travel while enhancing advantages for indigenous communities, economies, and ecosystems. Important elements of sustainable tourism involve environmentally conscious lodging, responsible travel, conserving water and energy, supporting community-based tourism, and promoting ethical wildlife tourism. Tour operators are essential in this process by securing sustainability certifications and providing educational initiatives to foster awareness of conservation efforts and responsible travel practices. Sustainable tourism also addresses issues like over-tourism, promoting off-season travel to ease pressure on popular destinations, reducing carbon emissions, and encouraging eco-friendly activities. The goal is to foster economic growth for local communities, preserve natural and cultural heritage, and confirm the responsible use of resources for the upcoming generations.

In India, sustainable tourism is gaining traction, particularly in eco-tourism destinations like Kerala, Uttarakhand, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. National parks such as Jim Corbett and Kaziranga are adopting eco-friendly initiatives to protect wildlife and involve tourists in conservation. Community-based tourism programs in states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka help support local communities by promoting cultural experiences, traditional crafts, and local customs. Despite challenges like overcrowding and infrastructure pressure, government has initiated ideologies such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) and Dekho Apna Desh encourage domestic tourism and responsible travel practices. There is a limited understanding of how aware students are of sustainable tourism practices and how they adopt them, despite their crucial part in influencing the future of the tourism segment. This study targets to evaluate the awareness and adoption of sustainable tourism practices among students in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, and seeks to offer insights into how education and awareness can promote sustainable practices, ultimately impacting future tourism policies and strategies in India.

**Key words:** Sustainability, Tourism, India, Environment, Eco-tourism

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism motivates on plummeting the adverse social, environmental, and economic outcomes of travel while taking full advantage of its benefits for indigenous communities, economies, and the environment. Key practices include eco-friendly accommodations, like the energy-efficient buildings and effective waste management systems, and encouraging responsible tourism, where travellers respect local cultures and engage in ethical wildlife tourism. Sustainable tourism also promotes water and energy conservation, supports local communities through community-based tourism, and also makes sure that fair wages and working conditions for workers in the industry are being pertained. Tour operators play a crucial role by obtaining certifications for sustainability practices and offering educational programs that raise awareness about conservation and responsible travel.

By addressing issues like over tourism, sustainable tourism promotes balanced visitor flows and supports off-season travel to reduce pressure on popular destinations. It also focuses on reducing carbon emissions, such as through carbon counteracting and ecological transportation, and encourages environmental activities like hiking and wildlife watching. Sustainable practices in tourism not only help preserve natural and cultural heritage but also contribute to economic growth for local communities by providing jobs and supporting small businesses. In the long run, sustainable tourism fosters authentic experiences for tourists while ensuring the responsible use of resources for future generations.

## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN INDIA

### Environmental Conservation and Community Involvement

Sustainable tourism in India is growing, with a strong emphasis on preserving the country's natural resources and supporting local communities. India's eco-tourism destinations, such as Kerala's backwaters, Uttarakhand's forests, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, are leading the way with practices like waste management, water conservation, and energy-efficient infrastructure. National parks like Jim Corbett, Kaziranga, and Sunderbans are adopting eco-friendly initiatives to protect wildlife and engage tourists in conservation efforts. Additionally, community-based tourism programs in states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka are helping local communities benefit economically by promoting authentic cultural experiences, traditional crafts, and local customs. These initiatives not only protect natural and cultural heritage but also empower local people through sustainable livelihoods.

### Government Initiatives and Responsible Travel

Despite challenges such as overcrowding at tourist sites and pressure on infrastructure, India's government has introduced several policies to promote sustainable tourism. Programs like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) emphasis on refining cleanliness and waste management in tourist destinations, while the Dekho Apna Desh initiative encourages domestic tourism to off-peak and lesser-known regions. Additionally, the promotion of responsible travel practices is gaining traction, with tourists being urged to respect

local cultures, avoid wildlife exploitation, and minimize their carbon footprint. States like Kerala have adopted eco-certifications to highlight businesses that follow sustainable practices. These efforts are crucial in safeguarding that tourism in India contributes to environmental conservation, economic growth, and cultural preservation in the long run.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The tourism industry in India is a significant backer to our country's economy, but it also postures considerable environmental, social, and cultural challenges. Unsustainable tourism practices, such as over-tourism, pollution, resource depletion, and cultural erosion, have led to the degradation of natural and cultural heritage sites. As the global focus shifts towards sustainability, there is a crucial necessity to promote sustainable tourism practices that poise economic progress with ecological conservation and socio-cultural well-being.

Despite the growing emphasis on sustainable tourism globally, there is limited understanding of the responsiveness and adoption of sustainable tourism practices midst students, who are the forthcoming stakeholders of the tourism industry. Students, particularly those pursuing tourism-related studies, play a critical part in influencing the upcoming of the tourism industry. Moreover, the extent to which they are aware of sustainable tourism principles and their willingness to adopt these practices stays under explored.

This research pursues to report this gap by assessing the level of awareness and acceptance of ecological tourism practices among students in India. Especially, it targets to respond to the given questions:

1. To what extent are students currently informed about sustainable tourism practices?
2. What are the key factors that affect students' adoption of sustainable tourism practices?
3. In what ways can enhanced awareness and adoption of sustainable tourism practices by students help shape a more environmentally friendly future for India's tourism sector?

By addressing these problems, the research will offer valuable perceptions into the role of education and consciousness in promoting sustainable tourism. The findings will have implications for policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders in designing policies to nurture further sustainable and responsible tourism industry in India.

## **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The scope of this research is fixated on assessing the awareness and adoption of sustainable tourism practices among students ranging from higher secondary students to postgraduate level in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu, India. Coimbatore, branded for its educational institutions and proximity to eco-tourism destinations, provides a relevant context for understanding the role of students in promoting sustainable tourism. The study will encompass the various dimensions namely -Target Population, Awareness Assessment, Adoption of Sustainable Practices, Influencing Factors, Educational Implications, Policy and Industry Implications, and Future-Oriented Approach.

## OBJECTIVES

This research aims to:

- To gauge students, awareness and understanding of sustainable tourism.
- To analyze students, travel behaviors and their willingness to adopt sustainable practices.
- To identify key factors influencing their travel decisions.
- To evaluate their opinions on the sustainability of Indian tourism.
- To explore their role in promoting sustainable tourism.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This research adopts the aspects of descriptive research design to examine student's awareness, attitudes, and behaviors regarding sustainable tourism. It syndicates quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather insights from a diverse student population.

- Type of Study: Descriptive & Analytical
- Research Approach: Mixed-method (Quantitative via structured questionnaire & Qualitative via open-ended responses)
- Research Instrument: Structured Questionnaire

### Data Collection Methods

#### A. Primary Data Collection

Primary data was collected using a organized questionnaire directed to students. The questionnaire was designed to cover: Demographic Information (age, education level, and travel frequency), Awareness & Understanding of Sustainable Tourism, Attitudes & Opinions on Sustainability in Tourism, Personal Travel Behavior & Willingness to Adopt Sustainable Practices and Students' Role in Promoting Sustainable Tourism

#### B. Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data was collected from academic journals, government reports, sustainable tourism case studies, and industry white papers. Key sources include:

- Government Policies on Sustainable Tourism (e.g., Eco-Tourism Policy 2023, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan)

- Reports from UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization) and Ministry of Tourism (India)
- Sustainable Tourism Initiatives by Private and Public Sector Companies
- Research papers on student awareness and behavior toward sustainable travel

#### **Mode of Data Collection:**

- Online Survey (Google Forms, Microsoft Forms, etc.) – Shared via university portals, social media groups, and student associations.
- Offline Data Collection (Face-to-Face Surveys) – Conducted at universities and colleges to ensure diverse participation.

#### **Sampling Methodology**

##### **A. Target Population**

The target population includes students from various educational backgrounds who travel for leisure and academic purposes.

##### **B. Sampling Technique**

The sampling technique adopted for this research was stratified random sampling to ensure diversity in respondents. Students were divided into different categories based on: Educational Level (High School, Undergraduate, and Postgraduate), Stream of Study (Arts, Commerce, and Science), Geographical Location (Urban, Semi-Urban, Rural Institutions)

#### **Sample Size**

Total Sample Size included for the research includes 150 students. This sample provides a reliable representation of student perspectives across different disciplines and institutions.

#### **Research Instrument: Questionnaire Structure**

The questionnaire was designed to ensure clarity, relevance, and ease of response. It included:

1. Closed-ended Questions like the Multiple-choice, Likert scale (rating questions), and Yes/No responses.
2. Open-ended Questions – To gather qualitative insights on students' opinions and suggestions for sustainable tourism.

## Limitations of the Study

- Limited Geographic Scope: The survey was conducted in selected institutions, which may not fully represent all student demographics in India.
- Self-Reported Data: Responses may be inclined by personal prejudices or social interest.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sustainable tourism has gained significant attention as a means to balance commercial growth with ecological and social responsibility. Studies highlight that young adult, particularly students, play a vital role in adopting ecological tourism practices due to their increasing awareness of environmental concerns (Smith et al., 2020). However, gaps persist in translating awareness into active adoption (Kumar & Rao, 2021).

Research by Sharma et al. (2019) emphasizes the influence of educational institutions in nurturing sustainability awareness through curriculum incorporation and experimental learning. Another study by Gupta and Mehta (2022) finds that social media significantly shapes students' perceptions of sustainable tourism, encouraging eco-friendly travel behavior.

Despite growing awareness, financial constraints and convenience often deter students from making sustainable travel choices (Patel & Verma, 2021). Additionally, policy interventions and incentives can play a vital role in encouraging responsible tourism habits among young travelers (Chakraborty, 2023).

## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### Awareness of Sustainable Tourism

With 70% of students reporting awareness of sustainable tourism, there seems to be a strong level of knowledge among respondents. Social media (50%) and academic courses (30%) are the primary sources of this awareness, which highlights the role of both online platforms and formal education in spreading information about sustainable tourism. This suggests that younger individuals, who are more active on social media, might be better informed about global sustainability issues.

### Perceptions of Indian Tourism Sustainability

The analysis indicates that only 20% of respondents perceive Indian tourism as currently sustainable. This finding suggests that there is crucial room for upgrading in terms of sustainability in India's tourism sector. The identified challenges, including waste and littering (60%), overcrowding (45%), and water scarcity (40%), are common concerns in many Indian tourist destinations. These challenges align with global sustainability issues in tourism, indicating that environmental conservation and management practices need to be urgently addressed in the Indian context.

## **Adoption of Sustainable Travel Practices**

While consciousness of sustainable tourism is high, authentic adoption of sustainable practices is somewhat moderate. 60% of respondents avoid single-use plastics, and 50% support local businesses, but only 25% actively choose eco-friendly accommodations. This disparity could reflect a conflict between students' awareness of sustainable practices and their actual behavior, possibly due to convenience, cost, or a lack of readily available eco-friendly options. The relatively low adoption of eco-friendly accommodations could also suggest that these options may not be widespread or affordable enough for students.

## **Willingness to Pay for Sustainable Travel**

Over half (55%) of respondents are willing to pay extra for eco-friendly stays, while 35% would consider it if the price were reasonable. This shows a strong, albeit conditional, willingness to invest in sustainability, provided it does not significantly increase the cost of travel. This aligns with the earlier finding that budget and affordability are top priorities for 70% of respondents when making travel choices, indicating a potential barrier to adopting sustainable tourism practices if they come with higher costs.

## **Factors Influencing Travel Choices**

The top priority for students when choosing travel options is affordability (70%), followed by cultural experiences and heritage (50%). The relatively low importance placed on eco-friendly tourism options (25%) suggests that while students are aware of sustainability, economic factors take precedence. This trend reinforces the idea that cost-effectiveness and cultural immersion are the most significant factors driving travel choices, even when sustainability is a secondary concern.

## **Students' Role in Promoting Sustainable Tourism**

A significant number of students (60%) are willing to participate in sustainability initiatives led by colleges, and 75% believe that sustainable tourism should be promoted among students. Moreover, 80% support including sustainable tourism in educational curriculums. These findings indicate that students are generally open to being involved in sustainability efforts and believe that education is a key component in fostering sustainable tourism awareness.

## **Hypothesis Formation**

### **Hypothesis**

Younger individuals (18–25 age group) are more likely to be aware of sustainable tourism and engage in sustainable travel practices.

Based on the demographic data, 65% of respondents belong to the 18–25 age group, which suggests that younger people might have more awareness and engagement with modern global issues like sustainability, particularly through social media and education.

### **Hypothesis**

Students' awareness of sustainable tourism influences their willingness to adopt sustainable travel practices.

With 70% of students being aware of sustainable tourism, it's hypothesized that increased awareness leads to a higher adoption rate of sustainable travel behaviors, such as avoiding single-use plastics, supporting local businesses, and using public transport.

### **Hypothesis**

Affordability plays a more significant role than eco-friendliness in influencing students' travel choices.

Since 70% of respondents prioritized budget and affordability over eco-friendly options (25%), the hypothesis is that students are more likely to prioritize cost-effectiveness when making travel decisions rather than sustainability concerns.

## **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Key Insights from the Study**

- Social media plays a crucial role in spreading awareness about sustainable tourism.
- While awareness is high (70%), practical implementation is lower (45%) due to cost concerns and lack of options.
- Students prioritize budget over sustainability, suggesting the need for more affordable eco-friendly options.
- Education can play a key role. Students have highest awareness levels (85%) related to sustainable tourism.

### **Recommendations for Students**

- Adopt more eco-friendly travel habits such as using reusable bottles, staying in sustainable accommodations, and supporting local businesses.
- Spread awareness through student-led sustainability clubs and social media campaigns.
- Advocate for greener policies by engaging with colleges and travel organizations.



## Recommendations for Tourism Industry & Government

- Develop student discounts on sustainable travel options to encourage adoption.
- Increase public transport access to tourist destinations.
- Promote eco-tourism destinations more actively among young travelers.
- Integrate sustainable tourism education in schools and colleges.

## CONCLUSION

The study highlights that while students are aware of sustainable tourism, practical adoption is limited due to cost concerns and lack of infrastructure. By promoting affordability, education, and incentives, both the tourism industry and students can urge for a more sustainable future of tourism in India. The findings suggest that policy efforts and educational resourcefulness directed at increasing mindfulness and reducing the cost of sustainable travel options could help foster greater acceptance of sustainable tourism practices in India.

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