

Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism: A Case Study of Regenerative Practices in Sadhana Forest, Tamil Nadu, India

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ABSTRACT

The tourism industry's growing GDP contribution highlights the need to assess its environmental impacts. Sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, regenerative tourism, and volunteer tourism, aims to mitigate negative effects. In Tamil Nadu, India, Sadhana Forest engages tourists in reforestation projects, emphasizing water conservation and community development. Sustainable tourism's economic, social, and environmental impacts are evident in initiatives like Sadhana Forest, where since 2003, over 5000 participants have engaged in hands-on learning and reforestation efforts. Through the philosophy of the "Gift Economy," Sadhana Forest empowers volunteer tourists globally, fostering environmental education and stewardship. These practices not only enhance tourists' understanding of global environmental issues but also foster a sense of contribution to Sadhana Forest's revitalization.

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, in 2023, travel and tourism contributed to 9.1% of the global GDP. This was a 23.2% increase from the previous year (Council). This industry and its significant contribution to the global economy is present on every continent and in every country of the world. As this industry continues to grow through a variety of activities, locations, participation, and more, so will the environmental impact that it brings to the Earth. The Travel and Tourism Industry is supplemented by many industries including lodging, transportation, food and beverage, etc. This spreads its footprint throughout all avenues of the economy. This footprint is good and bad. Excessive waste, destruction of land, resource depletion, cultural erosion, and seasonal unemployment are just a few ways that this industry strains the places it occurs.

In today's environmental conditions, it is crucial for firms to focus on sustainable tourism. This is a tourism approach that focuses on a holistic approach to the restoration and regeneration of places and cultures, community empowerment, cultural preservation, and biodiversity conservation. This approach ensures the sustainability and conservation of areas where tourism is taking place. It does not just focus on minimizing the negative effects of tourism on places, people, and cultures. However, it strives to bring positive impacts to the area and its community through ecotourism and volunteering tourism. These types of tourism have become increasingly important to tourists in the past decade.

To demonstrate these concepts we have created a case study on the Sadhana Forest, an organization located in Tamil Nadu, India. It is an organization that offers experiences for ecotourists and volunteer tourists. The program's focus is on the conservation of the tropical dry evergreen forest through water conservation, tree planting, and community empowerment.

Since 2003, Sadhana Forest has been a strong example of environmental education as well as sustainable tourism. By offering hands-on learning experiences and workshops, as well as training sessions on reforestation and water conservation, Sadhana Forest has embraced their philosophy of the "Gift Economy" by hosting over 5000 participants over the past two decades. The organization hosts and empowers volunteer tourists from around the world who will help contribute to the revitalization of the Sadhana Forest. Through these sustainable practices, tourists will not only leave the forest with more knowledge surrounding advancing global environmental stewardship but also with a sense of accomplishment knowing that they were involved in the reforestation efforts of the Sadhana Forest.

The Sadhana Forest water conservation efforts are focused on building trenches, dams, and bunding to redistribute water throughout the forest. Along with building hand pumps and digging wells for community members to use in order to have more access to consistent water sources. Additionally, the Sadhana forest spends a lot of time and resources focusing on the replanting of the evergreen forest. They are working to restore the biodiversity of the forest soil to promote healthy and strong growth within the forest that has been depleted throughout the past few decades due to deforestation from industrial and farming infrastructure. Along with the strain from natural effects on the forest like wildfires and severe rain storms which cause erosion. Sadhana Forest's efforts to regenerate and conserve the tropical dry evergreen forest have been focused on having high survival rates of the trees they plant instead of the raw number of trees they plant. The survival rates of the trees are what is most important for the health of the environment and for creating positive, strong relationships with community members. Additionally, the Sadhana Forest is working to empower the local community through initiatives of sharing knowledge, surrounding villages, and children's land.

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