

FROM THE LANDS OF CAPTAIN FORSYTH

Ecotourism bangs in Madhya Pradesh: Status report

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Abstract

Quite remarkably Madhya Pradesh with 9.38% geographical area of the country accounts for 12.44% of the country's forests, and accounts for the largest Forest State. As the name indicates (Madhya in Hindi means 'middle') strategically, MP is located in the middle of the country and due to this often called as the 'Heart of the Country'. The State of MP covers its maximum area with a plateau streaked from the hill ranges, the Vindhyas and the Satpuras. Adding to its natural beauty a range of natural rivers include Narmada, Chambal, Betwa, Mahanadi, to name a few. One-third of the State is forest land and thus offers unique and exciting panorama of wildlife, flora and related things. Various National Parks and Sanctuaries are spread over the State.

Being a State of largest potential of tourism and its development, the State government is giving special emphasis on tourism. From the Tourism Policy of the State it can be interpreted that the Government gives prime importance to the infrastructure development for the development of tourism in the State. Apart from the large networks of roads, which connect the different tourism sites, various other facilities like transportation, hotels, etc. are being provided at different spots at the convenience of the tourists.

Nevertheless, it would not be wrong in saying that, still after all these things, the State has not been able to exploit the tourism potential in a big way. Reasons may be manifold, but the time has ripened enough to set the direction and work on achieve the best tourism State status, as various other States in the country went far ahead in this. Here is an attempt made to peep inside this glorious State of splendour and grandeur. This paper argues that with the profound changes taking place in the recent past through various policy initiatives and others, the State has become a favourable destination worth investing in tourism and related sector.

Prologue

India is one of the 12-mega diversity centres of the world and Madhya Pradesh (MP) with 9.38% geographical area of the country accounts for 12.44% of the country's magnificent forests. Within the State, 31% of the geographical area amounting to 95221 sq km is under forests. The Dry and Moist Deciduous Tropical Forests, which are abundant in the State, are extremely rich in terms of both floral and faunal biodiversity. Encompassing the rich biodiversity coupled with a range of colourful culture and heritage, the State celebrates intermittently one of the hotspots for Ecotourism as well. Arguably the State holds in its credit certain unique features in its biodiversity as well as cultural wealth, which make it a bounty of ecotourism potential territory.

MP accounts for 22% tiger population of the country. Barasingha (*Cervus duvancelli branderi*) is one species which is endemic to the State. Kanha holds the only remaining population of Barasingha in peninsular India. In 1970, these were down to only 66, but now after careful management, the population numbers about 400. These are found mainly on the meadows around Kanha village, but recently they seem to have been spreading to other areas of the Park.

As far as the floral diversity is concerned, Panchmarhi, well known hill station in the North East Provinces, from the British time onwards is virtually a junction of forest representative types prevailing in the State. It is natural junction of two most important timber species viz. Teak and Sal. The occurrence of relict population of Sal (*Shorea robusta*) in the predominant teak bearing area is a unique ecological phenomenon in the biosphere reserve. Certain endemic plants like *Psilotum* are the treasures in the State.

MP has the largest tribal population in India. The population of Scheduled Tribes alone accounts for about 20.27% of the total population of the State while the area covered is about 25,652 square miles, which is, approximately, 15% of the area of the State. It is said that the tribal people live in hills and forests, but the full implication of this statement is not generally understood. The coverage of forests varies from one area to the other, but it can be said that about half of the tribal area is covered with forests.

There are many important Non wood Forest Products (NWFP) found in the forests e.g. Tendu leaves or Bidi leaves (*Diospyros melanoxylon*), Sal Seed (*Shorea robusta*), Chebulic Myrobolan or Harra (*Terminalia chebula*), Gum, Chironji (*Buchanania lanzan*), flower and seeds of Mahua (*Madhuca indica*) and flowers, seeds, bark and roots of various plant species. The State is gifted with a wide variety of medicinal plants, which are sparsely distributed to the length, and breadth of the geographical area.

The history echoes

The vibrant and versatile MP has found a prominent place even in the colonial records. Captain Forsyth of the Bengal Lancers, who happened to visit the Satpura jungles of the State, found himself attracted to the unique magnetism of the area. In his own words, which later got published in a book titled, 'The highlands of the Central India', "...Altogether, the aspect of the plateau was much more that of a fine English park than of any scene I had before come across in India." Quite impressed was he after witnessing the rich natural and archaeological splendour of the State, he could not contain himself from writing a travelogue exclusively about the State. After he went back to the plains later as the deputy commissioner, Forsyth suggested that Pachmarhi be used as a sanatorium. And the Brit exodus began, a cantonment was created, churches and bungalows were built, a road network was laid, clubs came up and with them golf, horse racing, polo, tennis, snooker... , and a hill station was born.

The colonial flavour still remains in the churches and bungalows and Pachmarhi is as unspoilt as ever. There are bridle paths leading to tranquil forest glades, innumerable water falls, glens, brooks, natural pools (wonderful for an undisturbed swim), murmur of the flowing waters, groves of wild bamboo and *Jamun*, dense *Sal* forests and delicate bamboo thickets.

Interestingly the Nobel laureate Rudyard Kipling got his clue for the world famous fiction 'The Jungle Book' from an instance ostensibly taken place at Sant Bawadi village in Seoni district of MP. Beautiful geographical landscapes of the area and the behaviour of wild animals therein received a picturesque narration in R. A. Strandell's book 'Mammalia of India and Ceylon and Denizens', and this subsequently provided a strong background for Kipling's classical work. This boy, named Mogli, brought up by a herd of wolves was found in the Sant Bawadi village by Leut John Moor under the guidance of Col William Sleeman in 1831. Kipling got this flamboyant description of things both from the pamphlet titled, "An account of wolves nurturing children in their dens" by Sir. William Henry Sleeman and a book on "Camp life of Seoni" by R A Sterendale. The Jungle Book mentions a place where Sher Khan was killed. This place is in fact the Valley of Benganga River, near Kanhiwada village. At the present time, these places of historical significance are falling under the famous Pench National Park.

The heart of India

MP as its name implies, lies in the heart of India. It covers an area of 3,08,000 sq. km, making it the second largest State in the country after Rajasthan, bordering seven other States - Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan. MP consists largely of a plateau streaked with the hill ranges of the Vindhyas and the Satpuras with the Chhattisgarh plains to the east. The hills give rise to the main

river systems - the Narmada and the Tapti, running from east to west, and the Chambal, Sone, Betwa, and Mahanadi, west to east. Intersected by these meandering rivers and dotted with hills and lakes, the State has a varied natural setting of great beauty. MP, as the Modern State, came into being in 1956; its cultural heritage is ancient and chequered.

The large State of MP is the geographical heartland of India. Most of the State is a high plateau and in summer it can be very hot and dry. Virtually all phases of Indian history have left their mark on MP, historically known as Malwa. There are still many pre-Aryan Gond and Bhil tribal people in the State, but MP is overwhelmingly Indo-Aryan with majority of the people speaking in Hindi and following Hinduism. Innumerable monuments, exquisitely carved temples, *Stupas*, forts and palaces on hilltops, raise in the visitor's mind visions of empires and kingdoms, of great warriors and builders, poets and musicians, saints and philosophers; of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam. India's immortal poet-dramatist **Kalidasa** and the great musician of the Mughal court, **Tansen**, were from these parts. One third of the State is forested and offers a unique and exciting panorama of wildlife. In the national parks of Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Shivpuri and many others one has the rare opportunity to see the tiger; as such, MP is often referred to as the **Tiger State** of India. A wide variety of deer, antelope and bison are also the attractions of these parks.

The cultural heritage

Customs and beliefs in each area have added colour to the fairs and festivals. Dussehra in Bastar; Shivratri in Khajuraho, Bhojpur, Pachmarhi and Ujjain; Ramnavami in Chitrakoot and Orchha, Bhagoriya in Jhabua and the annual festival of dances at Khajuraho are events for the tourists to remember. The Malwa Festival in Indore, Mandu and Ujjain, and the Pachmarhi Festival bring alive the rich folk and tribal culture of the State in colourful celebrations. Thus, MP represents a true spirit of Northern India in its colourful life and a true place to visit and to develop as an ecotourism destination State as it has all the spices of splendour visit in it.

MP is not called the 'heart of India' just because it is located in the centre of the country, but the State has also been home to the cultural heritage of four main religions viz Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam. Innumerable monuments, exquisitely carved temples, *stupas*, forts and palaces are dotted all over the State. The natural beauty of MP is equally varied. Consisting largely of a plateau, the State has - spectacular mountain ranges, meandering rivers and an abundance of dense forests. In fact, one third of the State is forested, offering an incomparable and exhilarating panorama of wildlife in sylvan surroundings.

The prolific tourism profile

The World Tourism Organisation, through the studies conducted at various levels, global, regional and national level has stated that the tourism flow globally generates a sum of Rs. 2310000 crores annually through a tourist influx of around 700 million people. The same figure for India is Rs. 13644 crores annually through the annual turn over of 2.64 million tourists. However projections for the next 2-3 years indicate that, the income generated from this will increase to a mammoth Rs. 50000 crores nationally and the employment it will create will be more than 57 million including the direct and indirect jobs, and there will be further phenomenal increase in the figures as a result of the prolific tourism growth to 1.50 billion people by the year 2020 with expected receipt of US \$ 2000 billion.

Madhya Pradesh with an annual tourism influx of around 0.11 million generates benefits equivalent to Rs 637 crores annually. Besides, the State also has special reason to cheer up, as the projection for the next 2-3 years will bring in the State of 2.69 employment opportunities and a generated income which is quite equivalent to Rs. 2336.4 crores annually. Making an allowance for all the aforementioned facts, the State Government has already begun the work to make the most of these accruing benefits. Policy and

administrative changes which have either taken place or are in the process are the cases in point.

Diverse tourism zones: A right mix of everything

A multitude of tourism activities are reportedly taking place in the State. From the world famous heritage sites to grandeur monumental structures, the State is enriched with a range of fairs and festivals. Added to its existing tourism activities are an annual pilgrimage, which is eagerly devoured by devotees largely from within and outside the State. Taking advantage to the country's largest forested areas, the State promotes the wildlife tourism as well in a bigger way. In all, approximately 20 destinations spread across the State are offered under the 'Temptation' tourist packages offered exclusively by the State tourism development corporation. The destinations are as follows:

- **Gwalior**
A multitude of reigning dynasties, of the great Rajput clans of the Pratiharas, Kacchwahas and Tomars have left indelible etchings of their rule in this city of palaces, temples and monuments. Gwalior's tradition as a royal capital continued until the formation of present day India, with the Scindias having their dynastic seat here. The magnificent mementoes of a glorious past have been preserved with care, giving Gwalior an appeal unique and timeless.
- **Orchha**
Its grandeur has been captured in stone, frozen in time, a rich legacy to the ages.
- **Khajuraho**
Famed worldwide for the erotic sculptures on its temples. These breathtaking sculptures capture life in every form and mood.
- **Bhopal**
Bhopal, the capital of MP, combines scenic beauty, historicity and modern urban planning. Bhopal today presents a multi-faceted profile; the old city with its teeming market places, fine old mosques and palaces still bear the aristocratic imprint of its former rulers.
- **Sanchi**
The seat of Buddhist learning is famous for its stupas, monasteries, temples and pillars dating from the 3rd century BC to the 12th century AD.
- **Bhimbetka**
Over 600 rock shelters belonging to the Neolithic age were recently discovered in this place of interest. Here, in vivid panoramic detail, paintings in over 500 caves depict the life of the pre-historic cave-dwellers making the Bhimbetka group an archeological treasure, an invaluable chronicle in the history of man.
- **Indore**
The commercial centre of MP, this bustling city has rare monuments built by the Holkar dynasty.
- **Ujjain**
Ujjain is the site of the Kumbh mela, the largest religious congregation in the world. It is also known as the temple city. Modern Ujjain is situated on the banks of the river Shipra, regarded since times immemorial as sacred.
- **Omkareshwar**
This place is a sacred island at the confluence of two rivers, Narmada and Kaveri, shaped like the holiest of all Hindu symbols, Om. At the confluence of the rivers, the devout gather to kneel before the Jyotirlinga (one of the twelve throughout India) at the temple of Shri Omkar Mandhata.
- **Narmada**
This ancient city is also mentioned in the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. It is renowned for its bathing ghats and the famous Maheshwari sarees.
- **Mandu**
Each of Mandu's structure is an architectural gem; some are outstanding like the massive Jama Masjid and Hoshang Shah's tomb, which provided inspiration to the master builders of the Taj Mahal centuries later.
- **Amarkantak**
Amarkantak is a great pilgrim centre for the Hindus, and is the source of the rivers Narmada and Sone.

- **Bhojpur**
Founded by the legendary Parmar King of Dhar, Raja Bhoj and named after him, Bhojpur, is renowned for the remains of its magnificent Shiva temple and Cyclopean dam.
- **Chanderi**
A crafts centre famous for its sarees and boracades. Chanderi was an important military outpost, prized by rulers with power or ambition.
- **Chitrakoot**
Chitrakoot's spiritual legacy stretches back to legendary ages: it was in these deep forests that Rama and Sita spent eleven of their fourteen years of exile; here that the great sage Atri and Sati Anusuya meditated. A place with tranquil forests, rivers and streams.
- **Pachmarhi**
This city is MP's most verdant jewel, a place where nature has found exquisite expression in myriad enchanting ways. Pachmarhi is also an archeological treasure-trove. In cave shelters in the Mahadeo Hills is an astonishing richness of rock paintings.
- **Shivpuri**
This city is steeped in the royal legacy of its past, when it was the summer capital of the Scindia rulers of Gwalior.

Thus, MP provides an ideal ecotourism destination site for the visitors to the State as it has all types of tourism blended in it, archaeological (Khajuraho), wildlife (NPs), adventure, etc. In addition to it, MP is culturally endowed with spectacular fairs and festivals on its land. Both the State government through its tourism department and various organisations as well as individuals of different walk of life are promoting the annual events of cultural importance. Indeed, this is been symbolises the rich cultural heritage of the State and the tradition is progressing.

The treasure of festivals

Festivals are the time that bring colour and add pleasure to one's life. The State of MP can be seen enjoying in the colours of the festivities that take place throughout the year in various parts. They are in the form of the traditional festivals as well as fairs that are organised by various bodies. Some of the festive attractions of the State are as follows :

- Festival of Dances, **Khajuraho** - *Indian Classical Dance Performances*
- Akhil Bhartiya Kalidas Samaroh, **Ujjain** - *Literary Presentations along with Dramas and Indian classical programmes.*
- Tansen Sangeet Samaroh, **Gwalior** - *Indian Classical Vocal and Musical performances*
- Dhrupad Samaroh, **Bhopal** - *Vocal performances of Dhrupad Style of Indian Classical Music*
- Chakradhar Samaroh, **Raigarh** - *Indian Classical Dance and Music*
- Ameer Khan Festival, **Indore** - *Indian Classical performances*
- Rashtriya Hindi Natya Samaroh, **Bhopal** - *Hindi's Best Dramas' Performances*
- Pachmarhi Utsava, **Pachmarhi** - *Indian Folk Arts' Performances*
- Mandu Utsava, **Mandu** - *Indian Classical Music Performances*
- Orchha Utsava, **Orchha** - *Indian Music Performances*
- Keshav Jayanti Samaroh, **Orchha** - *Literary Presentation*
- Alauddin Khan Vyakhyanmala, **Bhopal** - *Lectures Based on Indian Classical Music*
- Bhavbhuti Samaroh, **Gwalior** - *Sanskrit's Literary Programmes*
- Malwa Utsava, **Ujjain and Indore** - *Folk Arts and Indian Classical Music*
- Makhanlal Chaturvedi Samaroh, **Jabalpur** - *Literary Programmes*
- Lokrang Samaroh, **Bhopal** - *Indian Folk Arts' Presentation and Performance*
- Pt. Kumar Gandharva Samaroh, **Dewas** - *Indian Classical Music Performances*
- Shankari Samaroh, Different Parts of MP - *Sanskrit Literary Programmes*
- Kabir Samaroh, Different Parts of MP - *Folk arts, Music, Dances and Literary Programme*
- Rashtriya Alankaran Samaroh, **Bhopal** - *Distribution of Cultural Awards Instituted by the Government of MP*
- Krishna Rao Shankar Pandit Samaroh, **Gwalior** - *Indian Classical Music Performances*
- MP Sangeet Samaroh, Different Centres of MP
- Nimar Utsava, **Maheshwar** - *Indian Folk and Classical performances*

- Bharat Bhawan, **Bhopal** - Various Folk, Arts Exhibition and Performances throughout the year
- Film Festival, **Bhopal** - Films from India and Abroad
- Lata Mangeshkar Samaroh and Award Ceremony, **Indore** - National Level Light Musical Performances
- Bhagoria Haat, **Jhabua**: This colourful festival of the Bhils and Bhilalas, particularly in the district of West Nimar and Jhabua, is actually in the nature of a mass svayamvara, a marriage market, usually held on the various market days falling before the Holi festival in March
- **Khajuraho** Festival of Dances: This festival draws the best classical dancers in the country who perform against the spectacular backdrop of the floodlit temples, every year in February / March. The finest exponents of different classical Indian styles are represented - Kathak, Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Manipuri, and many more.
- **Tansen** Music Festival: More than a monument, the Tansen Tomb is a part of Gwalior's living cultural heritage. It is the venue of the annual Indian classical festival held in November-December. Renowned classical singers of the land regale audiences through five mesmerising night-long sessions of the much-loved classical ragas.

The fairy fairs

The State has been gifted with a tradition of fairs, which mark the prospects and progress achieved. Notwithstanding the religious nature of these fairs, people have attended it traditionally from different walk of life. Few of these fairs, which perhaps date back to the 18th century, still celebrated with much fanfare are, are listed below with the corresponding locations.

Fair	Region
Jageshwari Devi	Chanderi (Guna)
Garibnath Babu	Avantipur, Barodia (Shajapur)
Kana Babu	Sadalpur (Hoshangabad)
Dhamanu Urs	Hastan Shah Mosque (Sagar)
Nagajee	Porsa (Morena)
Hira Bhumiya	Gwalior
Ramleela	Gwalior
Pir Budhan	Shivpuri, Sanwra
Tejajee Fair	Bhamawad, Guna
Mahamritunija	Aahate, Rewa
Chamti Devi	Ghaghra Gao, Sidhi
Baha Sahabuddin	Neemuch, Mandsour
Kalujee Maharaj	West Nimar
Sinngajee	West Nimar
Mandhatta	East Nimar
Rajjim Fair	Rajjim, Raipur

Immense ecotourism potential

The fascinating biodiversity

India is one of the 12-mega diversity centres of the world. Quite remarkably MP with 9.38% geographical area of the country accounts for 12.44% of the country's forests. Within the State 31% of the geographical area amounting to 9.5 million hectares is under forests. The Dry and Moist Deciduous Tropical Forests, which are abundant in the State, are extremely rich in terms of both floral and faunal biodiversity. These rich biodiversity coupled with a range of colourful culture and heritage, the State celebrates intermittently one of the hotspots for Ecotourism as well. Arguably the State holds in its credit certain unique features in its biodiversity as well as cultural wealth, which make it a bounty of ecotourism potential territory.

MP has got approximately 1026 Tigers, which account for 22% tiger population of the country. Barasingha (*Cervus duvancelli branderi*) is one species, which is endemic to the State. Kanha holds the only remaining population of Barasingha in peninsular India. In 1970 these were down to only 66, but now after careful management, the population numbers about 400. These are found mainly on the meadows around Kanha village, but recently they seem to have been spreading to other areas of the Park.

As far as the floral diversity is concerned, Pachmarhi, well known hill station in the North East Provinces, from the British time onwards is virtually a junction of forest representative types prevailing in the State. It is natural junction of two most important timber species viz. Teak and Sal. The occurrence of relict population of Sal (*Shorea robusta*) in the predominant teak bearing area is a unique ecological phenomenon in the biosphere reserve. Certain endemic plants like *Psilotum* are found in the State.

MP thus has enormous potential for Ecotourism, as it is rich in its natural diversity, cultural heritages and civilization and traditions. But so far the ecotourism potential of the State has not been explored to its point as it carries in it.

The nowhere else wildlife

National Parks	Wildlife Sanctuaries		
1. Bandhavgarh	1. Bori	10. Chambal	19. Son Ghariyal
2. Fossil (Dindori)	2. Bagdara	11. Nauradehi	20. Sardapur
3. Kanha	3. Phen	12. Pachmari	21. Sailana
4. Madhav	4. Ghatigaon	13. Panpatha	22. Ralamandal
5. Panna	5. Gandhisagar	14. Kuno	23. Orchha
6. Pench	6. Karera	15. Pench	24. Gangau
7. Sanjay	7. Ken Ghariyal	16. Ratapani	25. Durgawati
8. Satpura	8. Kheoni	17. Sanjay Dubri	
9. Vanvihar	9. Narsingharh	18. Singhori	

One-third of MP is forested. The State offers a unique and exciting panorama of wildlife in sylvan surroundings. Spectacular mountain ranges, meandering rivers and miles and miles of dense forests are on offer for those who visit the State.

The immediate jungle plan for the tiger country and other such attractions are part of the State's wildlife promotion drive include developing new areas in the State. The State is also serious about the future development of Kanha and Bandhavgarh National Parks, which can arguably be recognised MP's pride.

- **Bandhavgarh National Park:** One can be almost certain of seeing a tiger in this region. The density of the Tiger population at Bandhavgarh is the highest known in India. This is also White Tiger country.
- **Kanha National Park:** Kanha's Sal and Bamboo forests, rolling grasslands and meandering streams stretch over 940 sq km in dramatic natural splendour which form the core of the Kanha Tiger Reserve created in 1974 under Project Tiger. The park is the only habitat of the rare hard ground Barasingha (*Cervus duvancelli branderi*).

More to offer - potential ecotourism sites

The various destination areas, which carry the ecotourism potential, have been listed below which have the potential to be developed as the ecotourism destination points. The following are listed some of the Sites in MP which have an enormous potential for the development of the Ecotourism sites.

DESTINATION	TOURISM INTEREST
<i>Ratapani WLS (Obedullahgunj)</i>	<i>Nature, Historical</i>
<i>Panna NP and adjoining Forests (Panna)</i>	<i>Nature, Historical, Religious, Adventure</i>
<i>Pench WLS and Sakta Rukhad Forests (Seoni)</i>	<i>Nature and wildlife</i>
<i>Noradehi WLS (Sagar)</i>	<i>Nature and wildlife</i>
<i>Rani Durgawati WLS (Damoh)</i>	<i>Nature and wildlife, Historical</i>
<i>Satpura NP and Bori WLS (Hoshangabad)</i>	<i>Nature and wildlife, Religious, Adventure</i>
<i>Sanjay NP (Sidhi)</i>	<i>Nature and wildlife</i>
<i>Betul Forests (Betul)</i>	<i>Nature</i>
<i>Buffer zone Forests of Kanha Tiger Reserve (Mandla)</i>	<i>Nature</i>
<i>Ralamandal WLS (Indore)</i>	<i>Nature and wildlife</i>
<i>Kheoni WLS (Dewas)</i>	<i>Nature and wildlife</i>

In addition to the above list, MP provides an excellent blend of nature, adventure and wildlife tourism. The major attractions of these blend can be had from the variety of identified places of interest.

The unique features

MP, with an infinite number of heritage sites, coupled with extensive natural flora and fauna, MP easily works out be an adventure tourism and art and culture tourism destination. With wildlife being an essential element of the State, and around one-third of the State forested, the State has a lot to offer in wildlife tourism, which can be termed as the State's USP.

- MP has got approximately 1026 tigers, which account for 19% tiger population of the world.
- Barasingha (*Cervus duvancelli branderi*) is one species that is endemic to the State.
- Occurrence of relict population of Sal (*Shorea robusta*) in the predominant teak bearing area of Pachmarhi is a unique ecological phenomenon.
- *Many endemic species, like Psilotum nudum*, a very rare and primitive plant commonly known as wisk fern are found only in Pachmarhi area.

Apart from announcing its heritage policy, and hosting various road shows across the country, the government of MP has put in place the State's eco and adventure tourism policy, declaring itself as a 'wildlife and adventure Tourism State'.

The State aims to position itself as a '**wildlife**' destination, especially as the '**Tiger State**' both in the national and international arena.

Disclosed an official from the State tourism department: "Today's tourists are not content with cultural or religious tourism alone - what one looks for is some thrill, fun, adventure and something other than the routine. So, in keeping with this change of attitude in tourists, the State government has decided to actively promote eco-tourism and adventure tourism. Further, to popularize and develop these forms of tourism, the government is for the first time seeking participation of private investors. Adventure tourism provides tourists a special thrill whilst participating in sporting activities like river rafting, trekking etc. MP with its rich natural flora and fauna, unexploited so far, has immense potential for such sports."

The ambient Infrastructure

Infrastructure is an absolute necessity for any tourism activity, no matter how minimal it is. MP State also realised this aspect quite early and has taken initiatives already in this direction by involving different stakeholders. Destination specific activities and infrastructure has been promoted over the period of time. An excerpt of the destinations and activities are given below with the specific tourism category.

The versatile destinations and vibrant activities

The versatility	Places of Importance	Facilities
Cultural Tourism	<i>Gwalior, Orchha, Khajuraho, Sanchi, Mandu.</i>	<i>Heritage Hotels, Museums, Craft Villages.</i>
Wildlife and Adventure Tourism	<i>Pachmarhi, Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Panna, Satpura, Pench Valley National Parks, Tigra Lake (Gwalior), Upper Lake (Bhopal), Gandhi Sagar (Mandsaur).</i>	<i>Log Huts, Camping Grounds, Trekking, Water-Sports, Aero-Sports, Angling, Cruises, Caravans, Tents etc.</i>
Leisure and Business Tourism	<i>Pachmarhi, Khajuraho, Bhopal, Gwalior, Indore, Mainpat, Tamia, Jabalpur etc.</i>	<i>Convention Centres, Exhibition Grounds, Shopping, Evening Entertainment, Golf Courses, Country Clubs, Weekend Getaways etc.</i>
Pilgrim Tourism	<i>Ujjain, Maheshwar, Omkareshwar, Chitrakoot, Amarkantak, Rajim, Sanchi, Bhopal, Orchha etc.</i>	<i>Budget Accommodation, Day Shelters, Cafeterias etc.</i>

Recently, as part of the Tourism Policy, the Government has declared special package of incentives for the tourism industry. These incentives will be available for private entrepreneurs for infrastructure development activities.

Hotels, Motels and Restaurants: The MP government has amplified its tourism drive by attracting bids for development from private sector in the area of hospitality investment. Inviting the hospitality industry to invest in the State is one of the most important plans of action that MP tourism has identified. The State government has also shorted-listed locations that could attract hospitality investment.

The investment covers of the hospitality segment would be in heritage hotels, health farms, recreation centres, ropeways, golf courses, museums, amusement parks, craft villages, convention centres, and all other bonafide tourism-related activities recognised by the government.

Subsequently, hospitality giants of the country have also evinced interest in investing into the hotel sector of the State. Revealed Jamshed S Daboo, chairman, CII tourism sub-committee, western region, and chief operating officer-leisure hotels, Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL): "The State has got tremendous potential in the area of tourism, so IHCL would definitely look at investing in the region in the near future. The avenues, which the State has to offer for hospitality investment, are worth exploring."

Highlighting the potentials and plans with respect to **tourism and infrastructure development**, the State has identified the hospitality industry as one of its prime movers in strengthening the tourism position of the region.

Instead of depending on its limited resources, the State government has decided to open up this sector for private participation for optimum utilisation of these natural resources. While on one hand, with these efforts, the government hopes to attract tourists in larger

numbers, on the other hand, it is expected that it would help in generating greater demand for local products, and creating new employment avenues for local communities.

In order to attract private participation, the State government has finalised a set of simplified guidelines that are hassle free and would make it easy for entrepreneurs to conform with.

The ecotourism breakthroughs

The Strengths

MP, because of its central location in India, has remained a crucible of historical currents from North, South, East and West. Rich archaeological wealth has been unearthed in various parts of the State throwing light on its history. Its central location makes MP a strategic hub with so many logistical advantages.

- MP is highly benefited from its strategic location as the central part of the country. It is very well connected both by the road, rail and air to any important destinations in the country.
- MP is one among the largest producer of minerals, agricultural and forest produces and is ideal for modern biotech industries.
- MP is an ideal tourist destination from the viewpoint of hospitality industry - with two world heritage sites of Khajuraho and Sanchi and several other major monuments in addition to some major tiger reserves and spots for adventure and eco tourism. It caters a tourism package blended with various cultures, traditions, festivals, fairs and wildlife and archeological attractions
- MP has the advantage of promoting a Composite Tourism Package, as the State is gifted with sites worth Wildlife tourism, Cultural tourism, Archaeological tourism, Natural Tourism, Indigenous tourism, so on and so forth.
- MP dotted with 19 Industrial Growth Centres is home to a large number of companies. Well-developed industries base is available at attractive prices and a package of incentives.
- The infrastructure advantage in MP include the strongest Optical Fibre backbone at every district headquarters, a network of roads, railways and regular air services connecting Bhopal, Indore and Gwalior with rest of the country.
- MP is building a road network that can be compared to the best in the country. This network of over 10,000 kms of road taking care of 90 percent of traffic in the State is being completed on war footing in two years time.
- MP has some of the finest educational institutions in disciplines like IT, management electronics, hospitality, law, forest management etc. New institutions in hi-tech area like biotech and microbiology are on the anvil in the State.
- MP is profited by an efficient and responsive administration.
- Striving for a growth at par with any developed States, MP offers a variety of incentives and concessions for the investors.
- On top of it all the State over the period of time developed a congenial atmosphere for the growth and development of tourism. A special policy framework that supports the tourism activity with administrative as well as legal mechanism is put in place. A separate Ecotourism policy, which will focus on the ecotourism development of the State, is on the offing.

The grey areas

- The poor network of road communication, both between and outside different tourism locations.
- Lack of adequate and appropriate infrastructural facilities, pulls the State back from utilising its tourism potential in its maximum.

- A concerted effort from different departments and agencies that are the stakeholders in tourism promotion is lacking.
- Involvement of the community should also be ensured, as this is one important aspect one cannot do away with.
- Comparing to other States in the country, which had achieved grand success in Tourism, MP is disadvantaged with a comprehensive promotion campaign targeting both the domestic as well as foreign tourists.
- Lack of funds to the government for the development of sustainable tourism in the State.
- Lack of efficient manpower and technical staff in the field of tourism development.
- Lack of special incentives and packages for the tour and travelling in MP.

Future Strategy

The enabling environment

From being the first-ever State in the country to announce its exclusive heritage policy, to that of conducting the first road show in the Capital and other metropolises in India, MP tourism has arrived with a bang. Marketing its product as 'Mystic MP' the State has firmly declared its presence on the tourism map of India. Consequently, the MP State Tourism Development Corporation (MPSTDC), the official body and tourism facilitator of the State, in association with the local CII representation, with the support of the MP State government and other State tourism and hospitality bodies and associations have formulated concrete plans to position the State as a world class tourism destination in India.

Progressive policies and administrative framework

Keeping in sync with the global trend on environmental consciousness, the North-Eastern States of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura are coming together to form a joint ecotourism policy shortly. On a similar eco-focus, like other States of Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Delhi and Tamil Nadu, **MP** is extensively working towards incorporating ecotourism as a vital approach for tourism and hospitality industries in the respective existing tourism policies.

Subsequently, the State Government in its new Ecotourism Policy has provided the much needed focus on the development of Ecotourism in the State. The State Government revealed, "In order for the State to grow as a leading domestic and international tourist destination, it needs to work in tandem to promote its greatest asset - eco-tourism."

Ecotourism sets a goal in the New Forest Policy

Setting things upright, the State of MP had recently come out with a new policy on forests called the MP Forest Policy- 2004. Ecotourism gets a very special mention in this policy which apparently reflects the acknowledgement of the State on its awesome potential. Reiterating the participatory approach in the forest management, the new policy finds ecotourism as a tool for better management of the forest resources with a constructive participation from the forest dependent communities. Highlighting the inherent advantages of the ecotourism explicitly, the new forest policy places the need for preparing area specific Ecotourism Management Plans at each region of the State. Evolving a permanent mechanism with appropriate participation from the stakeholders of different kind is the basic idea underlying this policy initiative. Sustaining the tourism interests of the visitors the policy proposes a composite package of experiences in the form of interpretation centers, better infrastructure so and so forth.

The liberal Tourism Policy

In a bid to expedite the development of tourism in MP, the State government has a proactive tourism policy in place since 1995. The new tourism policy envisages creation of an environment conducive to attracting increased private investment in the tourism sector, and a more meaningful role for the government. The policy has also conceptualised the strategy for development, wherein the focus shall be on the following areas:

- Improvement and creation of adequate basic infrastructure.
- Upgradation and augmentation of accommodation, catering and recreational facilities.
- The stepping up of transport facilities.
- Marketing of destinations to ensure optimal use of infrastructure.
- Evolving suitable policies for increasing foreign exchange earnings.
- Promotion of traditional arts and crafts of the State.

Divergent Eco and adventure tourism policy

Ecotourism, which primarily connects conservation with the economic development, has got special recognition in MP. Considering the unique and abundant forest resources, the State found that the scope for Ecotourism is tremendous at par or even better than various other States in the country. This acknowledgement received administrative as well as legal support through the adoption of a new policy framework, which is called, the Eco/Adventure Tourism Policy 2001-02. Welcoming the large-scale private participation the policy enumerates the proactive role of government and its various departments in exploiting the ecotourism potential of the State. Adventure tourism, which is perhaps an ingredient in the ecotourism, got special emphasis in the policy, as the State have incredible prospects in that. Despite the fact that, it opened up a wide spectrum of opportunities and options for the private entrepreneurs, the policy evidently restricts the magnitude of those activities just to avoid all those adverse impacts.

Newer horizons in new ecotourism policy

The MP Forest Department, being the custodian of the largest forest resources in the country is also coming out with an exclusive comprehensive policy on Ecotourism. The new ecotourism / nature tourism policy of the government focuses on reorienting the forest staff as well as the forest community in order to enable them in popularizing the concept of nature based tourism. The policy indeed identifies the various options and activities, which are required for the implementation of ecotourism. While listing out all the possible activities, the policy demands for equally worth infrastructural facilities as well, which suits to the requirements of the tourists of different categories? Taking a cue from the examples of various State Forest Departments, which had already become successful in the ecotourism initiative, the government through this policy wishes to bring in a range of benefits in the form of improved conservation, securing the economic development of the forest communities and accelerating the progress among them.

Strategy for Ecotourism Development

In order to promote ecotourism as a tool for sustainable development, the focus shall be on the following areas:

- Improvement and creation of adequate basic infrastructure - land, roads, water, electricity etc.
- Upgradation and augmentation of accommodation, catering and recreational facilities.
- Augmentation of transport facilities.
- Marketing of destinations to ensure optimal use of infrastructure

- Evolving suitable policies for increasing foreign exchange earnings.
- Promotion of the arts and crafts of MP.

Role of the State Government

The State government will confine its efforts to infrastructural development like ensuring uninterrupted electricity, water supply and provision of basic medical facilities. It will also be responsible for dissemination of information, organisation of festivals and interdepartmental co-ordination to create conditions for attracting private sector investment for the tourism sector. For this, it will provide fiscal incentives, assist in providing suitable sites and remove bottlenecks, especially those connected with infrastructural development.

Incentives

A special package of incentives for the tourism industry has been prepared. These incentives will also be available for private entrepreneurs for any of the following activities:

- Hotels, Motels and Restaurants.
- Heritage Hotels, Health Farms, Recreation Centres, Ropeways, Golf Courses, Museums, Amusement Parks, Craft Villages, Convention Centres, and all other bonafide tourism related activities recognised by the government.
- A/c Luxury Coaches, A/c Mini Buses, and imported Limousines purchased by registered tour operators for tourist transport.
- Activities connected with adventure tourism, such as hang gliding, para- sailing, river rafting, boating, trekking, rock climbing etc.

Special incentives are as follows -

Land

1. Government land will be offered with the approval of the Empowered Committee as equity participation on behalf of the Government at current market value for setting up Joint Ventures.
2. The companies thus formed who are given any kind of Government land will be expected to complete the project within a period of three years from the date of transfer of land, failing which the land will revert to the Government. The company will not be allowed to transfer the land to anybody else, or use it for any purpose other than that for which it is allotted.
3. For construction of approved category hotels, etc. in the urban areas, exemption under Section 20 of the Urban Land Ceiling Act will be made available on a case-to-case basis as decided by the Empowered Committee.

Luxury Tax

New projects shall be exempt from Luxury Tax for ten years from the date of commencement of commercial operations.

Sales Tax

New projects shall be exempt from Sales Tax for ten years from the date of commencement of commercial operations.

Entertainment Tax

Entertainment Centres will be exempt from Entertainment Tax for ten years from the date of commencement of commercial operations.

Epilogue

Without having an enabling environment, the efforts for achieving development will never find the fruits. It requires a class of visionaries and energetic lot both in the governance and administration. MP, though a little rearward industrially, has found enough reasons for the apparent dull growth. Understanding the available resources, its worth and utilising it sensibly and successfully requires a quantum of confidence. And confidence emanates from an environment, which is promising and vibrant. In MP the environment has ripened enough to have a wide range of investments, especially in the sector of tourism. Ecotourism, which can be a solution for a wide variety of problems receive a boost from the State in the form of policy initiatives. These policies are demanding to create a range of facilities in the form of legal and administrative support as well as infrastructure development, which in turn can provide an atmosphere where the ecotourism can flourish. Diversity within the diversity makes MP different from others States in the country. The State is in its surge ahead for utilising these unique resources by promoting ecotourism in the big way and long way.