

THE LAND OF BIG CATS - A CASE STUDY

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We were fortunate enough to visit Kanha National Park, in December which is its peak season. The climate was moderate in days and cold breeze in nights provoked us to have hot teas in open, sitting around the source of fire. So we decided to visit a nearby Dhaba, named Burman Dhaba. That was near the Khatiya Gate of Kanha, we planned to sit near the source of fire and we ordered tea. While having the conversation with the owner of the Dhaba, we discovered various stories of the park which included the alarming calls made by other animals when tiger is around, how they trace tigers, etc. After the long conversation he explained that this year tourist has not arrived. Since last year, the number of tourist arrival has decreased considerably, but he was not aware about the reason. His livelihood, his family everything is dependent on the tourist arrival. This year his main concern was that how he will be able sustain during the off-seasons. As the park is closed for nearly 4 months during the rainy season.



Kanha National Park Overview

In India, we have lots of Tiger Reserves one of them being Kanha National Park which is presently located in Madhya Pradesh. In the 1930s, the area was divided into two sanctuaries, Banjar and Hallon, of 300 and 250 km². The park was created on 1 June 1955. But now it stretches over an area of 940 km² in the two districts of Balaghat and Mandla. Together with the neighboring 110 km² (Phen Sanctuary) and surrounding buffer zone of 1,067 km², forms the Kanha Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, retrieved on 14 April 2010).



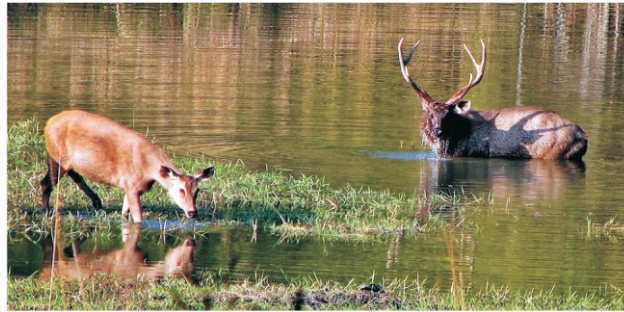
As we know that the park is famous for Tigers but it is also rich in Indian wild Dog, leopards, the sloth bear and Barasingha. The famous novel of Rudyard Kipling named "Jungle Book" has also been inspired from its rich flora and fauna (wiki).

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There are two main entry points at Kanha national park, one being Khatiya gate and other is Mukki gate. And there are nearly 15 hotels, 7 B&B and Inns and 26 specialty resort (advisor) in each and every resort nearly 80 % percent of employees are from local community. So the livelihood of local community is mainly dependent on tourism activity.

Major Wildlife Attractions Of Kanha

Kanha is also supportive to huge wildlife, which is a prime attraction for the tourist, some are as follow tiger, leopard, sambhar, hare, barking deer, mongoose, chousingha, bison, porcupine, monkey, gaur, back buck, sloth bear, jackal fox, chital, jungle cat, black deer, pea fowl, hyena, mouse deer, barasingha, python.



The Kanha's climatic conditions, the large water bodies and dense forest are able to attract many migratory birds. In return this is also attracting bird watchers to have a close view of the birds like fly catchers, storks, orioles, teals, finches, pintails, owls, bee-eaters, fowl, papihas, pond herons, drongos, peacock, rollers, spotted parakeets, green pigeons, egrets, spur fowl, wood peckers, quails, warblers, partridges, cuckoos, hoopoes, peafowl, rock pigeons, kingfisher, ring doves.

The species that could replace the image of Kanha National Park or which can be the next representator to attract tourist to the destination then that could be the Swamp Deer, commonly known as the Barasingha. The Barasingha located in Kanha is unique in itself, as it is hard ground, which is rarest of rarer breed. Around twenty years ago, this breed was at its extinction but the deliberate actions were taken which resulted in safeguard of the entire species. (national.com)

Flora

Kanha National Park is rich in various species of plants. Which are supported by its favorable climatic conditions; as the forest is tropical moist dry deciduous forest. It is able to support very rare species like bamboo trees are able to locate on the slopes and the Indian Ghost tree is also found in this forest.

The park is majorly open grassland, which were initially homes for the villagers. But they were asked to leave the park premises so that animals can move freely in the park. The grasslands available are able to support many species one of them being the Barasingha.

Transport & facilities

Jabalpur is the common point from where Kanha National park could be approached, which is also connected via air but the access is limited. Other airports which could also be approached



are Raipur and the other being Nagpur which are well connected to the other parts of the country. While approaching Kanha, Mandla is the point from where cab facility is available.

There are three entrance gates for the Park. When proceeding towards Kanha, the best place which could be approached is Khatia, which is inside the buffer zone. The second gate is at Mukki and the third most recently opened, gate is at Serai.

Supreme Court Verdict

As per the verdict given by Supreme Court, any tourist intervention inside the defined core areas is strictly prohibited, so as to preserve Tigers. The court has imposed fine on six states: Andhra Pradesh, Tamil nadu, Arunachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Maharashtra. As they have failed to define the core, buffer areas. All these restrictions were imposed because of drastic decrease in the number of tigers, because of illegal poaching. (times)

Around 30 may, 2012, the Supreme Court gave a relaxation by announcing that certain amendments will be made in the tourism context. Initially court has announced that no tourist is allowed to enter inside the park but a temporary relaxation was announced stating that tourist can explore 20% area of the core zone or the high density zone of Tigers.

Though the amendments brought relief to the tiger reserve areas, but the conditions were worse for the service providers at the destination. As there was a steep fall in the number of bookings made by the tiger lovers.

They are restricting tourist access to their core areas, but very marginally. According to a senior official at Kanha National Park the relaxation provided by the Supreme Court is enough for the destination to draw healthy business.

Restriction

After the changes that were being made by Supreme Court, hoteliers and the locals faced most of the challenges. With the closing down of many resorts, locals became unemployed. Hoteliers employed 80% of people from local community and job comprised from manager to housekeeping. Locals derived employment from others tourism related sectors like by becoming guide and drivers to the tourist who visit in an around national park.

But Supreme Court jurisdiction reduced the number of vehicles entry into the park. Which in turn, decreased the number of tourist hence resulted in lost to hoteliers and locals. Occupancy in hotels, reduced drastically which initially had occupancy of 60-70% round the year, now have only 10 to 20 percent and some have nil occupancy.

Due to the dependence on tourism for economic benefits, every family has owned a gypsy which they either booked in M.P tourism or with the hoteliers. The only source of income in Kanha is derived from tourism. But due to the changes in regulations of Supreme Court, which defined the carrying capacity and hence restricted the numbers of vehicles entry into the park.

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The other problem arose when the restriction was imposed on the entry in core area, where maximum numbers of tigers are traced. This restriction also became one of the major factors in downfall of number of tourist. As Kanha is always projected as the land of tigers, so tourist relate Kanha national park to tigers only. Where it is believed that chances of watching tigers is maximum. But due to the restriction in core areas the visibility of tiger is negligible because they are hardly found in buffer area. The tiger show which was the prime attraction of the Kanha, was also stopped, which again became one of the reason for non locating the tigers.

Brand image of Kanha national park is tiger, which are no longer visible, hence hampering the niche market. Due to the decrease in the number of tigers from 127 to 60 in the last five years has resulted in the increased concern for their (tiger) safety and security. So government underwent some changes in the rules and regulation for the protected areas.

Local community constitutes of tribal's which were initially inhabitant into the park. But once the Kanha became the tiger reserve these tribes were relocated outside the park. Relocation affected the culture and heritage of tribe (like, Beiga tribe).

Changes made

Restrictions imposed by the government are again revised taking into the consideration of locals. As for locals, the only source of income is tourism; hence certain amendments were being made. Firstly, the entry into the core zone is allowed up to 20% and rest is closed for tourist. Secondly, the number of vehicles in park is reduced from 150 to 50 per day per gate. Thirdly, the bookings for entry into the park are now done online, which will reduce the pressure on the gate and will also reduce long queue on the gate. Last but not the least, on Wednesday the entry into park is not allowed. It is believed that one day rest is required by the forest staff and it will also help animals to relax. But locals believed that reduction in numbers of vehicles has adversely hammered their business and closing the park for one day will add on to losses.



NOTES

1. No construction is allowed in the core areas
2. Night safari in core area is banned by SC.
3. Entry into core area is allowed only after sunrise and before sunset
4. Prior permission is required to enter into core area.

QUESTIONS

1. What alternatives should be adopted by hoteliers to engage tourist into the destination for the rest of the days?

2. What further changes can be adopted by the SC for improving the condition of the locals keeping in mind the sustainability of the destination?
3. Eco tourism development board is trying to maintain a balance between forest department and local's community. What could be their role /suggestions to make both wild life and local community sustain in market?
4. As the number of tourists have considerably decreased, few hotels have already closed and some are planning to shutdown their venture, which will lead to unemployment in huge number .what could be the alternatives for locals to survive?

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