

## Coastal ecotourism in India A case study of Veraval-a coastal town in Gujarat

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### Keywords

Ecotourism, Sustainability, Conservation of Nature, Environment-friendly Activities

### Abstract

*India is blessed with a 7516 km long coastline. Development of Tourism along the coastline of India can provide a major boost to the Indian economy at large and to the local communities in particular. However, the sustainability of tourism activity is under the scanner of environmentalists as there are various physical, economic and cultural impacts of tourism that are negative in nature.*

*The Present Study makes an attempt to find the feasibility of implementing Coastal Eco-tourism norms to the development of ecotourism in the coastal regions of India. The prospects of ecotourism development and the problems in implementing the same are considered in this study.*

*The coastal town of Veraval was selected for the study as this town is unique in its location. It has almost virgin beaches, is close to the Gir Reserved Forest (42 Kms) and has a religious significance for the Hindu community because of the ancient Somnath temple.*

*Veraval is a Fishing Town. Besides it has some interesting flora and fauna which also is likely to make the town a favourite tourist destination for ecotourism.*

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### Introduction

*Ecotourism* is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." (TIES, 1990). So ecotourism is nature based tourism and it is an effective instrument for enhancing method of conservation of environment, many income generating activity (through earning revenue, foreign exchange, hotel business, commodity selling, hotel boy service, guide, making hand-crafts etc.) of the local population, economic benefits of the host communities of the state or country and rejuvenation of the culture and tradition there by facilitating overall development. It also gives us that ecotourism is a positive source of fascination for man and one of the causes of his psychological peace, mental solace and enjoyment and it rejuvenates man's spirit to explore nature again and again, revives his vitality and gives fillip to his energy after been churned out by the routine work of his monotonous life.

### Study Area

Veraval is located at 20.9° N Latitude and 70.37° E Longitude. It has an average elevation of 0 metres (0 feet). (*Image 1 and 2*)

Veraval was founded in 13th or 14th century by Rao VeravaljiVadher(Rathore)a Rajput. Veraval was once a fortified port town of the royal family of Junagadh. It was a part of the Kingdom of Junagadh till 1953 when Junagadh was merged with India. Before the rise of Surat, Veraval was the major seaport for pilgrims to Mecca... Its importance now is as a fishing port, one of the largest in India. Sea going dhows and fishing boats are still being built by the sea without the use of any instruments other than a tape-measure.

As of the 2001 India census, Veraval had a population of 141,250. Males constitute 51% of the population and females 49%. Veraval has an average literacy rate of 62%, higher than the

national average of 59.5%: male literacy is 71%, and female literacy is 53%. In Veraval, 14% of the population is under 6 years of age. Veraval has a predominant Gujrati population. Amongst Gujaratis, the Kharwas and the Kolis form a sizable part of the local population. In addition there are also significant populations of Turks, Rajwadibhoi's, Lohanas, Maleks, Memons, Patnis and Raykas. There is also a sizable population of Malayalees and Sindhis. Gujrati and Hindi are the most common languages in the town.



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4



Image 5



Image 6

### Prospects of Ecotourism Development

Veraval enjoys a long coastline, lined with beaches. Beaches extend uninterrupted almost throughout the Veraval coast. Only a small portion of the beach has been commercialised and majority of the beach is still virgin. (Image 3 and 4)

Veraval is also the closest town to the Gir Forest Reserve which is famous for its Asian Lion population. Gir has the highest population of Lions in Asia and is also famous as a tourism destination.

Veraval also is religiously significant for the Somnath Temple which is believed to be the incarnation of Lord Shiva. (Image 5 and 6) There is annual fair during the Hindu calendar month of Magh for the days preceding MahaShivratri when the footfall of tourists is close to 200000 per day. Religious fairs in India have traditionally been noisy affairs. The latest technological developments in musical instruments and systems have further aggravated the condition.

Fisheries have always been the main industries in the town and are dominated by the Kharwas (fisherfolk). The fishing is done mostly on traditional boats and trawlers. Veraval also has a large boat making industry. Veraval is home to a large number of fish processing factories in G.I.D.C which export prime quality seafood to USA, Japan, SE Asian, Gulf and EU Countries. The seafood-industry which was started through government initiative now is in its prime and many importers are attracted towards Veraval from around the globe. Regional research centers of CIFT and CMFRI situated at Veraval have done yeoman service in development of fisheries sector in Gujarat.

Veraval also has been noted as a sighting location of the whale shark. This makes it very interesting for the tourists interested in Marine Biology.

Veraval has a hot semi-arid climate (Table 1), (Köppen climate classification *BSh*) with warm to hot temperatures throughout the year. Almost all precipitation falls during the summer monsoon season from June to September. Many of the tourists travelling from Europe and North America look for beaches which offer them warmth and sunshine that is in contrast to their home climates. Hence Veraval is climatically also an attractive destination for tourists coming from colder regions of the world.

**Table 1**

Climate data for Veraval													
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Record high °C °F	34.2 93.6	36.7 98.1	40.4 104.7	41.5 106.7	40.7 105.3	34.1 93.4	36.9 98.4	33.8 92.8	38.0 100.4	41.0 105.8	38.7 101.7	34.8 94.6	41.5 106.7
Average high °C °F	28.7 83.7	29.4 84.9	31.3 88.3	31.8 89.2	32.0 89.6	32.0 89.6	30.5 86.9	29.5 85.1	30.8 87.4	33.5 92.3	33.0 91.4	30.4 86.7	31.08 87.93
Daily mean °C °F	21.5 70.7	22.3 72.1	24.9 76.8	27.0 80.6	28.6 83.5	29.5 85.1	28.4 83.1	27.4 81.3	27.6 81.7	27.9 82.2	26.2 79.2	23.2 73.8	26.21 79.18
Average low °C °F	14.2 57.6	15.2 59.4	18.4 65.1	22.1 71.8	25.2 77.4	26.9 80.4	26.2 79.2	25.2 77.4	24.3 75.7	22.3 72.1	19.3 66.7	16.0 60.8	21.28 70.3
Record low °C °F	7.2 45	7.1 44.8	10.8 51.4	14.8 58.6	17.9 64.2	20.7 69.3	21.1 70	20.5 68.9	19.7 67.5	16.0 60.8	11.9 53.4	8.1 46.6	7.1 44.8
Precipitation mm (inches)	1 (0.04)	1 (0.04)	0 (0)	1 (0.04)	1 (0.04)	207 (8.15)	229 (9.02)	168 (6.61)	79 (3.11)	15 (0.59)	33 (1.3)	0 (0)	735 (28.94)
Avg. rainy days	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	6.6	13.4	13.2	6.0	1.1	1.0	0.1	42.1
% humidity													

Source: NOAA (1971-1990)

Veraval being in Gujarat, has strict norms of Prohibition which make it a safer spot of tourism for families and single women. It also reduces the garbage generated in form of empty bottles and cans which is usually associated with the consumption of liquor.

### **Problems in Promoting Ecotourism**

The major problems in promoting ecotourism are related to marketing and management. Ecotourism also involves creating source of livelihood for the local community in form of direct occupation and developing handicrafts. But many-a-times the tourists visiting the destination demand products that are not locally manufactured and hence there is leakage of currency. The tourists who visit solely for religious purposes tend to be very noisy in the celebrations and create noise pollution in the region. Also there is immense garbage generated during the period of fair. This affects the marine ecosystem and also adds to the pressure of waste management on the local governing body.

### **Suggestions for Promoting Ecotourism**

The basic of Ecotourism addresses the garbage management. Coastal towns with a large number of fishing community have to manage the solid waste that is likely to be generated in the town. The fish population gets most affected by deposition of solid waste in the littoral waters. This directly affects the amount of catch and its quality. This problem can be addressed by disallowing the use of polythene lower than 30 microns in the area completely.

The town of Veraval is close to the Forest Reserve of Gir which is a home to the largest population of the Asian Lion. Hence controlling noise pollution becomes imperative. Particularly during the festival of MahaShivratri in the month of Magh according to the Hindu calendar, which, also usually falls in the months of February or March. Strict norms of noise pollution control have to be implemented. Restrictions have to be put on the tourists/ pilgrims as regards to the kind of music that can be allowed or disallowed. Ecotourism also refers to allowing environment friendly activities in the region. The virgin beaches of Veraval have a great potential in being harnessed for coastal tourism activities like scuba diving and underwater diving.

Veraval along with Mangrol on the coast of Gujarat have been found to be best suited for the sightings of the whale shark. This was stated in the report 'Gujarat Gentle Giant-Conservation of Whale shark'. The report was a part of the conservation programme taken up by the Gujarat forest department and Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), along with an industrial house based at Mithapur.

The report further states that whale shark tourism depends on good visibility and only deeper areas far from the shore show a good visibility of the giant fish. The report states that of the three sites surveyed as a part of the project - Veraval, Diu and Mangrol - it was revealed that Mangrol showed good visibility compared to Veraval. However, Veraval had a broad range of visibility. This can be used to the advantage of the development of Ecotourism in Veraval.

### **Conclusion**

An ecologically significant location provides a boost to ecotourism. Veraval has virgin beaches, closeness to Gir Reserved Forest and is also religiously significant. Hence it has all the necessary factors which makes it an ideal destination for ecotourism development. Proper management and will from the Government can bring about the development of Veraval as a centre for ecotourism in India and can also prove an example for other coastal towns looking for development of ecotourism.

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