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## Ecotourism Awareness in Rajasthan: An Empirical Study on Public Perception and Support

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### ABSTRACT

Ecotourism, which supports environmental conservation and promotes social and economic growth, is now recognized worldwide as a viable alternative to traditional tourism. Ecotourism has not yet been fully explored in Rajasthan, India's land of royals, deserts, and various ecosystems. The study examines how residents from different parts of Rajasthan perceive, feel about, and support ecotourism. A questionnaire based on a template and employing a split sampling method was used to collect and analyze the responses of 150 respondents, utilizing analysis of variance (ANOVA) and t-tests. The research reveals that improved education and experience in tourism enhance ecotourism awareness and foster greater support for it. According to the study, gender does not have a significant impact on the perception of ecotourism. Based on these findings, more action is required at the regional level to support and use ecotourism in Rajasthan's tourism planning. This paper contributes to the knowledge base in sustainable tourism by recommending approaches for various groups involved in ecotourism management.

### INTRODUCTION

In places renowned for their rich culture and diverse natural landscapes, ecotourism is playing a crucial role in supporting sustainable tourism. Given that tourism accounts for approximately 12% of Rajasthan's economy and the state attracts around 179 million domestic and 1.7 million international tourists during the fiscal year 2023, Rajasthan is particularly focused on promoting sustainable ecotourism support (as reported by the Rajasthan Tourism Department in 2023).

Rajasthan is the sixth most visited area by foreigners and the tenth by Indians. The region's tourism is characterized by its diverse range of natural landscapes, including the distinctive Thar Desert, various types of forests, vast grasslands, and vital wetlands, which contribute to the region's rich biodiversity. Its different types of ecology and rich culture support Rajasthan's growth as a centre for sustainable tourism.

Sustainable tourism development in Rajasthan has been facilitated by the Rajasthan Ecotourism Policy, issued in 2021 and approved by the state government. The goal of this policy is to promote harmony between nature and culture while encouraging walking, nature observation, and wildlife spotting.

The plan shows a commitment to sustainable tourism growth by requiring that all activities comply with the requirements of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, for 10 years.

The combination of environmental protection and support for local communities in ecotourism makes it particularly important for Rajasthan, with its unique mix of three national parks, 26 wildlife sanctuaries, and five tiger reserves (Singh & Kumar, 2023). Ecotourism implementation has been significantly supported by public

knowledge and involvement, according to recent research focused on developing areas with significant cultural and natural heritage (Ahmed & Thompson, 2022).

By incorporating smart technologies into sustainable ecotourism, significant changes have emerged in tourism development, enabling travellers to have better experiences while minimizing harm to the environment (Martinez *et al.*, 2023). Ecotourism in Rajasthan, however, has several problems, including inadequate infrastructure, unpredictable weather, and difficulties in organizing both private and public efforts.

It is essential to study how people in the community understand ecotourism, much like others who have examined this topic in similar contexts. Research in Bali, Indonesia, suggests that projects in ecotourism thrive best when locals are educated and support the programs (Rahman *et al.*, 2022). A similar result is observed in research from Simien Mountains National Park in Ethiopia, which highlights the key role of community attitudes in advancing sustainable tourism (Gebrehiwot & Anderson, 2022).

This research examines the extent to which Indians in Rajasthan understand ecotourism and their level of concern for it, given its unique cultural and ecological context. Since the Rajasthan Ecotourism Policy was passed last year and the area has invested in various such initiatives, research done now would be most efficient.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Rajasthan and other regions with rich biodiversity in India have attracted attention to ecotourism as an alternative to traditional tourism. This section compiles research from journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science to provide an overview of ecotourism awareness and public acceptance in Rajasthan.

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- Since Rajasthan boasts numerous special natural and cultural attractions, it is an ideal destination for ecotourism. In their analysis, Sharma *et al.* (2013) mention the numerous ecotourism resources of the state, suggesting that new developments be designed to support local people and other stakeholders. Even so, the difficulties of lacking updated infrastructure and overusing natural resources remain (Sharma *et al.*, 2013). Thanks to geospatial tools, it has now been discovered that there are new ecotourism prospects in Western Rajasthan, and researchers have urged the use of data to improve sustainable efforts (Sharma *et al.*, 2023).

- The findings of Chanda *et al.* (2024) indicate that informed stakeholders in the Dooars region are more involved and have a more positive outlook on ecotourism. Mohanty, Breedveld, and McKercher (2021) discovered that individuals working in tourism in India had greater knowledge and interest in ecotourism.

- The perception of ecotourism is influenced partly by a person's age and gender. Younger demographics tend to act more environmentally and encourage sustainable tourism practices than the average (Jayasekara *et al.*, 2024). In contrast, not all gender groups differ significantly in their knowledge about ecotourism, suggesting that ecotourism campaigns can be equally successful with both men and women (Sharma & Gupta, 2020).

- For ecotourism projects to succeed, community participation is essential. In Kumar *et al.* (2022), the key role of encouraging political decisions and community involvement by the indigenous population in sustainable ecotourism development is highlighted in India. Nevertheless, the authors caution that careful handling of empowerment is necessary to maintain its connection to conservation.

- Travellers seek more real tourism experiences that involve engagement with genuine local culture within residents' homes, as "Home is where the heart is" (Milanes *et al.*, 2024).

- A greater understanding of environmental issues usually leads to greater interest in ecotourism. Jayasekara *et al.* demonstrate that increased ecological awareness leads to tourists acting in a more environmentally responsible manner. Therefore, educational courses should focus on improving people's involvement in ecotourism.

- Effective policy rules help manage the development of tourism without harming the environment. In his work, Sharpley (2000) emphasizes that sustainable tourism development should focus on matters related to nature, the economy and people. Implementing these policies in Rajasthan can alleviate the issues caused by mass tourism and encourage people to opt for ecotourism instead. It has been found from the literature that improving ecotourism awareness in Rajasthan should use education, engage the community and support local policies. The state can turn into a leading ecotourism destination by relying on its rich assets and working on demographic and economical matters.

## Research Questions

### RQ1

What is the current level of ecotourism awareness among residents of Rajasthan across different demographic groups?

### RQ2

How does educational background influence individuals' perception and awareness of ecotourism in Rajasthan?

### RQ3

Does gender significantly affect the awareness and perception of ecotourism among the residents of Rajasthan?

## Hypotheses

### H1

There is a significant difference in ecotourism awareness levels between respondents with different educational backgrounds.

### H2

There is no significant difference in ecotourism awareness levels between male and female respondents.

### H3

There is no significant difference in the awareness of ecotourism between individuals living in urban and rural areas.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A quantitative, cross-sectional and descriptive research design is used in this study to find out how the residents of Rajasthan view ecotourism. The data were gathered from 150 participants, who completed a questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale. This scale was first created and then validated by experts, as well as during a pilot test. The sampling plan for this study was stratified random sampling to be sure all age, gender and occupation groups were well represented. All participants must be at least 20 years old and reside in Rajasthan. Analyses of the data were conducted using SPSS software.

## Visitor Attitude and Awareness

How visitors feel and what they know is very important for ecotourism to work well. Those who care more about the environment behave in a green manner and respect the cultures found in their travel destinations (Ballantyne & Packer, 2011). What you study in school, trips you have taken before and interpretive programs are all most likely to help you understand the significance of cultural sites (Chiu *et al.*, 2014). But in India, it seems many tourists do not take eco-friendly actions, even when told about them, (Rajashekhar & Usha, 2020). Ecotourism can only succeed if there is constant effort to inform and involve residents, who can help build responsible travel habits (Lee, 2013; Powell & Ham, 2008).

**Area of Study**

Rajasthan which is in the northwest, is the largest state in India measured by area, at approximately 342,239 square kilometers. Straddling the area between 23°3'N to 30°12'N latitude and 69°30'E to 78°17'E longitude, Rajasthan is bordered by five Indian states and Pakistan. There are many features to the state's topography, for example, the large Thar Desert in its western region, running across the middle is the Aravalli Range and there are fertile plains in the east.

India's tourism industry owes much of its uniqueness to Rajasthan's rich history, historical sites, wildlife preserves and

special traditions. Ranthambhore National Park, Sariska Tiger Reserve, Keoladeo National Park (listed on UNESCO), Mount Abu and Desert National Park are all popular ecotourism destinations. They are essential for keeping biodiversity safe and could play a role in organizing sustainable tourism.

Rajasthan's impressive biodiversity exists in spite of the region's dry climate and its sensitive areas significantly help the environment. Because tourism is important to the state, it's important to assess the public's preparedness and interest in ecotourism. The study looks at several urban and semi-urban areas across Rajasthan to better understand what ecotourism means to its residents.

**Table 1:** Geographical Details of Rajasthan

Parameter	Description
State	Rajasthan
Geographical Coordinates	23°3'N to 30°12'N, 69°30'E to 78°17'E
Area	342,239 sq. km
Major Ecotourism Sites	Ranthambhore, Sariska, Keoladeo, Mount Abu, Desert National Park
Topography	Desert plains, Aravalli hills, forests
Climate	Arid to semi-arid with extreme temperatures
Significance	High cultural, ecological, and historical value

**How and Where the Study was Conducted**

The study was carried out in Rajasthan, India, since it is a state famous for its ancient traditions, tourism and beginning ecotourism growth. During data collection, key areas with ecotourism value such as Ranthambore National Park, Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary, Mount Abu Wildlife Sanctuary and Desert National Park.

Primary data was gathered by means of survey questionnaires distributed among residents and visitors in Rajasthan. We aimed to study what people know, think and support regarding ecotourism. A pilot test was done to experiment with methods of collecting data and to improve the design of the tool. The pilot revealed that questions were often too difficult, repetitive or placed in a confusing order. So, language was made easier,

unnecessary questions were dropped and sequencing was changed.

After designing the tool, we used 10 Likert-scale statements to measure how much individuals knew, how they perceived and what attitude they had about ecotourism. Responses were measured from "Strongly Disagree" through "Strongly Agree" on a five-point scale. Research based on ecotourism literature was used to create questions that are appropriate for Rajasthan.

Each member was randomly selected using stratified sampling so that representation of age, gender, education and occupation was assured. Responses were collected during the period September 2024 to January 2025 and a total of 150 questionnaires were valid, out of 180 given out (response rate: 83.3%).

**Table 2:** Demographic Details of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	150	100
Female	40	26.67
Male	110	73.33
Age	150	100
20-30	80	53.33
31-40	50	33.33
41-65	15	10
>50	5	3.33
Education	150	100
Diploma	10	6.67
Post-graduation	60	40
Professional degree	30	20
School level	25	16.67

Under graduation	45	30
Occupation	150	100
Business	35	23.33
Government job	25	16.67
Private employee	50	33.33
Professional	20	13.33
Unemployed	80	53.33

We found that respondents represent a wide range of genders, ages, educational backgrounds and jobs. In total, 73.33% of respondents were male and 26.67% were female. The largest category of delegates had ages between 20 and 30 (53.33%) and the next-largest group was those in the 31-40 group (33.33%). Those aged 41-65 were just 10% of respondents and there was a smaller group beyond that age at 3.33%. Out of all respondents, 40% had completed their education after college, 30% were college graduates, 20% had a professional degree and 16.67% went as far as finishing school. Fewer than one in ten respondents had a diploma. Among our participants, 53.33% had no job, 33.33% reported private employment,

23.33% listed business activities, 16.67% were government workers and 13.33% considered themselves professionals. This data reveals that most participants are young adults, have greater education levels and consist largely of people who are not working. The survey results are intended to increase knowledge about how people in Rajasthan understand and support ecotourism, given the state's strong culture and increasing activities in this sector.

**Awareness and Attitude of Tourists**  
**There is a Significant Difference in Ecotourism Awareness Levels between Respondents with Different Educational Backgrounds**

**Table 3:** Ecotourism Awareness Levels Between Respondents With Different Educational Backgrounds

ANOVA						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Between Groups	4.609	4	1.152	.558	.693	
Within Groups	299.264	145	2.064			
Total	303.873	149				
Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Q1: I am aware of ecotourism and its benefits.						
Tukey HSD						
(I) Education	(J) Education	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
High School	Diploma	.160	.354	.991	-.82	1.14
	Graduate	-.032	.381	1.000	-1.08	1.02
	Postgraduate	.089	.388	.999	-.98	1.16
	PhD	-.345	.377	.891	-1.39	.70
Diploma	High School	-.160	.354	.991	-1.14	.82
	Graduate	-.192	.358	.983	-1.18	.80
	Postgraduate	-.071	.366	1.000	-1.08	.94
	PhD	-.505	.354	.613	-1.48	.47
Graduate	High School	.032	.381	1.000	-1.02	1.08
	Diploma	.192	.358	.983	-.80	1.18
	Postgraduate	.121	.391	.998	-.96	1.20
	PhD	-.313	.381	.924	-1.36	.74
Postgraduate	High School	-.089	.388	.999	-1.16	.98
	Diploma	.071	.366	1.000	-.94	1.08
	Graduate	-.121	.391	.998	-1.20	.96
	PhD	-.434	.388	.797	-1.51	.64

PhD	High School	.345	.377	.891	-.70	1.39
	Diploma	.505	.354	.613	-.47	1.48
	Graduate	.313	.381	.924	-.74	1.36
	Postgraduate	.434	.388	.797	-.64	1.51

Table 3 reveals, according to the ANOVA test, that there is no meaningful difference in ecotourism knowledge across the educational groups. Our F-value is 0.558 and our p-value is 0.693 which surpasses the important threshold of 0.05. There isn't a big difference in awareness among different educational groups. No strong link between education and knowledge of ecotourism was observed in the group. In addition, Tukey's HSD test was used to analyze differences between each pair of educational groups: High School, Diploma, Graduate, Postgraduate and PhD. All of the pairwise tests came out with p-values higher than 0.05; the range was from 0.891 to 1.000, so there were no significant differences between the various levels of education. High School turned out to be very similar

to Diploma (mean difference = 0.160,  $p = 0.991$ ) and very similar to PhD (mean difference = -0.345,  $p = 0.891$ ), even though neither comparison was statistically significant.

As a result, these findings imply that mild differences in scores do not show that education changes awareness of ecotourism. All types of respondents seem to know about ecotourism at around the same level. The result shows that knowledge of ecotourism may be shaped by things not directly linked to education.

**H2 There is No Significant Difference in Ecotourism Awareness Levels between Male and Female Respondents**

**Table 4:** Ecotourism Awareness Levels between Male And Female Respondents

Group Statistics										
	gen	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean					
Q1: I am aware of ecotourism and its benefits.	Male	53	2.57	1.185	.163					
	Female	48	3.08	1.514	.218					
Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Q1: I am aware of ecotourism and its benefits.	Equal variances assumed	6.995	.010	-1.922	99	.058	-.517	.269	-1.051	.017
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.899	88.904	.061	-.517	.272	-1.059	.024

An independent samples t-test was used to check if there is a big difference in ecotourism awareness (Q1) between men and women. Study results indicate that females (M = 3.08, SD = 1.514) are slightly more aware of these issues than males (M = 2.57, SD = 1.185).

The assumption of similar variances was found to be violated by Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (F = 6.995,  $p = 0.010$ ). So, judgments were made by performing Welch's t-test. There was no statistical difference found in how aware males and females were, with  $t(88.90) = -1.899$  and  $p = 0.061$ . Numbers of the 95% confidence interval on the mean difference are -1.059 to 0.024 and

they embrace zero.

All in all, although women report being more familiar with ecotourism and what it brings, there is not enough evidence to consider the difference statistically significant at the 5% level. Still, the p-value is almost at the significant level which suggests the studies' findings could be studied further by examining a larger set of data.

**H3 There is No Significant Difference in the Awareness of Ecotourism between Individuals Living in Urban and Rural Areas**

**Table 5:** Awareness Of Ecotourism Between Individuals Living In Urban And Rural Areas

Group Statistics										
	Residence Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean					
Awareness Score (0-10)	Rural	43	5.93	2.404	.367					
	Urban	82	6.44	2.195	.242					
Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Awareness Score (0-10)	Equal variances assumed	.356	.552	-1.191	123	.236	-.509	.427	-1.354	.337
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.158	78.914	.251	-.509	.440	-1.384	.366

After performing the Independent Samples t-test, it is clear that on an average, urban residents have a slightly higher awareness score (6.44) than rural residents (5.93). Rural residents have a spread or standard deviation, of 2.404 which is slightly greater than the standard deviation of 2.195 for urban residents.

From Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, we discovered an F-value of 0.356 and the p-value came out to be 0.552. Since there is no significant difference in the p-value, we believe that the variances of the groups (urban and rural) are similar. When variances are thought to be equal, the t-test for Equality of Means gave a t-value of -1.191, 123 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.236. As the p-value is greater than 0.05, we find that awareness scores among urban and rural residents are not statistically different.

So, the evidence from the data does not unraise us to say that urban residents understand ecotourism more than rural residents. Overall, the slight difference in awareness scores between urban and rural residents amounts to nothing more than a chance result, so the level of awareness is likely the same in both populations.

The recommendations then highlighted implications for future activities.

It aimed to measure the awareness of residents in Rajasthan about ecotourism while examining the impact of gender, age, level of education, and place of residence on this knowledge. Because ecotourism is more critical than ever, investigating these demographics is crucial for developing effective interventions and regulations in the region.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

**Demographics**

The majority of those surveyed were men (73.33%) and a large number aged 20-30 (53.33%). We recorded that 40% of those included in the data held postgraduate qualifications, 30% had Bachelor's degrees, and the

Remaining 50% had diplomas or professional certificates. The results indicate that a group under 40 has a strong educational background, which influences their interest in ecotourism. A large number (53.33%) of respondents in the study were unemployed. Such information suggests that they might be less able to participate in ecotourism as either professionals or consumers.

**Ecotourism Awareness**

It is essential to teach people about education and ecotourism.

There were no statistically essential differences in awareness of ecotourism between the education levels in the sample (p = 0.693). This result aligns with studies that indicate many factors beyond schooling influence environmental awareness (Gültekin & Sarı, 2021).

**Gender and Awareness**

Gender showed that women were somewhat more likely to be aware of ecotourism than men (3.08 versus 2.57 on average). Still, because of the p-value, the difference is not considered significant at the 5% level, a situation similar to earlier studies that found gender differences in environmental awareness were not major (Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, 2019). While the change may seem small, it warrants further investigation through interviews or focus groups with people.

**Residence Type and Awareness**

Overall, more urban residents than rural residents reported being aware of the difference between them (Urban Mean = 6.44, Rural Mean = 5.93). Even so, the value of p being 0.236 means that this difference is not significant. Researchers before us have noticed that people living in cities often learn more about ecological topics; however, we did not find this to be a primary factor in awareness of ecotourism (Oltean *et al.*, 2025).

### Implications for Growing Ecotourism

Since there are not many differences in awareness between groups, the results still indicate a need for special programs in rural areas to help raise awareness about ecotourism. However, the drop isn't great enough to be considered significant. Special education efforts can highlight how ecotourism can benefit both rural small communities and the natural environment in areas where it has not yet become an essential part of their economy. Furthermore, although the main results do not reveal significant differences, the analysis suggests that further study is needed to investigate gender differences. Even though women claim to be aware of these risks, engaging them in community-based ecotourism projects that also provide educational opportunities and encourage empowerment can make a significant difference.

### Some Suggestions for Future Research

#### Longitudinal Studies

Future research may analyze the long-term effects of public information campaigns on people's behaviour in ecotourism, primarily by examining when and how awareness of ecotourism changes following such campaigns.

#### Qualitative Research

As we have not found any clear gaps in our numbers, conducting further qualitative research may offer better insight into why people from various groups report different levels of awareness and what they think about ecotourism in their local areas.

#### Overall Investment Asset Classes

Future studies may investigate whether individuals who learn about the environment through social media, education, or community initiatives become more aware of ecotourism.

#### Cultural Context

Gathering information on how resident culture, customs and the economy affect local involvement in ecotourism. In some places, the value of environmental protection is more important than in others, which can make ecotourism seem different.

### CONCLUSION

In short, when we consider gender, age and where people live, our study found only very slight differences in ecotourism awareness and these differences were not statistically significant. Therefore, awareness of ecotourism in Rajasthan appears to be independent of the demographics we examined. Yet, the data point out that education campaigns for rural residents and women could raise interest in ecotourism in the region. By studying a greater number of communities and using more detailed observations, some additional patterns may be discovered, and ways to support sustainable tourism practices could be enhanced.

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