

Executive summary

Business concept

This report is written for the Dutch foundation SCF India and has been developed to investigate the sustainable and financial feasibility of establishing an Eco lodge with a maximum of 15 rooms (30 guests) and one lodge for students and volunteers around the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra, in India, and to inform commercial institutions, private investors and donor agencies. The development objective is economic development by providing alternative incomes for the local community while reducing negative impacts on nature and to create local awareness among the locals by the attraction of responsible tourism.

TATR

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve is the oldest National park of the state Maharashtra and since 1993, a protected Tiger Reserve. Tadoba has been referred to as the 'Jewel of Vidarbha' with her splendid museum of flora and fauna. The surroundings of the reserve can be considered as rural area. The local community and the cattle pose a problem to nature. Since 2008, the Forest Department limits the entry times of the reserve for tourists whereas the possibility to offer accommodations inside the National Park is excluded. Tourism in the area is still in a nascent stage, but private investors are able to invest in accommodations as a result of increased prices of land.

SCF India

The Dutch foundation SCF India (*Society for Conservation of Forests in India*) conducts in partnership with Hope & Animal Trust (Ranchi, India) the 'SCF India Save Tiger Program' (SCFISTP) in Central India. This to ensure better living conditions for man and animal in TATR, Maharashtra. New rules and regulations of the Forest Department create possibilities to implement ecotourism around the reserve.

Identifying a site

When purchasing a site for the construction of an Eco lodge the existing infrastructure and facilities play an important role. The required facilities to construct depend of the specific site. Required facilities like power supply, water, waste disposal and accessibility can be costly. After investigation of several sites, the site in Kolara (North-East side of TATR) offers an interesting opportunity for the start of an Eco lodge. The costs for required facilities are relatively low and it meets with the provisions and demands of SCF India. Kolara has an attracting market segment and this area is not yet explored by other commercial private investors in comparison with Mohurli (South-West side of TATR).

Rules and regulations

Land acquisition is rather complicated in India. There are different types of land with special regulations. Official land is legal land and can be purchased without any risk. The area has also Tribal land. Old tribal land is given by the government of India to farmers in the villages to provide an income by growing rice and vegetables. Land owners are allowed to ask their land back in future; therefore this type of land is excluded to purchase. New tribal land allows the possibility to turn into legal land again. The Serpanche of the village needs to give permission for building an accommodation on the land. Secondly, after purchasing the land, an application of documents and master plan is required by the SDO of Warora. The land in Kolara is legal land.

Funding

SCF India's projects are depending on funding. Besides the funding of private or business operating sectors there is a possibility to get funding from the governmental institutions of India, like the Ministry of Forests and the MTDC (Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation).

An Eco lodge

An Eco Lodge is a small hotel or guesthouse that incorporates local architectural, cultural and natural characteristics, promotes environmental conservation, and produces social and economic benefits for local communities' (Fischer-Zernin, 2005). It is intended that the Eco lodge of SCF India will look like a traditional home or house. Construction materials should be locally available.

Architectural design

During the field research of this project two architects developed designs for the concept of the Eco lodge (Annex I-IV). R. Utturwar, a local architect, made a design for a single lodge, double lodge and lodge for students and volunteers. The Center for Vernacular Architecture, represented by R. Kumar and specialist in traditional design & construction made a building concept. The design of facilities developed into residential pavilions (12 double bedrooms for 24 guests, including a lodge for 2 students and volunteers and a dormitory for 6 persons), a restaurant pavilion (reception, kitchen in restaurant and seating in restaurant) and a recreation pavilion (craft class and performance stage). A lay-out plan has been developed by R. Kumar and is adapted to the land measurements of the land in Kolara.

Environmental construction

Electricity will be required by operating an Eco lodge. Power lines (transformers) reach to the villages around TATR. However, in the rural area large periods of load shedding are applied. The use of solar energy should be encouraged but generators are required for safety and might be used as back-ups. Many tourists appreciate the use of photovoltaic solar energy in Eco lodges and it is a good marketing tool but it requires high start-up costs.

Groundwater is the preferred solution for water supply because in most areas groundwater can be supplied without treatment. In most villages piped water supply is now to a certain extent available with water coming from a borehole supplying to a tap. A borehole is also more sustainable at the end of the dry season when the water table lowers.

There are no sewer systems or central treatment stations in the area. The way of disposing off water is primarily directly into the free nature and for modern houses via a septic tank. Remaining solid waste by waste minimization will be buried on site (wildlife) and incinerated occasionally.

Financial feasibility

A financial feasibility analysis for the construction and operation of the Eco lodge is based on the concept of architect R. Kumar and is 10% increased with the concept of R. Utturwar to take into account local conditions. Due to the nature and specific construction of the Eco lodges proposed, the project aims at a dedicated target group. It is assumed that this group can afford a room rate of 800 Rupees per day for the lodges. The occupancy rate is influenced by the season. During the rainy season (2 months) the number of tourists visiting Tadoba is low. Therefore the average occupancy is taken at 50 %. The start of the Eco lodge is profitable within 5 years when the maximum number of lodges and facilities will be realized by starting the operation. Starting an accommodation on small scale business still requires facilities like a reception, restaurant and garden. These investment costs do not allow the Eco lodge to turn profit within the required time of 5 year.

Marketing

The main target group for the Eco lodge are Western tourists because they have strong preference to choose for the qualities of the area of TATR. The Indian tourist is not yet very known with ecotourism. There are several points of action whereas Indian tourist could be involved. The Eco lodge needs to operate with price levels that the average tourist in India can afford. Community based activities also need to attract the Indian tourist. There are different kinds of possibilities for such tourist activities. These could be organized from community based interaction with TATR, her surroundings, city visits, SCF India projects and workshops in the Eco lodge.

It is a fact that Western tourists need to travel a long time to reach TATR and this may be expensive. The nearest airport is the national airport in Nagpur that does not provide international gateways. Travelling from Nagpur to the North-East side of the reserve to Kolara requires 2 hours by car.

The best time to visit the region is from February to May, because of acceptable temperatures. From June to September the rain falls are very heavy what results into at least 2 months of bad accessibility of roads.

Training

The participation of local people is needed in all stages of ecotourism evaluation, planning and implementation. To promote effective participation, efforts like education for local awareness and hospitality skills should be performed to enhance local people's appreciation and awareness of the potential ecotourism values.

Advice

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) shows that the positive impacts of the Eco lodge will contribute more to the area than the negative impacts. This means that the ecotourism project should be sustainable feasible for the local community and nature in the area. This certainly does not mean that the influence of the negative impacts is negligible. Most of the negative impacts are from the construction of the Eco lodge.

The set-up of the ecotourism project is considered feasible. To realize this project it is recommended to follow the next steps for the operation and financing.

- Involve local stakeholders (local communities and indigenous people, ecotourists, tour operators, and government institutions) in the development and planning process.
- Search for partners to cooperate with SCF India. It is necessary to work with local stakeholders jointly on the development and marketing of the ecotourism product.
- Search for sponsors to fund the project. The organization is required to find sponsors to provide the basic funding of the project.
- Implementation of small scale activities. Hence, the starting amount for the construction of the Eco-lodge could not yet be arranged it is advised to start community based activities in the area to develop the brand name and maintain contacts with the local community.