

Challenges for Wellness Tourism Development along Malvan Coast, Sindhudurg District, Maharashtra (India)

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Abstract

Main objective of coastal tourism is recreation. Coastal areas with serene environment can provide wide range of services which are very important for tourist's wellbeing. Malvan city (16°04'0.12"N 73°28'.1128"E) is historically very important because of famous Sindhudurg fort built by great Shivaji Maharaj for strengthening naval force of Maratha Empire and is major tourist attraction in modern day. The main occupation here is fishing with the staple diet of the local people fish curry and rice. Malwani cuisine is also very famous. Malvan city and adjacent coast have a footfall of more than three lakh tourists annually for last couple of years. People visit the area mainly for enjoying aesthetic beauty of beaches scenic locations, adventure tourism, Sindhudurg fort and Malvani cuisine. Government of Maharashtra is also planning to develop medical and wellness tourism along Sindhudurg coast of Maharashtra. Integrated approach is needed to combine various stake holders in this coastal region that benefits the community people however which are also beneficial to the tourist's health. Coastal tourism and high human pressure may lead to harmfulness along Malvan coast in Sindhudurg district on Maharashtra coast. This paper presents coastal tourism scenario, perceived risks and need for wellness tourism along Malvan coast. Recent field visits, ground water quality measurements, discussions with local people and interviews of Ayurveda medical practitioners and transcriptions of the same show rapidly growing tourism activities, infrastructure development and need for medical tourism. This study suggests priorities for creating awareness and strategies which will benefit local community people, tourists and medical practitioners. Many coastal villages along Sindhudurg district along

the Maharashtra coast are likely to face similar problems where coastal tourism is flourishing. Hence it is the need of the hour to design specific strategies and create awareness which will integrate local stake holders to develop wellness tourism. Methods and materials used in this study may be useful for other coastal tourism sites.

Key Words: Coastal Tourism, Risk, Wellness Tourism, Integrated approach, Awareness.

Introduction

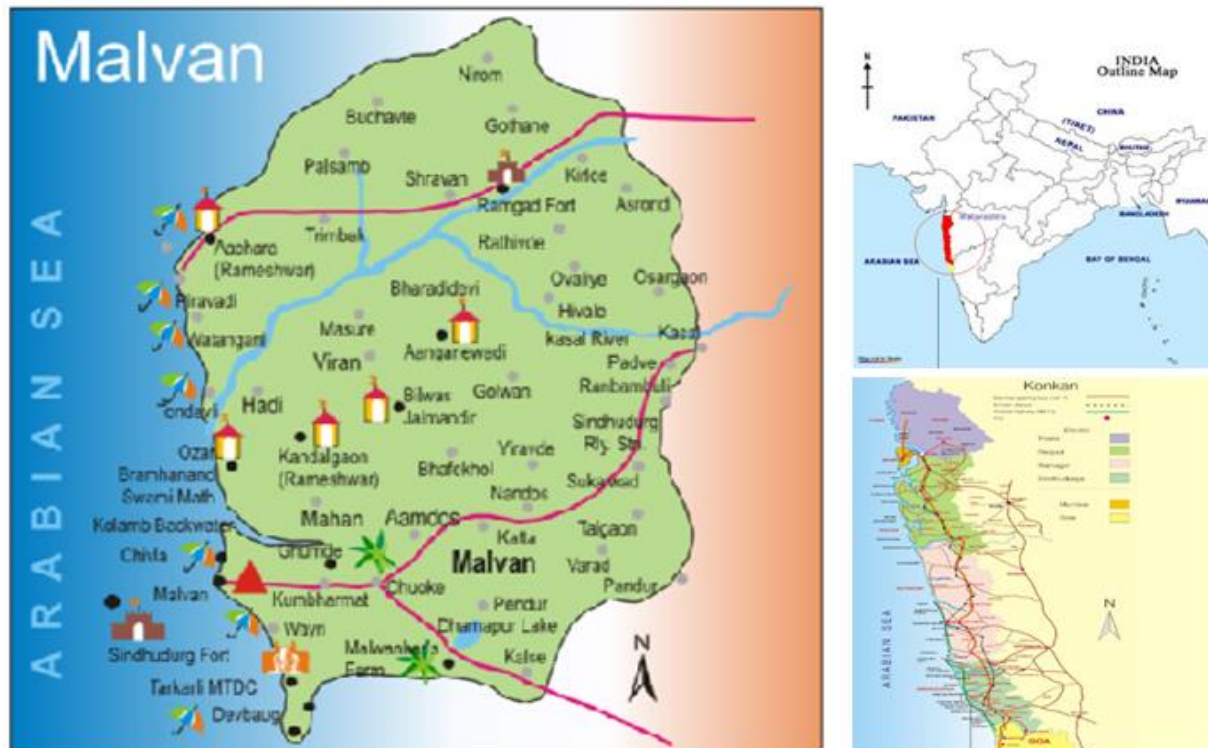
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Introduction

Coastal tourism is one of the most common forms of tourism. It is dependent on various services and values offered by ecosystems and biodiversity. However, concentration of too many activities and pressures in small region may result in negative, albeit localized, consequences. (UNEP,2009).

Malvan is a historic town with famous Sindhudurg sea fort in near vicinity (Figure 1.)

Fig 1 Malvan and surrounding coast



Source - Rane G. (2015)

Coast from Malvan to Devbag flourished as major tourist spot in last couple of decades in 21st century. Rampant alterations are making the ecosystem vulnerable to natural forces (Chaudhary & Pisolkar, 2016). In addition, salinity of the potable water is concern, which is also risky for public health. Increasing solid waste and deteriorating local aesthetics is another perceived risk for growing tourism and well-being in the area. Considering the activities that take place are crucial for sustainable use and management of resources it is necessary to take a consensual approach and to develop policies that regulate these activities. This paper reviews the literature regarding well-being and wellness tourism. Significance of coastal areas, opportunities and problems associated

with coastal environment to promote wellness tourism. It highlights risks of unplanned coastal tourism in rural set up, risks to local environment, community people and most importantly for wellness (or wellbeing) tourism along Malvan coastal region. Hence it also signifies the need for well-being and wellness tourism along Malvan coast. Need for integration of various stake holders to promote well-being and wellness tourism.

Objective of the study

1. To bring forward major challenges for wellness tourism development along Malvan coast of Maharashtra
2. To suggest some remedies to improve quality of tourism for wellbeing of all stakeholders

Literature Review

Wellness tourism is travel for the purpose of promoting health and well-being through physical, psychological, or spiritual activities. Wellbeing tourism is related to all activities which can improve physical and spiritual condition of individual or group of people (Naronha et.al, 2003) Wellness tourism involves people who travel in pursuit of activities that enhance their personal health and well-being. These tourists are often more adventurous in seeking unique locations to experience therapies not available to them locally (Global Spa Summit, 2011). It is important to note wellbeing is challenging to define (La Placa & Knight, 2014). Although wellness and well-being has been adapted by the business community, from a health point of view the term is not well defined but most stakeholders follow well-being as identified by the WHO (Sarah Pyke et.al 2016). Wellness tourism is nearly a \$2 trillion global industry with 289 million wellness consumers worldwide (SRI International 2012). The wellness tourism represents emergence of specialty tourism that is sign of societal changes in global as well as personal needs (Mc Kercher & Chan, 2005; Trauer, 2006).

Throughout the nineteenth century coastal areas represented a gateway with spa resorts and luxury hotels and other recreational offerings such as theater, walking trails etc. which has the unique coastal environment at its core (Onofri and Nunes, 2013). The unique coastal landscape is a significant contributor to overall visitor experience of the destination. In case of coastal tourism the landscape should be seen as a significant subject of interest as this land ocean interface is what attracts the tourist to the region. The experience is enhanced through the addition of cultural or

recreational activities to make the experience more attractive. In recent years' coastal tourism has grown very rapidly in response and currently constitutes the fastest growing sector within the global tourism industry (Hall, 2001).

Malvan, Tarkarli and Devbag Figures (Fig 1, Fig2a) have come up very rapidly as coastal tourism destination along Sindhudurg coast of Maharashtra in last decade or so. Tarkarli is about 8 km south of Malvan and Maharashtra Transport Development Corporation (MTDC) promoted this destination as *Tambu Niwas* (Tent Accommodation) in mid-1990's and Devbag is further 3 Km south of Tarkarli and picked up as major tourism destination in 21st century because of adventure tourism. It is utmost important to promote these sites keeping in mind local needs, tourist special interest and well-being. Coastal ecosystems protection is paramount as it is supportive of well-being of local population and in addition it supports the livelihood as well. The economy of coastal region is exclusively dependent on the regional landscape defined by the land ocean interface. Any degradation or imbalance can result in loss of livelihood and can also affect the health and well-being of the locals. These coastal environments are often utilized to the brink or even beyond, that makes the activities unsustainable.

Tourism can also result in changes or abandonment of other prevalent activities such as fishing and horticulture. The result is widespread changes in livelihood that are result of tourism activity which can be fickle and volatile. This requires careful management and sustainable planning with explicit understanding of the balance between the coastal environment and tourism activity. (Naronha et. al,2002). As happens with all economic activities, the financial implications take up center stage and the environmental considerations are often taken into account only as an afterthought and that too only if it affects with financial potential. Often the degradation of the coastal environment over time erodes the attraction of the destination and tourist move away in search of newer more pristine locations. This shift erodes the financial viability of local population. To minimize the conflict that can jeopardize the quality of the natural ecosystem while carrying out financially viable tourism possess a significant challenge. (UNEP,2009). Hence there is a great opportunity to develop Devbag – Tarkarli – Malvan as destination with difference adding wellness tourism dimension in addition to already exiting coastal tourism activities. There are some practitioners in the study area and they are trying to promote wellness tourism but there is need to integrate many more stake holders. Devbag – Tarkarli – Malvan region can be role model along Sindhudurg coast.

Government of Maharashtra has realized the importance of Sindhudurg coastline in general and along Malvan, Tarkarli and Devbag in particular. Some of the strategic interventions are Sindhudurg will be earmarked as special tourism districts. The state aims to promote the practice of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism is the one where all tourism activities such as leisure, business, conferences, adventure and/or ecotourism are self-sustained. The suitability should also be inclusive of guarantee of affording respect to indigenous people, travelers, cultural heritage of the region and the ecosystem. Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) has been given the mandate for inviting public private partnerships, the local communities, NGOs, and private citizens in maintaining and conserving the regional environment. In addition, local culture, cuisine, yoga, wellness centers and other unique local experiences can also be promoted as holistic tourism experience. Department of Tourism will revive Medical Tourism Council of Maharashtra (MTCM) and initiate projects under Medical Tourism and will create individual project profiles for Medical tourism viz. Wellness and spa, Ayurveda, Vipassana meditation, etc. across the state (Maharashtra Tourism Policy, 2016). Coastal tourism flourished along Sindhudurg district in last 15 to 20 years very fast. Tarkarli- Devbag is main centre of attraction now. MTDC and Government of Maharashtra played the key role in promoting Tarkarli Devbag destination. Given the increasing interest in wellness, there are opportunities for a number of destinations including Tarkarli- Devbag to establish a wellness positioning (These are more likely to succeed when planned as a component of a broader service offering). Moreover, the benefits and multiplier effects will be greatest where opportunities are created for local suppliers (CRC, 2010).

Methods and materials

The major part of the study comprised of interviews, discussions with local Ayurveda therapy practitioners of Vandashree Ayurvedic Centre and Ashwini Ayurveda from Malvan and Tarkarli along with medical practitioners from Devbag. Study also incorporates field measurements regarding quality of water. With the help of structured questionnaire, interviews and discussions with local indigenous people were conducted to understand their perceptions about the development of the region.

Major challenges for wellness tourism development along Malvan coast of Maharashtra

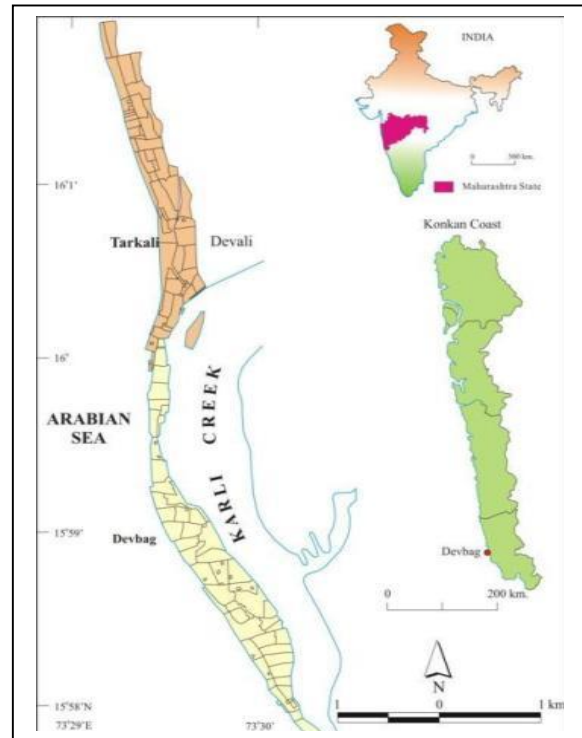
1. Whole Malvan coastline is going through the transition. Planning from gram panchayat to district level administration lack adequate primary data base for planning the region keeping in mind sustainability of all the activities.
2. In last decade at least more than two hundred home stays have been constructed in most unplanned way from Malvan to Devbag. To cater the need of tourist ground water is extracted without keeping in mind that, it is a common resource pull. Competition for water has already started. Some of the home stay owners are dependent on water tankers from which they fulfill their tradeoffs.
3. Quality of water is a major concern from Malvan to Devbag. Situation in Devbag is grim. (Table 1 Fig 2a, b). Health of the people, both local people and tourist will be of great concern.
4. Local people do not have enough drive to conserve local tangible and intangible heritage and make it as a brand for wellness tourism. Changing mindset of the local people and building capacities to promote medical tourism & heritage tourism is the greatest challenge.
5. To develop the strategy to integrate local *Ayurveda therapy* practitioners and local workforce to promote 'Medical Tourism' through regulatory framework
6. To develop tourism plan which will not erode the aesthetic value of ecosystems for infrastructural development since the area is visited by many for its serene beauty

Wells	Salinity(ppm)	
	Jan 2016	May 2016
1	600	800
2	800	800
3	2300	13600
4	700	1000
5	800	1900
6	3200	12900
7	5800	19800
8	1200	2100
9	1300	1600
10	1500	1700
11	1000	1500
12	700	800
13	900	800
14	1000	1600
15	800	800
16	500	600
17	500	600
18	1500	4000
19	4100	8300
20	600	1100
21	600	700
22	800	1000
23	2500	5200
24	1200	3900
25	700	700

Table 1

Water Quality(Village Devbag)

Fig 2a



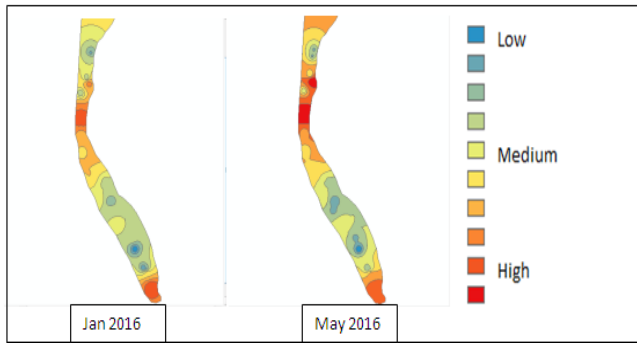


Fig 2b

Suggestions for Remedies

1. Lack of historical data poses a real challenge for prediction and management of future changes. There should be a serious initiative to undertake data collection and record keeping with respect to socio- economic parameters such as education level, livelihood, income etc. The data will provide a platform for systematic planning and management with respect to the future trends. No formal maps of survey numbers are available. Loss of landmass through erosion on creek as well as sea is anecdotal. The stress on the environment is very obvious for someone who visits these areas but no formal or scientific study is available which can aid in sustainable management.
2. Currently the home-stays are opened and operated on ad-hoc basis without any formal regulations. There is a need to formalize regulations in order to ascertain the resource availability and impact on the environment. The operators are often left to fend for themselves. They incur debt in hope of better living standards but lack the knowledge or sophistication to deal with number of issues arising from expectations of tourists and competition that ensues. Many are not technically savvy and only rely on word of mouth publicity from their existing customers. We have seen the vulnerability of such tourism to succumb to forces such as drought in 2015 or demonetization in 2016. These home-stay operators do not have ways and means to deal with such external disruptions. Again in the absence of formal records one has to rely on anecdotal evidence.
3. Drinking water for the village is available through open wells either privately owned or publicly owned. There is no other source of water for the village and reliance on open wells has posed its own unique challenge. The availability of drinking water of low salinity depends on the

underground aquifer storage of rain water as well as slow seepage and filtration of sea /creek water. In the event of monsoon failure, the aquifer recharge fails to provide water beyond the month of February. In addition, there is higher extraction through newly installed bore wells by the hotel owners increases the speed of extraction there by increasing the salinity of the water seeping from sea/creek. Water quality has been a major issue of contention with locals and tourists. As the pressure of tourism has grown the meager water resources are strained. Most of the tourist operators purchase water from neighboring towns to fulfill their needs, but the locals not involved in tourism are often without any means to make such purchase and therefore have to contend with low water quality. Local doctors have been reporting increase in cases of kidney disorders, bone disorders as well as cases of paralysis. But as with everything else no formal records are available.

4. The tourism participation largely depends on the property of the locals. The properties near the beach or creek fare better as compare to properties that are away from these desirable landscapes. This variation has created inequality of income potential among the local population. People without desirable properties are often left with secondary livelihood sources such as working at housekeeping /cooking at more viable hotels or take up trade with entertaining tourist especially those interested in adventure tourism. But avenues are few and far between. We believe that wellness tourism can fill this gap by providing locals with means of livelihood while improving wellbeing of the region as a whole.
5. Participatory approach with decentralized governance is the key to improve the ground water demand management and improvement of ground water quality.

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