Wildlife Tourism For Conservation

What is the issue?

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- Wildlife tourism has been slowly gaining ground in India as an effective tool for conservation.
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- It has also increased government revenue and aided local communities earn a livelihood.
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How has wildlife tourism helped local communities?

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- Wildlife tourism is currently focused on a few protected areas and these areas are running at maximum capacity.
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- Local populations being the largest beneficiary, wildlife tourism can potentially bring development to remotest areas.
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- 75crore or 45% of the 166crore generated through wildlife tourism was found to go back to communities.
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- Additionally, better road connectivity and other physical infrastructures such as electricity, health, education etc… sprout with development of tourism.
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- Notably, villages focused on tourism had better income, health and education levels than the rest.
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How has it benefited conservation efforts?

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- The dependency of the locals on the forests was found to be significantly reduce with tourism due to other sources of revenue.
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- Furthermore, their attitude towards wildlife conservation improved which is a win-win for conservation efforts.
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- In the Tiger Reserves that were surveyed, the total revenue generated from entry fees alone was over Rs 19 crore annually.
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- This was almost on par with the individual contributions of the state and central governments.
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What is the best way forward?

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- Exclusionary models of conservation is not feasible over a larger landscape outside the small isolated pockets.
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- To take tiger conservation beyond the protected areas, we need to look at new, parallel and complementary models for conservation.
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- Seeing ‘nature tourism’ as an effective solution rather than a threat makes prudent sense in this regard.
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- Improving ‘program planning and waste disposal’ at tourism sites could potentially enhance benefits.
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- While ecological damage due to tourism aided real-estate ventures is indeed a risk, strict vigil could keep it in check.
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- Notably, the footprint of eco-tourism is much lighter than other developmental initiatives.
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Source: Business Standard

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