

Ecotourism Push Balancing Growth & Conservation

Uttar Pradesh has over 40 ecotourism destinations grouped under nine ecotourism circuits which attract a large number of visitors. Among wildlife destinations, Dudhwa Tiger Reserve and Pilibhit Tiger Reserve remain the most popular, while Chuka has emerged as one of the state's fastest-growing ecotourism destinations. Though ecotourism has expanded steadily, the growth has been accompanied by a strong focus on environmental conservation and community participation.

Infra Development at Chuka Beach

Visitor infrastructure at Chuka Beach in Pilibhit has been developed with minimal disturbance to natural habitats. Construction activity has been carefully regulated and confined to designated zones. Nature-based experiences, rather than large-scale commercial infrastructure, remain the central attraction of the site, sources in the UP Ecotourism Board said.

Chuka Beach is situated on the banks of the Sharda river within the broader Pilibhit Tiger Reserve landscape, where tiger numbers have increased from 25 in 2018 to 65 in recent years. Bamboo huts, Tharu huts and tree huts add to the visitor experience.

"The model demonstrates how tourism development can coexist with biodiversity conservation, habitat protection and sustainable livelihood generation," said Jaiveer Singh, minister for tourism and culture.

He added that the objective is to promote tourism in a manner that protects ecosystems, supports local communities and encourages responsible travel.

Additional chief secretary, tourism, culture and religious affairs, Amrit Abhijat, said tourism planning is

increasingly being guided by long-term environmental considerations.

"The objective is to ensure that tourism growth strengthens environmental protection rather than compromising it," he said.

Chuka received 44,314 visitors during the 2025-26 ecotourism season up to May 2026. Another example of environmentally responsible tourism is the Vistadome rail journey between Bichhia and Palia Kalan near the Dudhwa landscape. The journey offers visitors views of forests, wetlands and grasslands through an existing rail corridor rather than requiring new tourism infrastructure.

Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, which forms part of the Terai Arc Landscape spread across India and Nepal, comprises 86 wetlands, over 120 tree species, more than 100 species of herbs and shrubs, rare orchids and extensive grasslands that support swamp deer and other wildlife. At other ecotourism destinations as well, eco-friendly infrastructure, green

mobility solutions and community-led tourism initiatives are being promoted.

Dudhwa: A Model of Sustainability

Participation of Tharu community has emerged as a key component of the tourism ecosystem. Residents are increasingly becoming stakeholders in conservation-linked economic activities.

Tourism has helped generate alternative sources of income while reducing dependence on unsustainable extraction of forest resources.

The Dudhwa landscape supports more than 30 registered Tharu homestays across villages including Chandan Chauki, Gobraula, Bankati, Singhiya, Najhota and Parsiya. Sustainability efforts are also focused on awareness generation. Nearly 3,000 students have participated in over 50 curated ecotourism tours across 53 districts at various destinations.

Unique Destinations

Salkhan Fossil Park in Sonbhadra represents a unique geotourism destination. It contains fossil formations estimated to be nearly 1.4 billion years old, making it one of the oldest fossil sites in the world and one of Uttar Pradesh's most distinctive tourism assets.

Pilibhit Tiger Reserve and

Chuka offer a rare combination of 'sal' forests, the Sharda Sagar reservoir, riverfront accommodation, Tharu huts and rich birdlife.

Driving Revenue Growth

At Chuka Ecotourism Zone, tourism-linked economic activity has grown significantly over the years. In recent tourism seasons, revenue generated through accommodation, entry fees, boating and associated visitor services has crossed Rs 1 crore, reaching Rs 1.14 crore, making it one of the strongest examples of ecotourism-led local economic activity in the state.

Promotion of homestays is creating direct income opportunities for rural families while encouraging visitors to engage with local culture and traditions. Ecotourism has strengthened the local economy while simultaneously creating incentives for wildlife and habitat conservation.

It is also helping preserve traditional knowledge, local cuisines and indigenous cultural practices by integrating them into the visitor experience.

New Destinations

Around 23 new development projects are currently being planned across different regions of Uttar Pradesh.

Upcoming projects include the Dudhwa Interpretation Centre, the Chittora Lake Ecotourism Project in Bahraich, Kusmhi Jungle Ecotourism Development in Gorakhpur and the second phase of Rapti Eco Park in Firozabad.

The redevelopment plans also include lake and wetland destinations such as Darwan Lake, Baghar Lake, Suraha Tal, Sohrauna Tal, Bakhira Lake and Samda Lake.

The tourism and forest departments operate as joint nodal agencies for ecotourism development, enabling better coordination. Planning, funding and execution processes have become significantly more streamlined.

With the chief minister chairing the Board and the chief secretary heading its executive committee, decision-making and inter-departmental coordination have become considerably faster.

