

Advances in Earth and Environmental Science

Environment Education Activities in Shivrajpur Blue Flag Beach of India

Ritesh Joshi¹, Alap Pandit² and Kanchan Puri^{1*}¹Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, New Delhi – 110003, India²GEER Foundation, Gandhinagar - 382 007, India

*Corresponding author

Kanchan Puri,
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change,
New Delhi,
India

Submitted : 24 May 2024 ; Published : 13 Jun 2024

Citation: Joshi, R.. et al. (2024). Environment education activities in Shivrajpur Blue Flag beach of India. *Adv Earth & Env Sci*; 5(2):1-3. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.47485/2766-2624.1045>**Abstract**

Blue Flag beach is an important eco-label programme of Foundation for Environmental Education. One of the main pillars of the Blue Flag programme is environmental and sustainability education. Presently India has 12 Blue flag beaches. This note indicates about the environment education event at one of the blue flag beach i.e. Shivrajpur beach located at Devbhumi Dwarka, Gujarat. Gujarat was one of the top 10 States of India in the year 2022 in respect of number of foreign tourist visits. This eco-label shall help the tourism sector (beach tourism/coastal areas) in the State to further grow keeping in view of environmental management systems. It is important to enhance the beauty and grandeur of such blue flag beaches of India keeping in view the regulatory mechanism for conserving coastal environment.

Keywords: Shivrajpur, Blue flag beach, Environment education, coastal ecosystem, Gujarat India**Introduction**

Coastal areas are a complex physical interface system between marine and terrestrial environments. Evolution of coastal beach systems depend on many factors that are different in nature and magnitude. The ability to adapt to dynamic change is related to preservation of coastal beaches (Mir-Gual et al., 2015). Coastal tourism management is a set of actions in order to achieve certain tourism purposes in the coastal area, by combining material and social resources (Yepes & Medina, 1997; Mir Gual et al., 2015). Blue Flag beach is an important eco-label programme of Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), Denmark which is an independent organization. To achieve this coveted eco-label, a series of rigorous environmental, educational, safety criteria are required to be qualified and certify its environment quality. 51 countries around the world have recognized the Blue flag programme. South Africa was the first country to join the International Blue Flag. It is reported that this label promotes environmental sustainability and contributes to Sustainable development goals. One of the main pillars of the Blue Flag programme is environmental and sustainability education which provides opportunities to enhance learner understandings, question environmental problems and take action for environmental change in pursuit of a sustainable development (FEE).

Environment Education can be defined as a process of developing a community that is aware of, concerned about, the total environment and its associated paradigms and which has the knowledge, attitudes, commitments and skills to work individually and collectively towards the situation of current problems and prevention of new ones

(Sonowal, 2009). In order to challenge local authorities and sites operators to achieve high standards in water quality, environmental management, environmental education and safety, this eco-label fosters environmental education activities through which people gain an all-round locally relevant or placed-based education. According to FEE, EE activities are classified into a) Information-seeking or enquiry: Learners are encouraged to ask questions about the environment and gather information or materials, b) Awareness-raising: focused on raising a learner's awareness about environmental problems, c) Action-oriented: approach based on environmental change and improvement, example is litter picking; d) Contact with nature / experiential / exploratory: Experiential approaches to environmental education are often based outside, in the particular environment in question, and seek to inspire learners to care for the environment by encouraging contact with nature and exploration.

Blue Flag Beach in India

Environmental literacy is not just knowledge of environmental and ecological concepts but it incorporates a set of skills profound to carry out sustainable behaviours, attitude and concern for the environment which then result into profound motivation to perform environmental behaviours (Fah & Sirisena, 2014). Recently during the India's G-20 presidency (2023), roadmap for tourism highlighted five priorities viz. Green Tourism (for a sustainable, responsible and resilient tourism sector), Digitalization (harnessing the power of digitalization to promote competitiveness), Skills (empowering youth with skills for jobs and entrepreneurship), Nurturing tourism in

Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises /Startups/private sector to unleash innovation and Destination management for achieving SDGs (Ministry of Tourism). A “Clean” beach is the primary indicator of coastal environmental quality, management and economic health of beach tourism. Presently India has 12 Blue flag beaches viz. Minicoy Thundi beach and Kadmat beach in Lakshadweep, Shivrajpur in Gujarat, Ghogla in Diu, Kasarkod and Padubidri in Karnataka, Kappad in Kerala, Eden beach in Puducherry, Kovalam in Tamil Nadu, Rushikonda in Andhra Pradesh, Golden beach in Odisha, Radhanagar in Andaman and Nicobar. With regard to environmental education and information, these beaches provide a map of the beach and rules that are pertinent to the beach; information on the Blue Flag; information on the bathing water quality; information on local ecosystems; and environmental education activities. Water quality meets imperative standards of total coliforms counts. Environmental management encompasses a high standard of beach cleanliness including bins, litter picking, and recycling to promote sustainable ways of waste disposal; a high standard of hygiene on the beach. Safety and services standards with adequate number of lifeguards on the beach, first-aid equipment, safe access to the beach. Under the Beach Environment and Aesthetic Management Service (BEAMS) project, MoEFCC; activities are undertaken in these Blue flag beaches like Physical, chemical & biological testing & monitoring of bathing water quality; Solid waste management (plastic waste handed over to the municipality recycler) and organic waste is recycled on site through bio-composting, provisions of bio toilets (treated grey water used for irrigation), safe drinking water, Solar PV plant, plantation with the native species, Bamboo made environment friendly sitting benches and proper lighting system along the beach (Annual Report, MoEFCC).

Environmental education possesses the potential to educate authorities responsible for beach management; inform the public on critical coastal issues; and instigate pro-environmental behaviour. The importance of environmental education has been emphasised in the literature as one of the best features of beach rating schemes, including the Blue Flag (Lucrezi, et al., 2015). Parameters i.e. Physical, biological and sociological are required to establish beach quality indicators. As part of environment education event at Shivrajpur beach located at Devbhumi Dwarka, Gujarat Educational Webinar on Beach Profile: A Step Towards Sand Dune Restoration was organized.



Figure 1: Students participated in the EE activities in Shivrajpur beach, Gujarat



Figure 2: Entrance of Shivrajpur Beach, Gujarat

The beach profiling was informed to enable participants to understand the beach processes leading to environment protection as well as conservation of sand dunes. Information on importance of sand dunes provided as the first line of defense against the ravages of the sea plays a vital role in restricting saline intrusion into the groundwater of coastal regions. Quiz was organized for the students, were appreciated with eco-friendly gifts. With every wrong answer, the correct answer was explained. Additionally painting competition arranged and participants enthusiastically painted their perceptions over the canvas on the theme “Save My Beach” under the central focal theme “I AM SAVING MY BEACH”. Furthermore, they were also given more information about Shivrajpur Beach by Beach Manager, Shivrajpur Beach. Uniqueness of the beach for the sustainable practices implemented on the beach was explained like use of biodegradable waste, use of renewable energy at the beach, safety measures for tourists, segregation of non-biodegradable waste and its recycling etc.

One of the top 10 States of India in 2022 w.r.t number of foreign tourist visits (20.7%) was Gujarat [India Tourism Statistics]. This eco-label shall help the tourism sector (beach tourism/coastal areas) in the State to further grow keeping in view of environmental management systems. Such beaches shall help in improving the environmental features of the area. It is important that the quality of the beach is maintained and not degraded and also meets the expectation of visitors.

Conclusion

Effective and meaningful environmental education is a challenge to be taken seriously if future generations want to enjoy the benefits of quality life and natural heritage [Hudson, 2001]. It is important that participants are involved in the environment education activities to understand the coastal ecosystem and develop critical thinking for achieving sustainability. Such endeavour set up benchmarks for sustainable eco-tourism models across coastal stretches of the country and nudge visitors to adopt sustainable practices. It is important to enhance the beauty and grandeur of such blue flag beaches of India keeping in view the regulatory mechanism for conserving coastal environment.

Acknowledgement: We would like to thank Director – Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation, other staff members and especially the school students for successful environment education event at Shivrajpur beach.

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