



Report on the ecotourism assessment of Popa Mountain Park



Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division

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Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association

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1. Introduction

Popa Mountain is the only prominent extinct volcano in Myanmar. Popa Mountain Park was first established as Popa Reserved Forest in 1902 and declared as Popa Mountain Park in 1989 to maintain its regionally unique ecosystem dominated by dry mixed deciduous forest and conserve the watershed area of Kyetmauk Taung Dam. Mount Popa is famed for high plant diversity and a source of medicinal plants. A volcanic plug, called Taung-kalat, at the western foot of Mount Popa is a prominent landmark. It is one of the most famous religious sites in Myanmar and several thousand people visit each year for religious and tourism purposes.

There are very few populations of small mammals such as wild dogs (*Cuon alpinus*), Muntjac (*Muntiacus muntjak*), Wild Pigs (*Sus scrofa*), and monkeys (*Macaca assamensis*, *Presbytis phayrei*). Many globally threatened species of mammals are recorded in the area (Eld's Deer, Dusky Langur, Capped Langur, Dhole). The deciduous dipterocarp forest (Indaing) and the dry forest (Than Dahat) are the main forest types of the site.

Popa Mountain is a famous tour site of Myanmar and many local and foreign tourists visit Popa throughout the year due to its good location on the way to or from famous ancient Bagan pagodas. Most only pay a one-day visit to the Nats temples and have a walk in the mountain trails. Restaurants are available inside the area as well as a government guest house and a private luxury hotel for overnight guests.

2. Objective

- To assist in carrying out local development activities by means of the ecotourism based on Popa Mountain Park.
- To develop the community oriented ecotourism, based on Popa Mountain Park.
- To promote jobs and incomes opportunities for local residents.

3. Current situation and opportunity for ecotourism

Popa Mountain Park is one of the 21 areas which specified as the ecotourism sites of Myanmar. The location of Popa Mountain Park is only the forested area of the Dry Zone of central Myanmar and Popa being the only extinct volcano, as a distinctive geographical feature.

As Mt. Popa is in the midst of a plain of comparatively level country, one can have a panoramic view of the scenery. So Popa Mountain Park has become one of the tour attractive areas of both national and international visitors.

Besides, Popa is an area where the feasts of Nats (Spirit gods) held annually lay the Nat worshippers in Myanmar. The feast of Min Maha Ghiri Spirit (Lord of the Great Mountain) is held in November and the feast of Aba Bomin Gaung, the great shaman, is held in August. At that time, Popa is teeming with the devotees, the Nat worshippers and the shamanists from every part of the country.

3.1 Road communication

Popa Mountain Park can be reached by car from Yangon to Popa. It is 410 miles by car from Yangon by the old route but it is 370 miles by car from Yangon by the new route.

Popa can also be reached by car via Kyauk padaung which is about 10 miles from Popa. For the travellers who wish to go by air, can make a journey from Yangon to Nyaung Oo by plane and then he can proceed by car to Popa. Popa is 30 miles by car from Nyaung Oo throughout the season. And it is 160 miles by car from Mandalay.

3.2 Opportunity for recreation

The luxuriant vegetation of the Mt. Popa Park is ever green and lush. Popa Mountain Park, in the Dry Zone, like an oasis which has attractive scenery. A visitor can enjoy the splendid view of the surroundings of Mt. Popa.

At the edge of Poap Mountain Park, there is Popa Mountain Resort that belongs to Htoo Group of Companies. The Popa Mountain Resort has (17) villas and (55) bedrooms and can give a good accommodation of (110) visitors. The visitors can do horseback riding and swimming for recreation at the Resort. It is learnt that the contract specified the Resort area was free from impact on the ecology and the environment. (Sources: Popa Mountain Park and Htoo Group of Companies)

3.3 Opportunity for research

3.3.1 Hiking in the forest

There is a ring road, which is 19 miles and 2 furlongs in length, built around the Popa mountainside. By hiking along the circle around the mountain, one can enjoy the scenic beauty of the surroundings.

3.3.2 Mountaineering and camping

Mt. Popa consists of a series of peaks, some rising up to 4000 feet, such as Mt. Hman pya, the highest peak (4981 ft), Mt. Sapar pon (4801 ft), and Mt, Sae Mon (4501 ft). The visitor interested in mountaineering can climb these mountains.

3.4 Opportunity to study the physical feature of the earth

Mt. Popa is the only extinct volcano in Myanmar and it has many ridges, ravines and valleys.

Its crater is 1968 feet deep and the mountain has an area of 25 square miles at the base.

As there is a distinctive geological feature in the surroundings of Mt. Popa, the geologist can make a survey in the area.

3.5 Opportunity to study the types of forest

There are six different types of forest which include upper Mixed Deciduous Forest, Lower Mixed Deciduous Forest, Indaing Forest, Dry forest, Pine Forest and Grass land.

3.5.1 Opportunity to study the natural vegetation

There are (300) tree species including Teak, Pyinkado (Iron Wood), Thitya, Ingyin. Moreover (86) orchid species, (10) bamboo species and the wild flowering plants which are in bloom according to the season can be studied.

3.5.2 Opportunity to study the valuable medicinal plants

Popa Mountain Park is an area where many kinds of medicinal plants are grown. As for those who wish to study the medicinal plants, (363) species of medicinal plants can be studied at the medicinal plants garden that was founded by Popa Mountain Park, and at the medicinal plants library. Moreover, other medicinal plants which grow naturally in the vicinity of Mt. Popa can be studied.

3.6 An opportunity to study the wild fauna

There are (15) mammalian, species such as Sambar Deer, Barking Deer, Wild Boar, Wild dog (Dhole), Jackal, Dusky Leaf monkey, Capped Langur, Rhesus Macaque, different kinds of Jungle cats, Siamese hare, Bat, Northern tree shrew and Squirrel.

Moreover, (185) species of birds such as kite, Pied Harrier, shikra, Emerald Dove, Oriental Turtle-Dove, Common Hoopoe, Black Drongo including endemic species of white throated Babbler. And (112) butterfly species can be studied at Popa Mountain Park.

Especially the endangered species of Dusky leaf monkey, whose typical habitat is in the vicinity of crater can be studied closely in their habitat.

3.7 Study of Captive deer

Six deer and two sambars are reared in the compound of 17.46 acres of Sandalwood forest. The deer and sambars can be studied in their nature. There are 2 buck deer, 4 doe deer and 2 sambars in the enclosure. Though they are reared naturally, being all male are impossible for their reproduction.

3.8 Study of Nature Conservation exhibition

After looking at the model of Popa Mountain Park at the Nature Conservation exhibition of Popa Mountain Park, a visitor can have information on the general location of the Popa area. Besides, the elaborate displays in the exhibition are the performances of the Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division which include the existing protected area in Myanmar, the activities of the wildlife conservation and the fauna and flora in Popa Mountain Park area.

These are displayed by maps, photographs and taxidermy of wild animals. The fossils and the natural resources of the Mt. Popa area can also be studied there.

At the audio-video room, the educational programme on the biodiversity and the nature conservation can be enjoyed.

3.9 Opportunity to study the tradition and cultural Heritage of Myanmar

The spirit shrines, in the surroundings of the tazza - shaped hill of the Mt. Taungkalett of Mt. Popa (2417 ft) can be seen. The feast of Min Maha Ghiri (Spirit Lord of the Great Mountain) which is held in November and the feast of Aba Bomin Gaung , the great Shaman, which is held in August can also be seen at Mt. Popa.

3.10 Opportunity to the study the natural beauty in the vicinity of the Kyet Mauk

Taung Dam

Kyet Mauk Taung Dam lies at a distance of 6.5 miles to the South- east of Kyauk padaung. From the embankment of the dam, the scene on the water, the view to Mt. Popa and the scenic beauty of the pleasant surroundings are the most entrancing sights. One can visit the Kyet Mauk Taung Dam and stop to admire the scenery.

3.11 Threats which take effects on ecotourism

3.11.1 Reckless disposal of rubbish

The villages in the vicinity of Popa Mountain Park use plastic bags and paper bags to protect the fruits such as mangoes, guavas, which produced from their own farms, from insect attack.

The villagers get used to throwing used bags at the roadside. Besides at the season of the feast, the traveller through the area of Mt. Popa and more rubbish is thrown heedlessly.

3.11.2 An increase of visitors and vehicles

As some roads are built which link with the nearby villages in the main wildlife reserve area, the traffic can cause disturbance to the wildlife, especially in breeding season.

3.11.3 Pasturing of domestic animals

Nearby villages are used to releasing the domestic animals such as cattle, goats including the dogs into the Park. The natural seedlings are destroyed by the domestic animals. The domestic animals can cause disturbance to the wildlife breeding. They can also cause soil impaction and erosion and the spreading diseases to wild fauna.

3.11.4 Collection of minor forest products

There are lots of people who collect the minor forest products and the orchid in the open season and many people who collect mushroom and bamboo shoot in the rainy season. As many people collect these things, minor forest product is becoming rare gradually.

In addition to the above mentioned facts, an increase number of people coming into the Park, risk of unintended cutting of firewood and hunting can be committed.

4. Suggestions and Recommendations

There are many opportunities to carry out the ecotourism which is based on Popa Mountain Park. In order to have more effective action, the suggestions are given as under-

- To run a training course by subject wise for fauna and flora to the staff who are assigned to work with the researchers.
- To run a training course of foreign language especially English.
- To conduct a course of computer including GIS and Microsoft Excel.

- To build small buildings which can be stayed for a short time, at the proper place for research and at the viewpoint and to build the toilets.
- To dispose of rubbish systematically, by setting up the notice - signposts and by placing of dustbins.
- To advertise ecotourism with brochures based on Popa Mountain Park and through the media in order to be familiarize by the national and international visitors.
- To give information about the ecosystem in the Mt. Popa area. All the people in the country who are interested in conservation, including the educational enterprises and the media, all students in the surroundings of Popa Mountain park are trained in jungle camping and how to study the plants and animals. By teaching them practically, they will know the web of food chain of plants, animals and people to each other and to their environment.
- To give information about the ecosystem serviced rendered by Popa Mountain Park through the educational enterprises and the media.
- Although the detailed survey is not conducted for the evaluation of ecosystem services of Popa Mountain Park, water from the water sources of Mt. Popa has been supplying to Kyauk padaung township many years ago to the present. At present it is recorded that 7218 households and 8616 persons in Kyauk padaung Township are supplied 1,194,550 gallons (1.2 million gallons) of water per year. (Source; T D C)



Scenery of Mt.Popa and Popa Taung Kalat



Scenery of Kyet Mauk Taung Dam and Mt.Popa



Scenery of Mt. Popa Crater



Scenery of Mt.Popa



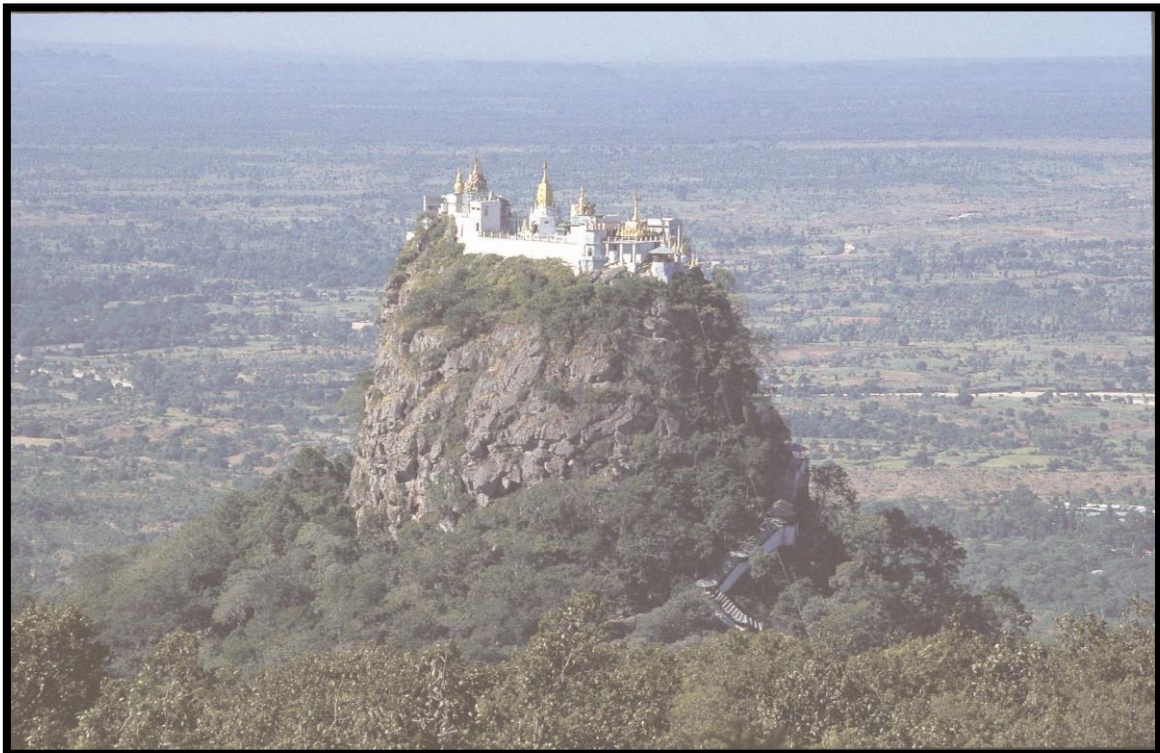
Natural Forests that are conserved in the Popa Mountain Park



Deers that are conserved naturally in Popa Mountain Park



Scenery of Popa Taung Kalat



Scenery of Popa Taung Kalat



Scenery of Popa Mountain Resort



Scenery of Popa Taung Kalat and Nature Forests

Orchids that can be studied in Popa Mountain Park



Vanda coeruluscens



Papilionanthe teres



Aerides multiflorum



Hygrochilus parishii



Dendrobium chrysotoxum



Renanthera imschootiana