

Kerala – on the Path towards Sustainable Development

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Abstract:

Throughout the world, Tourism has been recognised as having a very significant part in creating employment opportunities, reducing poverty, leading to a balanced regional development, earning foreign exchange, promoting industries like handicrafts, gems and jewellery, spices etc. and helping in boosting up the economic development of any country. India, and in particular the state of Kerala is fast moving ahead in this regard. Even though the state has turned up to be a promising tourist destination for many national and international tourists, over last few years there is loud cries for sustainability in tourism. The depletion of natural resources at an alarming rate, overcrowding of tourist places, environment pollution have all lead to increased significance for nature friendly and sustainable approach in tourism. As more and more tourist locations are been termed as unexplored, natural and exotic, the service providers and government officials need to be aware that its outcome might turn out to be more of a paradoxical one. The service providers and the Government in particular will be forced to remarket and refashion these destinations or to discover new places. It is in this context, a sustainable approach to tourism lies very relevant. The present study focuses on a conceptual understanding of the term sustainable tourism, to analyse the various sustainable tourism development strategies adopted in the state and to identify the hurdles faced in the implementation of sustainable tourism.

Key words: Tourism, sustainable tourism, environmental and cultural impact.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the major tools for economic prosperity (Manoj & Viswanath, Eco-tourism and sustainable development in keraka: some Empirical Evidence, 2015) .It contributes immensely towards employment generation and the economic development of a country. The Tourism sector alone accounted for 10.4 % of the global GDP and was instrumental in creating 319 million jobs or 10% of the total employment generated in 2018 (WTTC, 2019) Over the last few decades India is being recognised as one the popular tourist destinations around the world. Tourism has been contributing significantly to the foreign exchange reserves of the country. According to the India-Tourism statistics the number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India during 2018 was 10.56 Million ,showing an Annual Growth Rate 5.2% , the Foreign Exchange Earnings from Tourism was -INR terms `1,94,892 Crores and Annual Growth Rate was 9.6% (Ministry of Tourism, 2019).

However, India has to go a long way to be one among the Top Ten Countries by International Tourist arrivals, while in the Asia Pacific Region India comes only 7th (WTO, 2018) as cited in (Norton, 1987).Indian is still only 34th in the world rankings according to

Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019, published by World Economic Forum (WEF). The Indian Tourism Industry has to be more competitive and show professional standards in all areas including accommodation and transport. In addition to all these there are serious exploitations on the environment, causing serious damages to the natural beauty, the flora and fauna, the natural treasures and the historical monuments. The huge demands of tourism industry causes severe negative impacts on the local community. All these have contributed to an urgent need for sustainable tourism, which gives focus on the sustainability of environment and the local culture. The paper focuses on the need for sustainability of tourism in Kerala.

Statement of the Problem

The Tourism sector is instrumental in raising the standards of lakhs of people around the globe. The case of tourism in India, especially in the case of Kerala can be considered as one of the classic examples in this regard. However, the increase in FDI and improvements in the standard of living and cannot be at the cost of environment and local people. The negative impacts of tourism have there for highlighting the need for sustainability by adopting environment friendly strategies.

The adverse impacts of exploitation of environment are evident in the floods that truck the state of Kerala for the last two consecutive years. There is alarming rate of reduction in the natural resources, adverse effects on the flora and fauna and the like. Therefore the study is relevant, and it focuses on the sustainability tourism measures implemented in the state.

Objectives of the Study

- 1) To make a conceptual understanding of the term sustainable tourism
- 2) To analyse the sustainable tourism development initiatives adopted in the state.

Methodology of the Study

The study is purely based theoretical aspect of sustainable tourism and does an overview of concept of sustainable tourism. A critical literature review was done from various research papers, internet sources and books. The study analyses the various problems that led to the pressing need for sustainable tourism along with various initiatives taken in path towards sustainable tourism in Kerala.

Organization of the Paper

The paper is divided into 3 portions .Part-I deal with the first a conceptual understanding about the sustainable tourism. Part-II deals with the strategies adopted by the state of Kerala in Sustainable tourism. Part-III discusses the steps which are required for implementing the sustainable tourism strategy, followed by suggestions in this regard.

Sustainable tourism – A conceptual understanding:

Tourism is recognised as one of the major sectors in the world economy. As the people are having more purchasing power they spend more on leisure activities (Manoj, 2016). Travellers who specifically choose the natural areas prefer so, in order to experience the natural beauty in spite of choosing different activities (Norton, 1987). All the tourism activities must have a sustainable approach and should try to satisfy the local community without putting any pressure on the environment (Lane, 1991). So, a proactive approach is required to protect the natural treasures of the country. It is here that sustainability of natural resources and preserving the local culture is important.

The Term Sustainable Tourism has evolved from the philosophy of sustainable development which came to be popular in a publication -Our Common Future of (WCED) in 1987. The report was popularly referred to as Brundtland report, which stressed on a multilateral support for improving co-operation, awareness and to bring forth a balanced approach to development (Dowling, 1993) (Ruhanen, Weiler, Moyle, Lennan, & CJ, 2015) "which is instrumental in meeting the present needs without showing any compromise in needs of future generations" (WCED, 1987). Later the term was widely used in the industry in order to minimise the exploitations in the pretext of tourism. (Bramwell & Lane, 2012) (Saarinen, 2006)

Sustainable tourism, often also been referred as Responsible Tourism, Green Tourism, Eco-Tourism and Ethical Tourism. Sustainable Tourism should be able to manage the resources that ensures the economic, social aesthetic wants are been satisfied along with preserving the culture, ecological balance and the biodiversity.

Sustainable tourism involves developing the tourism by preserving the culture and the natural resources which is intended to give due respect to the residents of the area. It intends to make tourism more sustainable. Sustainable tourism is very closely associated with responsible tourism and intends to generate employment opportunities and giving a wider impact on environment as well as the local culture.

Characteristics of sustainable Tourism:

1. Sustainable Tourism tries in conserving the destinations and its resources.
2. Sustainable Tourism helps to maintain the local tradition and cultural values of the residents.
3. It ensures more involvement from the local people and helps them in earning a living.

(Manoj, Sustainable Tourism in India: A study from a global perspective with focus on tourism prospects of Kerala, 2008) has pointed out the following points as well:

1. Sustainable Tourism is concerned with travelling to natural places more purposefully to understand the history and cultural heritage of the place.
2. It aims at the betterment of the local population.
3. Sustainable tourism involves enjoying the natural beauty, specific species or any landscape.

4. Sustainable Tourism is intended to preserve the biodiversity of a region.
5. Sustainable Tourism aims at preserving the natural resources for the coming generations.

According to the World Commission on Environment and Development Sustainable development aims at meeting the wants of present generation without any compromise on preserving it so that coming generations can use it (Brundtland, 1987). Responsible tourism tries to find answers to the environmental and the socio-economic issues of a destination for its long term sustainability (Anu, 2019). Responsible Tourism is about ‘making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit’ (Cape Town Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, March 22,2012)

Responsible Tourism is concerned with reducing the negative impacts due to environmental, economical and social impacts, thereby contributing towards the wellbeing of destinations by participating local communities in all its activities which would affect their lives (Miriyala, 2016). Social, Economical and Environmental aspects are considered to be the three pillars for tourism initiatives. For achieving the Sustainability objective, green growth can be considered as one of the effective strategies, as it involves reduction of carbon emissions, green technology for reducing the negative impact on climate, conservation of bio diversity etc. It involves integrating various innovative green strategies for sustainable development (Anu, 2019).

The term green growth refers to- one which involves both sustainable development which includes environmental protection, climate change along with tackling economic issues like poverty eradication, especially in case of developing economies (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development(OECD), 2012).

‘Green Growth’ approach involves efficient use of natural resources, reducing environmental impacts, effective utilisation of natural resources (Jacobs, 2012) (UNEP, 2011).The Green Growth vision 2050 reminds the need for conserving the resources of the earth , reducing the carbon emissions, proper management of the resources and protecting the biodiversity (Lipman & Vorster, 2011)

The following are the implications of green growth.

Economic Outcomes	Improved and fair disseminated GDP of traditional goods and services.
	More and more acceptance on eco-friendly innovations.
	Improved manufacture of low priced eco-friendly services and encourages its use.
	Heterogeneity of economic resources.
Environmental Outcomes	Improved productivity and use of eco-friendly resources.

	Decrease the pressure on environment.
	Efficient and effective use of natural capital.
	Increased use of alternative capital with the employment of non-renewable natural capital.
Social Outcomes	Improved income and standard of living of the poor.
	Helps poor people to be more sustained with better employment opportunities.
	Improved social and intellectual capital.
	Able to reduce discriminations.

Table 1: Green growth Outcomes, Source: OECD Green Growth for Developing countries 2012

Sustainable tourism in India:

In the Tourism Policy 2002, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has stressed the need for sustainability and the need for super segments like eco-tourism, heritage tourism and cultural tourism in the tourism market. Special provisions have been made in the tourism policy for improved socio-economic benefits to the locals by providing better employment opportunities. Kerala is one of the first states to implement the sustainable tourism objective.

Kerala: The God's Own country

Kerala - 'God's Own Country', is one of the prominent tourism destinations in India (Ebitu.E, 2010) (Radhakrishnan, 2006). Kerala is ranked as 8th among the 12 by The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) in its Travel Trends Report 2017. Kerala is famous for its diverse tourist attractions like backwaters, hill stations, coastal belts, beaches etc. The state announced its first tourism policy in 1995, stressing on the importance of public-private partnership. The Department of Tourism in its Vision 2015 aims at developing Kerala as a world class tourism destination through efficient and effective use of resources focussing on a comprehensive development of the infrastructure by protecting the natural resources and the heritage with improvements in employment generation and standard of living, thereby improving the socio-economic sector without pressurising the environment (Department of Tourism, 2012).

About 16.7 million tourists visited Kerala as against 15.76 million during the previous year, showing an increase of 5.93 percent. The state was able to generate a revenue of 36,528.01 crores from the tourism sector in 2018, showing an increase of 2,874.33 crores from the previous year. The share from foreign tourists touched Rs 8,764.46 crores from 1.09 million. This growth is achieved despite of the devastating flood that has shocked the entire tourism sector. (Department of Tourism, 2018). Four popular destinations of Kovalam,

Kumarakom, Thekkady and Vythiri in Kerala were selected as a part of responsible tourism in 2007 and many activities were initiated with a tag name of 'Better Together' (Anu, 2019). The need for public-private participation in initiating innovative practices was given focus on in the second International Conference on Responsible Tourism (Frey & George, 2010).

II. Sustainable Tourism development initiatives.

1. Campaign to regenerate the mangrove cultivation in Kumarakom.

Mangroves are known for its roots which help the coastal areas to be protected from erosion in high waves and tsunami tides. Numerous hotels and resorts in Kumarakom had very bad impact on the mangroves, which adversely affected the local people since it protected the coastal area from soil erosion and acted as breeding grounds for fish. As a part of the Responsible tourism initiative thousands of mangroves were planted with the help of local people and they were made aware of the benefits of mangrove in the area.

2. Campaigns among locals to stop littering in the area and drop plastic waste only in bins and reduce the use of plastic.

3. Promote agriculture.

Farming was one of the major source of revenue to the locals before a century ago. With the high cost of production and very low yield, many residents quit agriculture and shifted to other means of livelihood. As part of the responsible tourism , the local people in kumarakom were encouraged to take up farming , with the Kudumbashree units initiating paddy cultivation and growing vegetables for the local hotels and restaurants (Anu, 2019).

4. Lotus cultivation and Fish farming.

The residents were encouraged to adopt fish farming and lotus cultivation in ponds that were un- used for many years. It helped them to protect the environment and provided them with economic benefit also (Manoj P. , 2010).

5. Various community awareness programmes were initiated

Various campaigns were initiated to make local people aware of child labour, prostitution, exploitation etc (Anu, 2019).

6. Issue of certificates

To encourage the resorts and hotels to follow the sustainable tourism drive forward the Tourism Department has decided to issue certificates. It is aimed to develop an environment friendly habit among the service providers.

Four responsibility centres have been formed and a score of 1000 was divided among the hotels and resorts which initiates sustainable development(200), take up cultural protection(250) , Economic management(250) and Environmental protection (300). The

properties were then classified as Platinum, Gold and Silver based on the respective scores they got (Department of Tourism,, 2012).

Sustainable tourism – Long ways to go:

1. A better participation of private as well as Government agencies :
Especially in case of a state like Kerala, there are many resource constraints, which can be tackled effectively with a better public private participation. The Government should give more preference to those service providers who comply with the quality of service, adopting effective pollution control techniques, taking steps for environmental protection, spreading awareness to locals and tourists in this regard. Steps should also be taken to ensure strict adherence to the law.
2. Providing better services to the tourists.
Sustainable tourism can be effectively implemented only by providing quality services to the local as well as international tourists. The state Government should take effective steps for a readily accessible information desk, hassle- free entry and exit, good sanitation facilities, Clean public toilets and tourism sites.
3. Creation of superior quality infrastructure facilities.
There is an urgent need for improvements in better quality infrastructural facilities like better roads, bridges and accommodation facilities which would provide a hassle free travel to the tourists. Providing better infrastructural facilities would benefit the local communities and they would show a welcome attitude only if they are also getting benefit out of tourism.
4. Tax concessions.
Encouragement should be provided so that more and more investors come and invest in the tourism sector. Ecotourism or sustainable tourism projects can be given more preference in this regard. Protecting the environment should be set as a the key precondition for providing tax concessions.
5. Effective use of IT infrastructure:
The use of internet has helped in faster dissemination of information at a well negligible price. It provides a wide reach for the marketing strategies adopted and brings in tourists from far places. It helps in providing better quality services to tourists (Manoj, 2008)
6. Easier Immigration.
In order to attract more foreign tourists Visa-on-Arrival, Visa-Free situation can be provided.
7. Better training facilities to the staff
The staff should be given better training facilities so that they can provide world class facilities. This ensures better competitiveness and a better and long-term sustainability.
8. Better co-operation from local community.
Government and other tourism service providers should ensure that the local community is being benefited from tourism. They should ensure steps to preserve the

local culture give more employment opportunities to the local people, help them preserving the tourism places.

9. Steps to popularise Kerala's unique culture, art forms, dance and Ayurveda.

Conclusion:

The integration responsible tourism for sustainability will improve the local community and enhance the travellers experience. It creates a positive feeling in the minds of all the interested parties. It helps in protecting the natural environment by increasing the socio-economic conditions of people. Tourism sector can flourish only with the sustainable development of the resources with the active participation of the local community. The Green growth concept helps in reducing the gaps in sustainable tourism and to reduce negative impacts of tourism development. By bringing together the concepts of green growth with responsible tourism we may be able to address the issues on environmental exploitation, For which a proactive approach of Government local residents tourists and the service providers is required.

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