

Developing Strategies and Measures Towards Sustainable Tourism in Kerala

George Sebastian*

*Department of Commerce (S.F), Kuriakose Elias College, Mannanam, Kottayam.
Email: georgesebastian@kecollege.ac.in

ABSTRACT

Kerala state is known for tourist destinations from North to South and has made decent revenue out of it in the last decades. Tourism is the backbone of the economy of the state since 1980s and has recently widened access through implication of responsible and eco- tourism projects. The annual budget of the state reserved funds for many of its tourism projects and is a major part of its capital revenue too. The rich heritage, rich natural topology, backwaters, mountains and terrains, food and dressing style, art and culture, basic amenities, statistical indices etc. promotes tourism in the state. The ill effects of improper planning and management of tourism destinations need to be addressed carefully. The paper studies the major ill effects of tourism and suggests measures to tackle it. Sustainable tourism practices need to be promoted and initiated in the state all of a sudden.

Keywords: Sustainable, Topography, Habitat, Socio- cultural, Environment.

INTRODUCTION

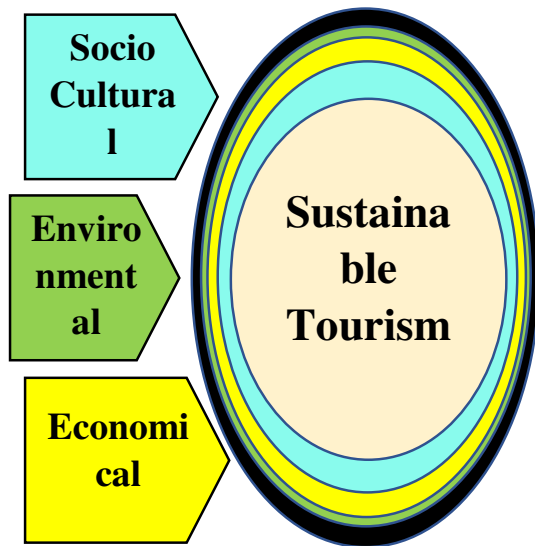
Kerala has got enormous natural resources and natural beauty which attracts tourists across the globe. The state spends large funds for tourism development and earns a large part of capital revenue through tourism industry. It is vital to find out whether our tourism practices are long lasting? Do we harm natural habitats? Does tourism disturb wildlife or local communities? How could we plan a tourism strategy which last long and have positive impact on our ecology? Sustainable tourism mode provides solution for all these concerns. Kerala model sustainable tourism strategies need to be developed. For this, proper studies should be conducted and actions should be taken. This paper is one such study on vital issues of Kerala model tourism and suggesting measures to make it sustainable.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Sustainable tourism is a broad term that covers all aspects of tourism along with concern and protection of nature. It covers concern for economic, socio cultural and environmental issues. It aims at improving tourist's experiences with concern for environment.

Stakeholders play an important role in activating and continuing this form of tourism. Stakeholders can include Government, organizations as well as individuals. Sustainable tourism is based on the concept that the community living around the destination are best suited to protect it. Local people can run the businesses in the premises and they are responsible for promoting awareness and conservation to protect the environment. Proper planning, development and management leads to Sustainable tourism. Different nations across the world have initiated proper steps in converting their tourism industry into a sustainable one which provides improved results at least harm to environment. United Nations and various environmental organisations have strictly warned some under developed nations to initiate sustainable model of tourism at the earliest. Ecological degradation is a matter of concern and sustainable model tourism has long term positive effects on environment. Global summits and regional associations of nations also have joined hands in bringing sustainable tourism models.

FACTORS AFFECTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



SOCIO CULTURAL FACTORS

Socio-cultural factors indicate how the natives or the local community of the tourism destination gets affected by tourism industry. The social outlook of the host community must be taken into consideration. Most of the well-known tourism destinations are considered unsustainable, there is lack of consideration for sustainable parameters, environment, wildlife and host communities. In order to initiate sustainable tourism, the aspects of culture and social life of local communities must be considered. Sustainable relationships among the stakeholders can be preserved through an inter related sociocultural environment. Local host and foreign guest cultures, both needs to be taken into account before taking an action.

Sustainable tourism is not only to maintain the ecological topography destination, socio-cultural aspects must also be considered with utmost care. It includes cherishing local culture and values, respecting their mentalities, places of worship, lifestyle, food patterns, dressing style, occupation and everything to worth their identity. Tourism is not comprised only of natural beauty, it also includes life on common man, living style, dressing style, food habits and more. Mass tourism should be substituted by quality tourism.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Pressure is mounted on natural resources when its consumption rises and availability is already scarce. Over use of water resources can end up in degradation of water resources and disposal of sewage and waste water. Land resources such as fertile soil, fossil fuels, forests, minerals and wildlife also get degraded through excess usage and waste disposal. Deforestation and land clearing has worse effects on forests. Disposal of waste is another serious problem in tourism destinations. Improper disposal spoils water bodies and natural sceneries. Trekking tourists dispose large amount of waste in mountain areas too. Construction of different facilities and hotels often leads to sewage pollution. Wastewater pollutes water bodies around tourist destinations, directly damaging the indigenous flora and fauna. Sewage pollution threatens the health of both humans and animals. Earth's surface temperatures have increased in the last two decades, because of rising amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Accumulation of carbon dioxide which is emitted from vehicles and burning, can cause global climate change, rising surface temperature in the upcoming years. Sustainable tourism considers all these matters and bring changes that are apt actions to be taken to tackle these ill effects.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Tourism is strongly motivated by economic factors. Tourism is a significant source of income for many countries. It provides employment for a large population directly and indirectly. How does government play their role in promoting tourism? Infrastructural development is necessary and Government has to spend a part of their income for the purpose. Also, Tourism generates revenue for government. As per the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism generated 6.8% of India's GDP in 2019-20.

Sustainable tourism requires more investment from part of government and national agencies in fields such as infrastructural development, promoting hygiene, security and awareness. Foreign

investors also prefer tourist destinations which follows sustainable tourism.

KERALA TOURISM

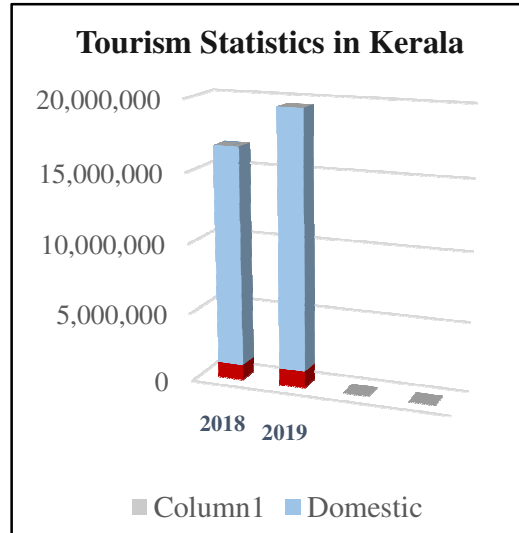
Kerala, popularly known as "God's Own Country", is one of the desirable tourist destinations across the globe. National Geographic Traveller named Kerala as one of the ten paradises of the world. Kerala state is well known especially for its ecotourism projects and vast spread backwaters. The culture and traditions here is unique, along with varied demography, which made Kerala one of the most selected tourism destinations in the world. Beautiful beaches, wild life sanctuaries and forests, hill stations, traditional art forms, festivals and rituals, ayurvedic resorts, the inland waterbodies; all promise a memorable holiday experience.

Till 1980s, Kerala was an unknown tourism destination compared to other destinations in India. In 1986, Kerala become the first state in India to declared tourism an important industry. Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC), the government agency for promotion of tourism in the state, designed and initiated marketing activities which later resulted in the rise of our tourism industry. The state witnessed steady growth in tourism sector until 2019. Kerala hosted for 1.96 crore tourists in the year 2019, highest ever in the past 24 years, with a growth rate of 17.2% of the previous year. In 2020, the rate declined due to COVID pandemic and nationwide lockdown.

TOURISM STATISTICS IN KERALA

	Number of Tourists 2018	Number of Tourists 2019	Variation from Previous Year
Foreign	1096,407	1189,771	+8.52 %
Domestic	15604,661	18384,233	+17.8 %
Total	16701,068	19574,004	14.67%

MEASURES TO INITIATE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



Sustainable tourism model should be initiated in the state with care. The following some measures that promote Sustainable tourism;

1. Raising awareness on environment protection along with generation of tourism opportunities is necessary for sustainable tourism. Tourism brings people into closer contact with nature and the environment. This confrontation will increase awareness about the value of nature. This initiates activities to preserve the environment and lead to environmentally conscious behaviour.
2. Development of infrastructure without disturbing ecology is advocated in sustainable tourism. Roads, bridges, amenities, stay areas: all are much required, but prime significance should be given to natural habitats and ecology.
3. Tourism is a major source of income and these funds should be utilised well for preservation and conservation of sensitive areas and ecology. Park fees, entrance fee, boating fee, accommodation, food charges and similar sources of funds can be allocated specifically to meet expenses for the protection and conservation of environmentally sensitive areas.
4. Management and planning of tourism facilities can increase benefits to sensitive natural areas. This requires careful planning of the environmental resources of the area.

By proper planning, damages and unwanted expenses can be prevented, preventing deterioration of environmental assets which are much required for tourism.

5. Preserving local folks and culture is very important component of sustainable tourism. Traditional food, art forms, rituals, dressing style etc attracts tourists. There is a need to preserve our art forms which are unique identity of various cultures in the state.
6. Promoting the participation of local communities would benefit the tourism projects. They should be given opportunities to make a living along with tourism development. Story tellers, demonstrators, guides, local parlours, heritage shops etc. should be promoted and these local communities should be made aware about Tourism needs to incorporate the principles and practices of sustainable consumption to meet long term needs. It includes building demand for products using clean manufacturing techniques, and for services that are provided with least environmental impacts.
7. Regulatory Measures Regulatory measures help offset negative impacts; for instance, controls on the number of tourist activities and movement of visitors within protected areas can limit impacts on the ecosystem and help maintain the integrity and vitality of the site. Such limits can also reduce the negative impacts on resources.

BENEFITS AND IMPACTS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MODEL

Sustainable Tourism model provides safe, harmless and long-term tourism possibilities for our state. Systematic approach can initiate changes in our tourism industry and bring sustainable results. The most important benefit of sustainable tourism is that it brings prosperity for local communities. It strengthens

the quality of life in local communities, including social structures and access to resources, amenities and life support systems, avoiding any form of social degradation or exploitation. Sustainable tourism advocates providing opportunities for local hosts to start businesses and work as guides and cleaning staffs in various tourist locations. It brings economic viability to our nation and state without harming environment.

By minimizing the pollution of air, water, land and the generation of waste by tourism enterprises and visitors, Sustainable tourism model assures environmental purity. Sustainable tourism model delivers quality tourism and delight in visitors. It provides satisfying, safe and mind fulfilling experience for all visitors without discrimination on the basis of language, race, gender, disability or in other ways.

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