

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TOURISM IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Kerala is one of the prominent tourist destinations of India with backwaters, hill stations, beaches, Ayurvedic tourism and tropical greenery. National Geographic's Traveller magazine listed Kerala in the 'Ten Paradises of the World' and '50 must visit places of a lifetime'. A unique advantage of Kerala is that most of the destinations here are only a two - four hour drive from the other destinations. Classical art forms, colourful festivals, exotic cuisine are some of the cultural marvels that await travellers. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine and Panchakarma, the rejuvenation therapy in Ayurveda have also helped Kerala to gain a pan-global reputation as a worth-visit destination. Season never ends in Kerala, thanks to the year-long moderate climate and numerous festivals and event. Kerala, "God's Own Country," is one of the hottest tourist's destinations of the world, attracting both domestic and international tourists. Growing at a rate of 13.31%, the tourism industry is a major contributor to the state economy. . Tourism Industry is the most energetic tertiary action and a multibillion industry in India.

KEYWORDS: God's Own Country, Eco Tourism, Responsible Tourism, Bio Diversity. Conservation

INTRODUCTION

Kerala is one of the prominent tourist destinations of India with backwaters, hill stations, beaches, Ayurvedic tourism and tropical greenery. National Geographic's Traveller magazine listed Kerala in the 'Ten Paradises of the World' and '50 must visit places of a lifetime'. Until the early 1980s, Kerala was a relatively unknown destination, with most tourism circuits concentrated around the north of the country. Aggressive marketing campaigns launched by the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation—the government agency that oversees tourism prospects of the state—laid the foundation for the growth of the tourism industry. In the decades that followed, Kerala Tourism was able to transform itself into one of the niche holiday destinations in India. The tag line Kerala – God's Own Country was adopted in its tourism promotions and became a global superbrand. Kerala is regarded as one of the destinations with the highest brand recall. In 2010, Kerala attracted 660,000 foreign tourist arrivals.

Kerala is a popular destination for both domestic as well as foreign tourists. Kerala is well known for its beaches, backwaters in Alappuzha and Kollam, mountain ranges and wildlife sanctuaries. Other popular attractions in the state include the beaches at Kovalam, Varkala, Kollam and Kappad; backwater tourism and lake resorts around Ashtamudi Lake, Kollam; hill stations and resorts at Munnar, Wayanad, Nelliampathi, Vagamon and Ponmudi; and national parks and wildlife sanctuaries at Periyar, Parambikulam and Eravikulam National Park. The "backwaters" region—an extensive network of interlocking rivers, lakes, and canals that centre on Ashtamudi Lake, Kollam, also see heavy tourist traffic. Heritage sites, such as the Padmanabhapuram Palace, Hill Palace, and Mattancherry Palace, are also visited. To further promote tourism in Kerala, the Grand Kerala Shopping Festival was started by the Government of Kerala in 2007. Since then it has been held every year during the December–January period.

Tourism is one of the few sectors where Kerala has clear competitive advantages as Kerala is considered as nature magic ranging from the Western Ghats covered with dense forests to the backwaters to the Arabian Sea. Its ancient rich culture including traditional dance forms and the strong presence of alternative systems of medicine add to its allure. Sustainable tourism is the mission. This can be achieved by integrating tourism with other parts of the economy like medical and health hubs which will attract more stable tourists over a longer period of time and with higher spending capacity. Infrastructure development is crucial. Tourism constitutes 10 per cent of Kerala's GDP, as per official statistics, and reportedly contributes around 23.5 per cent to the total employment in the state.

Kerala is the first state in India to declare tourism as an industry. The tourism policy documents of the central and state governments claim that Kerala tourism model is one of the most liberalised tourism models with the private sector leading tourism development.

Tourism can provide jobs and improve the wealth of an area. Many developing countries are keen to develop tourism in order to become richer and to improve the quality of life for their people. Kerala launched its tourism development programmes with the establishment of the international beach resort in Kovalam in 1976, with central government patronage. In the 1980s, the state government initiated Kerala tourism as a hospitality department. Recognising the huge economic potential of tourism in the state, the government declared tourism as an industry, vide an order dated July 11, 1986. Since then, the state government has extended several incentives, which were available to the investors in other industrial sectors, to the tourism sector, aimed at creating an investment-friendly atmosphere for tourism. The Tourism Department formed in 1958 renamed as the Department of Tourism in 1981 is the government agency responsible for the promotion, planning and development of tourism in the state. The infrastructure development schemes were implemented through line departments such as Irrigation Department, Public Works Department, Central Public Works Department etc and through Public Sector Units (PSUs) such as Kerala Tourism Development Corporation Ltd (KTDC), Kerala Industrial Technical Consultancy Organization (KITCO), Kerala Tourism Infrastructure Ltd (KTIL), Bekal Resorts Development Corporation Ltd (BRDC) etc.

There are both positive and negative effects on communities related to the economic impacts of tourism in their communities. A positive impact can refer to the increase in jobs, a higher quality of life for locals, and an increase in wealth of an area. Tourism also has the advantage of rebuilding and restoring historic sites and encouraging the revitalization of cultures.

Kerala has three international airports and one sea port (Kochi) connecting various parts of the country and globe. Even though the air travel charges are quite high, the good connectivity that the State enjoys, attracts both domestic and international tourists to the State, which increases the potential of the State's tourism sector, attracting both domestic and international tourists. Sustainable tourism provides tourism opportunities for visitors and jobs for locals while protecting the environment and culture from damaging change. This means that in the future, people will continue to enjoy and benefit from them.

Negative impacts are the effects, that are caused in most cases, at the tourist destination site with detrimental impacts to the social and cultural area, as well as the natural environment. Additionally, the economics of tourism have been shown to push out local tourism business owners in favour of strangers to the region. Tourism can raise property values near the tourism area, effectively pushing out locals and encouraging businesses to migrate inwards to encourage and take advantage of more tourist spending. Some countries rely heavily on tourism and this can be a problem if tourists stop coming. Sometimes tourist

numbers fall due to natural disasters such as floods or because of war or unrest. For example, some countries suffered from a fall in tourism after the 2004 Asian Tsunami and tourists were encouraged to leave Tunisia and Egypt during protests and unrest in 2011

Tourism has emerged as a lead sector of the Kerala economy, with its impact increasing in terms of economic growth and employment generated. The state government views tourism as one of the few alternatives available to develop the economy, especially in the context of limited prospects of the manufacturing sector, problems in the agricultural and traditional sectors, and the uncertainties facing expatriate employment in the Gulf countries. Kerala is now considered to be a tourism model for other states in India to emulate its growth. The tourism industry in Kerala witnessed considerable growth during nineties and beyond and is expected to grow further in the future.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM INITIATIVE IN KERALA

Envisaged with a 'triple bottom-line' mission which comprises economic, social and environmental responsibilities, Responsible Tourism (RT) as a concept came forward in 1996. Realising the tremendous potential of tourism, the development paradigms and the need for promoting it along sustainable lines, an action programme for practising Responsible Tourism (RT) was developed in 2007 involving elected representatives, NGOs, policymakers, industry practitioners, community leaders, social activists, environmentalists, media persons, academicians and other tourism stakeholders. It was decided to practise RT by giving due weightage to social, economic and environmental aspects, with the cooperation and support of all the stakeholders in the tourism business.

The 2nd International Conference on RT was conducted in Kochi in March 2008 and the Kerala Declaration of Responsible Tourism was signed during that conference. As a pilot phase, Responsible Tourism (RT) was implemented in four destinations viz. Kovalam, Kumarakom, Thekkady and Vythiri between 2008 and 2010 in which Kumarakom was developed as a successful model. Thus RT became a milestone in the tourism sector of the State in its first phase itself. The first phase was launched on March 14, 2008. The second phase of Responsible Tourism was launched in Kumarakom in March 2012. In the second phase that is between 2011 and 2017, the four destinations selected in the first phase successfully continued their journey and besides three more destinations were added to this phase. The destinations were Kumbalangi in Ernakulam, Ambalavayal in Wayanad and Bekal in Kasaragod. The destinations worked as business units. From 2011 February, RT cells were placed at all destinations for taking up RT activities and were facilitated through KITTS. Responsible Tourism Kerala was implemented with the intention to use tourism in Kerala as a tool for the development and empowerment of villagers through sustainable tourism model, encourage community living through home stays, and promoting eco-living initiatives.

Responsible Tourism offers tour packages to experience the cultural life of Kerala. The centuries-old history and tradition can be enjoyed with the support of the Responsible Tourism Mission. The RT Mission offers packages to experience the ritual arts Garudan Thookkam, Theyyam, Theeyattu, the temple festival and Njattuvela Maholsavam. During the time of Onam, the harvest festival of Kerala, a package titled 'Nattinpurangalil Onam Unnam, Ona Sammanagal Vaangam', was introduced.

The villages of God's Own Country are blessed with many small-scale traditional industries and skilled artisans such as the handicrafts village of Thiruvananthapuram or the Bell Metal Heritage village of Kunhimangalam. The tradition of Kerala, exquisitely crafted with beauty, renders a calming experience for visitors here. RT Mission packages inspire travellers

to engage in many interesting activities that are part and parcel of typical village life. The Mission offers packages in such a way that travellers coming to Kerala leave with the warmth and compassion of the village life of God's Own Country embedded deep in their hearts.

ECO-TOURISM

Ecotourism is a new concept in tourism, which was originally sparked off by the idea of making harmonious co-existence with nature a reality once again. As defined by the Ecotourism Society, it is the responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and sustains the wellbeing of local people. Today, ecotourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry. The Tourism Department of Government of Kerala has taken steps to give focused attention to ecotourism in the State.

The involvement of local communities in Ecotourism activities is a step in the right direction. It provides for alternative sources of income to local communities, which live in and around protected areas, thus decreasing their dependence on forest resources and increasing their commitment to keeping the forests intact. For the vast protected area network in India, the lessons from the Periyar experience is important, as it legitimately shows the need for communities and conservation to go hand in hand.

Kerala is one of the most renowned eco-destinations. Kerala ecotourism aims to let people have an insight into the local culture. Most of the foreign tourists choose eco-friendly areas to visit because Kerala has many destinations known for their natural beauty and exquisite landscape. Ecotourism along with pilgrim, backwater, and village tourism are propelling this field into new levels of progression with each passing day. Thenmala in Kerala becomes the first planned eco-tourism destination in India.

Undoubtedly our wealth is nature. Kerala has a protected area of 2,324 sq.km with two national parks and 12 wildlife sanctuaries. The development of Ecotourism in the Western Ghats of Kerala, with its tropical forest eco-system, provides a natural advantage for the tourists .

Kerala an unexplored hub for eco-tourism is a paradise for nature's lovers. Its coastal location, greenery, evergreen forest, mountains, hills, valleys stream, rivers, backwaters, beaches, lagoons, cultural heritage and rich bio-diversity provide a wide base for the development of eco-tourism. There is a need to have appropriate planning for these destinations to provide infrastructural facilities for eco-tourism development. Furthermore new potential sites for eco-tourism development are to be identified and planning are to be made accordingly for their development to promote and attract travellers from India and abroad. The state's tourism agenda promotes ecologically sustained tourism, which focuses on the local culture, wilderness adventures, volunteering and personal growth of the local population. Efforts are taken to minimize the adverse effects of traditional tourism on the natural environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people.

Kerala could be converted into a tourist paradise and there is considerable scope for it. The returns from the tourism economy can effectively answer to the problems of unemployment and non productivity in the state.

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