

**“A study on the role of responsible tourism approaches in
Destinations at kerala”**

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Abstract

This paper discusses the notion of responsible tourism approaches. We discuss that the concept as used currently means everything and therefore adds nothing to the conceptual terrain of tourism trends. We then introduce our own understanding of the concept arguing that while responsible tourism is linked to sustainability initiatives such as alternative tourism, ecotourism, ethical tourism, green tourism, soft tourism, pro-poor tourism, geo tourism, integrated tourism, community-based tourism, etc. It also demarcates an analytical realm of its own. We suggest that the practical use of the term in areas where it has been adopted suggests a rather restricted use. The aim of this study is to understand some of the approaches used Kerala tourism development corporation to promote tourism in general.

Keywords: Tourism, Responsible, Strategies, Economy and Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Being a dynamic sector, tourism is often considered as one of the largest growing industries in the world. It plays a significant role in the economic and social development of destinations and communities around the world. Hence, many countries consider tourism as a means for economic development. The future of Travel and Tourism is high as demand from emerging markets continues with unbridled speed. Besides, the large emerging middleclass all over is more able than ever to travel both within and beyond its borders. In response to the increased needs of a new age tourist populace, keen interventions in areas of infrastructure development, transportation and destination management are sought. It is imperative to note that many travellers are much concerned about the ethical practices involved in tourism destinations and the tourists often look into matters of responsible tourism as a precursor to destination sustainability, environment, culture and sustainable practices of companies to choose responsible products (Tearfund, 2002). At the same time, the issue of overreaching of the carrying capacity of destinations and the adverse impacts of tourism on the lives of local residents and environment raises questions on the future of tourism and emerges as serious issues of concern for tourism planners and policy makers.

Responsible Tourism

The sustainability orientation of responsible tourism is stressed by Smith (1990), who defined responsible tourism as a form of tourism which respect the hosts natural, built and cultural environments and the interest of all parties concerned. Besides the absence of a distinction between

responsible tourism and sustainable tourism that this view prompts, the controversies surrounding sustainable tourism also gets imported into the debates of responsible tourism. For instance, the sustainability debate is often criticized for its lack of conceptual clarity (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010) characterised as a flawed and inadequate concept that is based on misconceptions on the role of tourism demand, the nature of tourism resources, the imperative of inter and intra-generational equity, socio-cultural integrity, measurement and forms of sustainable development and for offering micro solutions to what is essentially a macro problem of unsustainable growth in tourism. Wheeler (1991) critical about the growing number of seemingly environment-friendly tourism initiatives and argues that responsible tourism cannot be a solution for the problems of tourism, as long as the volume of global tourism is on the increase. Any increase in tourism volume will necessarily have a corresponding increase in negative impacts. Therefore responsible development of tourism will require reducing the scale and volume of tourism. Responsible tourism as a pleasant, agreeable, but dangerously superficial, ephemeral and inadequate escape route for the educated middle classes unable or unwilling, to appreciate or accept their own destructive contribution to the international tourism maelstrom.

Responsible tourism in Kerala

A concerted effort to implement responsible tourism began with a state level consultation on the subject organised by the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala, in association with the International Centre for Responsible Tourism and EQUATIONS organised at Thiruvananthapuram, the state capital, on the 2nd and 3rd of February, 2007. Discussions were conducted in three sub-groups consisting of 1) Local self-governments and civil society organisations 2) Tourism industry and 3) State Government Departments and organisations. A series of economic, socio-cultural and environmental issues were identified by each of these sub-groups which were in turn captured in a workshop document that eventually led to the preparation of a framework for the implementation of responsible tourism. A State Level Responsible Tourism Committee emerged from this consisting of 40 members with representation from different groups of stakeholders.

In the first meeting of SLRTC it was decided that the responsible tourism initiative should be piloted in four different types of destinations in Kerala, all chosen for their importance as tourism destinations, but differing in tourist volumes and the ecological sensitivity of the destinations.

It is worth noting here that the Kerala Declaration for responsible tourism was working with a rather diffuse definition.

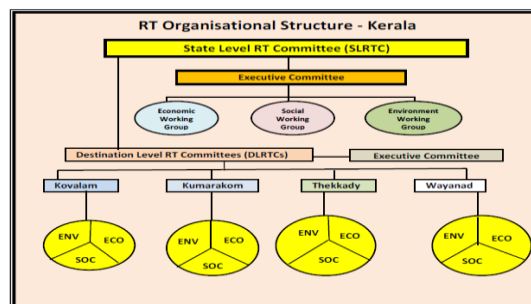


Image 1. Organisational layout for the implementation of Responsible Tourism in Kerala (<http://www.keralatourism.org/rt-impactsocial.php>)

Strategies or Approaches

In the state level workshop conducted in February, 2007 a series of issues in engaging with responsible tourism practices were identified. From the rather large list of issues local food procurement by tourism providers and local level facilitation of the same, were taken up for detailed investigation. Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies detailed the problems in this sector through a survey of issues in local food procurement for hotels in the four destinations chosen. From this study, it emerged that hoteliers though in principle willing to procure food locally, had a number of concerns that would have to be addressed if local procurement was to become a reality. These were:

- Produce requirements in practice were not steady throughout the year and supply chains would have to cater to this variability. Sudden spurts in demand were not uncommon and timeliness of supply would be needed.
- Acceptable prices needed to be negotiated. In some instance, local procurement could be more expensive with prices lower outside the locality.
- Quality control of food produce was of prime importance.
- Local food producers often were very small entities and hoteliers could engage in one to one transactions with each producer (Venu, 2008).

A strategy to address the above concerns was then needed. Detailing of such a strategy, as well of initiation of other initiatives in line with the spirit of responsible tourism, was left to the local governments at the destinations chosen.

Objectives of the study

- To study the role of responsible tourism approaches in destinations at Kerala.
- To find out responsible tourism strategies and approaches have affected the people.
- To provide the valuable suggestion to develop the tourism industries in Kerala.

Review of literature

World Tourism (1980) defined that the tourism as an activity essential to the life of nations because of its direct effects on the social, cultural, educational and economic sectors of national societies and on their international relations. This has created a growing need for sustainability of tourism development that resulted in the introduction of alternate concepts like Sustainable Tourism, Green Tourism, Eco Tourism, Pro-Poor Tourism, Accessible Tourism and Responsible Tourism.

James Buller (2000) explained that ecotourism promotes positive environmental ethics and it doesn't degrade the resources. He concentrates on intrinsic rather than extrinsic values, and it is bio centric rather than homocentric in philosophy. He defines ecotourism as a responsible way of travelling that supports preservation of natural and cultural heritage and welfare of local communities.

Thomas (2002) discussed that the former Minister of Tourism, Government of Kerala, in order to make Kerala the real God's Own Country, an up market high quality tourism destination through national utilisation of resources with focus on integrated development of infrastructure sector, conserving and preserving the heritage and environment and enhancing productivity, income, creating

employment opportunities and alleviating poverty thereby making tourism the most important sector for the socio-economic development and environmental protection of the state.

Bernard Lane (2003) note that being one of the founding fathers of sustainable tourism, Krippendorf stood for channelizing benefits of tourism into environmental and cultural conservation and to the host communities. It was not intended to regulate but to helping the industry to look long term and to become more responsible for its actions and impacts.

Singh (2008) analysed that the different travel attractions and the different motivators of travel. He argues that historical and cultural attractions play a crucial role in the promotion of foreign tourism. He analyses tourism industry in India in detail. He elaborately evaluates the governmental and institutional role in tourism promotion and the problems of development of tourism in India. He explains how to generate awareness among the people and highlights the importance of domestic tourism.

Research Methodology

The study of this paper is mainly gathered with some exploratory methods in processing the research. Here role responsible tourism approaches is the main aim.

Here the research was conducted on the basis of an online survey using self-administered questions and also from the available data from different sources. The survey rendered 50 responses. The survey contained 20 questions of personal profile and satisfaction level of current approaches tourism projects in Kerala. This approach of study not just spotlights on interchange of knowledge and circulation to add to the current group of tourism theories, above all analytical assumptions, critical thinking and the co-formation of recent information's are upgraded by gaining from practical as well as academic perspectives. The secondary data were collected from the annual reports, Journal, Tourism magazine and Local Government bodies. Various study reports made by different national and international agencies related to Tourism and tourism topics and also academic papers.

Significance of Study

Kerala is known for its scenic beauty and is a popular tourist destination. It was listed as the top ten paradises found in the millennium edition of the National Geographic magazine (Sebastian and Rajagopalan, 2009). Though almost 50 percent of the state's population was dependent on agriculture until the 1980s, this sector has since declined with farming becoming increasingly unprofitable. Industrial activities in the state are also limited, due to a multiplicity of factors, not least of which was the presence of a militant trade union movement. In terms of natural and cultural assets, Kerala however has a varied portfolio of attractions such as beaches, backwaters, hill stations, festivals, Ayurveda, wildlife, traditional cuisines, classical and folk art and dance forms, unique artefacts and a distinctive style of architecture. Tourism was therefore identified as a major economic development alternative. This recognition triggered a series of tourism development and promotional activities in the late 1980s. Tourism was given an industry status in 1986, thus making the sector eligible for all public sector incentives and concessions that were extended to other industries.

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Responsible Tourism activities focus mainly on three areas—the economic, social and environmental aspects of the destination. The RT authorities of Kumarakom have planned and implemented various projects with these focus areas in mind.

Ecotourism is not a philosophy rather a responsible form of tourism to ensure sustainable tourism development. However, ecotourism, responsible tourism and sustainable tourism must be used interchangeably as each one has its own specific principles for addressing the negative effects of social, cultural, economic, ecological and environmental impacts.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table No: 01 Satisfaction level with present responsible tourism projects.

| Satisfaction Level | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Very high | 18 | 36 |
| High | 7 | 14 |
| Neutral | 13 | 26 |
| Low | 02 | 4 |
| Very low | 10 | 20 |

Source : Primary Data

The table no 01 showing that the level of satisfaction with present approaches in tourism projects undergoing at Kerala revealed that 36 percent business houses have a very high level of satisfaction and 20 percent of them have a low level of satisfaction level in this aspect. The study revealed that the majority of the business houses were satisfied with the present approaches in tourism projects undergoing at Kerala and was seen as an economic tool of prosperity.

Table No: 02 Factor Analysis Result of the Destination Sustainability Construct.

| Constructs and Scales | Loading | Eigen Value | Variance explained |
|---------------------------------|---------|-------------|--------------------|
| Economic Sustainability | 0.77* | 3.248 | 57.10% |
| Local Enterprise Growth | 0.776 | | |
| Improvement of living standards | 0.596 | | |
| Jobs and benefits | 0.516 | | |
| Tangible Benefits | 0.905 | | |
| Consistent and Reliable Income | 0.827 | | |
| Tourism Integrated Economy | 0.837 | | |
| Kaiser-meyer-olkin msa | 0.852 | | |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | 0.001 | | |

Source : Primary Data

* Reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s Alpha)

Table no 02 shows that the Cronbach's reliability estimate for all four sub dimensions of the Destination Sustainability components were greater than .70 percent and exceeded the requirement of acceptable level. Also, the variance explained for all four sub-dimensions was above 50 percent, indicating that variance due to measurement error is smaller than the variance captured by the factor. Therefore, it was concluded that destination sustainability can be measured using four dimensions economic, social, cultural and environmental.

The responsible business approaches of business units on local community or tourists and its far reaching effects on destinations will definitely pave way for setting a new paradigm in tourism development. The index developed for measuring responsible business practices has an immense scope for revalidation and testing in multiple locations which in turn can use for certification and ratings.

Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to provide a theoretical framework on sustainable destination management and to suggest a few steps in climbing the ladders of sustainability. It has also endeavoured in identifying and listing the best responsible tourism approaches in the industry and destinations. It was concluded that creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities and income-generating endeavours for local communities are the key predictors. An effort to measure responsible business has made a theoretical contribution to the indicator framework on responsible business. The study found that there is an apparent relationship of the responsible business approaches. Based on the findings of the research, a few policy suggestions have been made which may be useful for policy makers, tourism professionals, social scientists and tourism planners. While tourism destinations across the world strive to maintain balance between sustainability and development, the findings of the study may throw light on the endeavours of sustainable tourism development and destination management that in turn can improve image and competitiveness of tourism destinations.

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