

Sustainable Tourism Planning and Development in Kerala-an Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is fundamentally a highly public business that has impressed a position for itself internationally. Tourism has developed as an important sector globally, causative to around 10 per cent of global GDP, 9.4 per cent of global employment, 7 per cent of global exports and 30 per cent of service exports. This international experience is progressively documented as an active tool for economic growth of nations, by way of employment generation, earning revenue and foreign currency transfer, and is acting as a means for upward social mobility through interface with cultures from elsewhere in the world. Kerala is one among the firmest growing tourism termini in the world. Kerala tourism has gained several national and international acknowledgments, mainly due to the regions picturesque beauty and states responsible tourism projects. Tourism produce ten per cent of Kerala's Gross Domestic Product, and contributing around 23.5 per cent to the total employment generation in the state. While the possibilities of tourism development appear to be quite optimistic in India in general and in the state of Kerala in particular, there rising concerns regarding the sustainability of the same because of such diverse reasons as uncomplimentary impacts on culture and environment, holdups because of the scarcity of adequate infrastructure and the like. In the above context, this paper reviews the planning and strategies to be adopted for sustainable development of tourism industry in Kerala.

Keyword: *Tourism, Sustainable tourism development Introduction*

Tourism is fundamentally a highly public business that has impressed a position for itself internationally. Tourism has developed as an important sector globally, causative to around 10 per cent of global GDP, 9.4 per cent of global employment, 7 per cent of global exports and 30 per cent of service exports. This international experience is progressively documented as an active tool for

economic growth of nations, by way of employment generation, earning revenue and foreign currency transfer, and is acting as a means for upward social mobility through interface with cultures from elsewhere in the world.

Kerala is habitually referred to as 'God's own country', because of its wonderful natural beauty resembling the heaven. "Gods own country" has been known as an official ringing even by the State Government's tourism ministry. Kerala, central the way for tourism in the country, has got a number of distinguishing characteristic in the tourism front among the states in the Indian union. Kerala has been revolutionary in among the Indian states in health and medical tourism. Kerala is acknowledged for the Ayurveda and has become synonymous with each other. The state has been promoting concerted efforts to encourage health and medical tourism in a big way, particularly Ayurveda-based health tourism.

Kerala tourism has gained numerous recognitions at national and international level, mainly due to the attractive beauty and responsible tourism projects. Kerala's principal tourism products fall into six categories: 1) beaches, 2) backwaters, 3) heritage and cultural sites and events, 4) wild life sanctuaries, 5) hill stations and 6) Ayurveda, with the collective cord of green environs consistent them all together to form a Green Sonata

The Kerala tourism model is celebrated as one of the most opened tourism models with the private sector prominent tourism development and the state performing as a facilitator rather than a regulator. Tourism constitutes ten per cent of state's GDP, as per official data, and seemingly contributes around 23.5 per cent to the total employment generation in the state. Despite the huge prospective of the sector for contributing to economic growth and employment, studies show that the benefits from tourism in several places are not derived as estimated. It is on this background the paper examining the potential for sustainable tourism planning for tourism development in Kerala.

Planning for harnessing tourism products for sustainable tourism

Planning for tourism is a necessity. Many involvements in different parts of the world have shown that unplanned and haphazard development of tourism can create harmful results, with irreversible damage to the environment and socio-cultural values of humanity. There are predetermined limitations to tourism development, in terms of both physical and social carrying capacities of destinations. Tourism planning should aim at accomplishing sustainable development, so that the tourism properties are available for perpetual use. A

swot analysis of tourism sector in Kerala has been conducted prior to suggesting sustainable tourism measures. The result of swot analysis shows that Kerala tourism sector had the following;

Strengths

1. Established law and order, high degree personal safety in the state
2. Diverse centre of natural attractions in a small land area
3. Fairly connected air, rail, road, and telecom links
4. Availability of high quality and civilized manpower
5. Good brand image 'God's own country' for targeting high pending tourists

Weaknesses

1. Fragile institutional machinery for ensuring sustainable planning and development
2. Insufficiency of public amenities and infrastructure in tourist destinations
3. Distance of tourism centres from commercial hubs
4. Limited international airport facilities causing low level of international tourist handling

Opportunities

1. Unexploited possibilities in heritage, back water, eco-friendly and Ayurveda tourism
2. Availability of Prospective private investors interested in investing in Kerala

Threats

1. Unrestrained growth of tourism may result in environmental and cultural degradation
2. Unrealistic projection of future growth in tourism

Futuresustainable product planning

Kerala is far in advance of many other states in India in terms of planning and project execution in tourism. The State is also an absolute treasure trove of tourism assets of varied nature. There are at least 175 distinct tourist spots of varying degrees of importance and development potential throughout the State. The choosy improvements to these places on various fronts and to enlarge facilities and services would get identified and executed from time to time in the private, public or joint sectors based on emergent factors.

Beach tourism

Beaches and connected marine areas could offer a variety of options, as may be feasible, such as boating, swimming, wind and board surfing, Para sailing, water skiing, scuba diving, snorkelling and sport fishing. An evaluation of the probable beach areas in Kerala could be carried out and determinations could be focused on those that are apposite for growth. Many of the beaches in Kerala are trivial and scope for development is restricted.

Backwater tourism

While other forms of tourist attractions are found profusely in different parts of India, the widespread backwaters are a distinct feature of Kerala, providing an exceptional opportunity for putting as a bizarre tourism product. The geographical area of the backwaters also makes it convenient and favourable to spread tourism activity across the State. One of the constituents of backwater tourism is the development of connected landmasses in the backwaters to develop accommodation, recreation and allied facilities. Many of the key tourist allures in Kerala are close to the coast. Therefore, viability of organising coastal cruise ship tours can also be explored in due course, depending on suitability of port amenities and market prospective.

Heritage and cultural tourism

Heritage and cultural tourism founds a dominant component among both domestic and foreign tourists stay at the State. Among the available resources, it is imperative to identify and focus upon those that are exceptional enough to attract and satisfy varied interests. Probable models for tourism development that would draw strength from the native culture, arts and lifestyle of Kerala include rural tourism, development of a heritage village, and business tourism packages integrating cultural performances, local cuisine, etc. Appropriate elements of these models could be incorporated into numerous projects, or separate projects along these lines could also be reflected at suitable locations in the State.

Forest and wildlife

Expansion of tourism in forest areas has often been a subject of considerable discussion. Forest and wildlife constructed tourism would have to be encouraged on a conformist level, and therefore cannot be expected to generate large scale employment and income generation.

Guided trekking programme for tourists in the Periyar Tiger Reserve is projected as a typical success story in eco-tourism in forest areas. Promoting appropriate

methods of forest and wildlife based tourism could be reflected in Wildlife Sanctuaries. Tourism in forest areas is disposed to be environmentally sensitive, and one has to tread with caution, with continuous monitoring of the costs and benefits.

Eco-tourism

Awareness and interest in the conception of eco-tourism in Kerala is quite reassuring. Some pulsating initiatives such as the Thenmala Eco-Tourism Project are already in place. Given Kerala's varied natural resources, the concept can be developed further to incorporate a wide gamut of eco-tourism activities. Due contemplation may also be given to improvement of eco-tourism at various places already identified for this purpose. The tangible test would be to see eco-tourism practiced in letter and spirit on a bigger canvas right across the entire State.

Hill station tourism

Many hilly areas in the State offer room for various forms of tourism activities such as picnicking, trekking, rock climbing, which need to be appraised. Places like Ranipuram, Nelliampathy and Pythalmala could worth consideration. With some developments previously in place in parts of Wayanad district, it would be apposite to explore the possibility of attracting further investments to this region to achieve economies of gathering and integration of tourism activities, so that they can benefit from public access roads, transportation and other amenities.

Ayurveda tourism

Ayurveda rejuvenation treatments becoming available extensively in different parts of India and abroad, Kerala would have to reinforce its positioning as the 'real' destination for Ayurveda, and clearly differentiate its product from those available at other places. Ayurveda tourism can sustain itself against competition, provided it can fascinate repeat business and also sustained business from new customers through publicity. This is possible only if we evade falsification of traditional Ayurveda and its commercialization for hurried gains.

Planning for infrastructure to support sustainable tourism

The main requirement for achieving any growth goal is to carry forward the following three elements harmoniously in parallel: 1) having the essential tourism products in place, 2) consolidating the necessary supporting general infrastructure, and 3) focussed marketing to the appropriate target segments.

While all the elements are correspondingly important, it is usually the supporting infrastructure and facilities that becomes the main blockage in developing countries. Small island economies and such others that are awesomely dependent on tourism are able to financially justify necessary investments virtuously on the strength of returns from tourism.

Roads, air transport links, water supply, sanitation, power supply, etc., can be improved on a substantial scale based only on multi-use justification, driven by complex significances of the native economy, in the background of fund constraints. Tourism carries in high returns with low investments is true only in situations where excellent roads, attractively landscaped urban vicinities, consistent electricity and water supply, cleanliness and solid waste clearance systems are already in place on the strength of the general economy. This highlights the need for a clear and objective analysis of tourism benefits without overlooking any costs.

Strategies for sustainable tourism

- Endorse sustainable tourism focusing on conservation of heritage and culture.
- Support institutional mechanism for planned development of tourism, by enacting appropriate legislation.
- Reinforce the tourism sector so to attend as the growth vehicle for the state's socio-economic development.
- Government to focus on basic infrastructure through coordinated effort of all departments.
- Assurance to quality services in all sectors of tourism
- Encourage tourism products focusing on backwaters, Ayurveda, performing arts, cuisine and eco-tourism.
- Tourism infrastructure and products to be established through private sector and private-public partnership, with government acting as a organizer and catalyst.
- Explore and develop new international and domestic markets for Kerala.
- Create adequate quantity and quality of requisite human resources in the State.

Governments Role in Tourism Development

The Government of Kerala progressively seeks to play an effective role of a facilitator and Promoter. Government plans basically focus on the following issues:

Ensuring sustainable development: Through suitable legislation for ensuring quality, by laying down developmental advices, monitoring the activities and initiating remedial measures when needed.

Marketing and promotion: Distinctive positioning and umbrella brand building for the State in the domestic and international markets in the light of growing competition.

Tourism friendly legislation - particularly those related to taxation. Leisure tourism is mostly price driven. If tourists have to pay a greater price for related experiences available in another place at a lower price, they will opt that place.

Ensuring active role in infrastructure development: transportation, water source, electricity, and telecommunication. Increasing connectivity through enabling road, air and rail

CONCLUSION

Tourism has got excellent prospects for promotion of rapid economic development particularly in Kerala; Kerala has made admirable progress in tourism development in recent years. The brand name 'God's own Country' has turned out to be a well-recognised tourism icon and the State has reached impressive growth in foreign tourist arrivals. Sustainability characteristic of tourism has not often been given acceptable consideration in scheming tourism policies. To achieve the objective of sustainable tourism there is an urgent need that our tourism businesses, guests and our destinations and the native communities take a well-planned walk towards achieving sustainability in its organization, operations and even in the simplest of actions that are taken to support tourism in a destination. The tourism industry has a major role in achieving the sustainability of a destination ably supported by the government, local administration and the local community.

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