

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN KERALA AND ITS DENOUEMENTS

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Abstract

The study investigates the evaluation of success of sustainable tourism ventures of Kerala with reference to Global Sustainable Tourism Council. The data for the study were collected from 50 stakeholders of sustainable tourism in Kerala by using purposive sampling method. Primary data were collected by using structured questionnaire. The study found that the popular tourism destination Kerala is obliged to follow sustainability policies and it is also inevitable for survival. It is also reveals that the pilot destinations are moderately successful in implementation of sustainable tourism projects when compared to GSTC.

Key word: sustainable development, GSTC, Tourism, Purposive sampling.

Introduction

The travel and tourism sector are one of the key players in world economy. The rapid growth of this sector does not come as a surprise, given the pace of globalization and changing lifestyles. The towering potential of tourism sector to reap whopping returns is unparalleled. Tourism is an often-misunderstood concept. Tourism is not something limited to holiday activities only. Tourism could be travel for pleasure, entertainment, business, education and any other engagement. People traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment is considered tourism as long as it is for more than 24 hours and for less than one consecutive year. Tourism can be domestic or international.

Tourism sector, which is a huge part of service sector, has become the major source of income for many countries. And India is no exception. India's rich cultural and ecological diversity have been serving as a magnet which attracts tourists all over the world. Being a people-oriented industry; it has provided numerous employment opportunities, further helping India in the upliftment of its economy. In this scenario, it will be safe to assume that tourism has been anything but a curse to a developing country like India. But all states in India have not been able to enjoy the fruits of tourism. This is just because of the difference in what the states have to offer. Kerala is a state which has profited appreciably well from growth in tourism sector. The greenery, rich heritage stretching back to

centuries, wide variety of cuisines, numerous art forms, outstretched water bodies and extravagant precipices present themselves as the reasons for the popularity of Kerala among tourism destinations. Kerala tourism sector is one of the fastest growing business sectors in the twenty first century offering innumerable employment opportunities and immensely contributing to the economic growth of a country. It has helped in boosting the economic activities in India which has consequently led to enhancement in industry revenues.

However, like any other growing sector, tourism is not free from glitches. Unregulated and reckless tourism can result in negative impacts on environment, economy, society, culture and human relations. Aftermath of tourism on environment ranges from loss of vegetation and reduction in carrying capacity to pollution of different kinds, fall in the level of water table, adverse effects on wildlife and opposing natural phenomena.

The socio-cultural impacts are associated with interactions between people with differing cultural backgrounds, attitudes and behaviors. The commercialization of culture can undermine the soul of a tourist destination. The introduction of tourists to sensitive areas can be detrimental. It may cause a loss of culture or alternatively contribute to custom drainage.

Apart from these, tourism can also cause negative consequences on economy as the tourism jobs are usually seasonal with no extra benefits and they are relatively low-wage and low-skill jobs. Over dependence on tourism can leave the country vulnerable to economic ruin in the long run due to the fact that money can end up being directed overly to tourist areas when other regions are in necessity.

In this setup, the concept of sustainable tourism gains sizeable approval. The United Nations designated the year 2017 as the International Year for Sustainable Tourism and ratified 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Tourism is not supposed to abuse natural environment and its benefits need to be diffused rather than concentrating on a narrow piece of land. Sustainable tourism is the type of modernized tourism which assesses the socio-cultural, environmental and economic impacts and takes care of its stakeholders by minimizing the negative effects and promoting positive aspects. Sustainable tourism is hinged on a tripod: preservation of environment, high quality experience to tourists and leaving a positive impact on host community. The ulterior motive behind sustainable tourism is to maintain ecological balance, economic prosperity, cultural integrity as well as diversity and increase in living standards of host population without affecting the ability of future

generations to do the same. Sustainable tourism development meets all the needs of current stakeholders while protecting and enhancing future prospects. The concept has recently seeped into Kerala and established itself as one of highly regarded. With the implementation of sustainable tourism, the needs of no one would be hindered. As UNWTO defines, sustainable tourism development can be understood as the 'proficient management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining, cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems'. An effective and efficient sustainable tourism destination could only be established with the combined and coordinated efforts of government, local population, tourists and businesses who are the principal stakeholders of sustainable tourism as Mr. Swarbrooke classified. For painting a clear picture regarding the standards to be maintained and factors to be considered, Global Sustainable Tourism Council laid down a set of systematic norms known as Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria or GSTC. This set of universally accepted benchmarks help in evaluating the progress of destinations with regards to sustainability. This covers all the aspects of sustainable tourism and could be efficiently applied to any destination, including Kerala.

With Kerala being one of the most famous destinations, it becomes inevitable that sustainable tourism policies are formulated and implemented in Kerala. Kerala tourism is mainly dependent on the natural beauty the state has to offer and its vivid culture. Therefore, if sustainability is not maintained, the state will have to face heavy consequences.

Statement of the problem

With tourism industry galloping to new heights and beyond, the imprints left by it increase in a growing pace and force as well. These after effects could not be ignored as it affects mankind as a whole. That is when resorting to more sustainable ways becomes ineludible. Sustainable tourism not only minimizes the fatal consequences, but it also brings along a lot of utilities with it. It ensures that the needs of everyone are met without being an inconvenience for anyone. Alongside satisfying the requirements of public, it also develops innumerable opportunities for the future. Even though the concept of sustainable tourism is fairly new and unheard of for many, the term and concept has been gaining bountiful attention, support and popularity during last the few decades. Apart from the sheer need for a solution to fix the problems created by man himself, the tantalizing utilities brought by sustainable tourism have drawn the global population into it. Sustainable tourism which is the concept of visiting somewhere as a tourist and trying to make a positive impact on environment, economy and society with the combined effort of host

community, government and businesses is a broad one which has been and is being interpreted in multiple dimensions. Each of these have persuaded us to believe in its payoff including monetary benefits to the local community; conservation of precious natural resources; honest outlook into the area for tourists to make their trip more meaningful; avoiding displacement and resettlement; preparing the world for the future and ultimately creating better places to live by executing responsibilities. A world with sustainability is what everyone is aspiring for at this moment and there is no better way to pave path for that than through implementation of sustainable tourism as it covers not just the well-being of mere tourists and businesses but the entire community and society. Kerala, a home to the term diversity, benefits immensely from the successful implementation of sustainable tourism. The abundant natural, cultural and social resources require constant assistance to prevent them from erosion. Sustainable tourism promises the same.

However, these days it is not uncommon for general public to view sustainable tourism as a favor done for the sake of others, when in reality it is just them executing their responsibilities properly to build and maintain balanced world capable of pleasing all needs and wants of this as well as future generation. The concept of sustainable tourism is limited to protection of environment for many. And it is indeed a severe dilemma when even this single aspect of sustainable tourism remains unfulfilled. It appears as though man a being with incomparable curiosity has somehow lost it all when obligations are bought up. Tourists, as often reported, fail to treat the places and residents respectfully. Meanwhile the host community, businesses and government also fail in contributing to sustainability. A lot of tourist places are ecologically imbalanced as reports suggest. The culture and practices of indigenous communities are tainted due to invasion and careless interactions. The social norms are left idle. People are forced to move and resettle from major tourist places. The disputes between tourists and hosts have become a frequent occurrence. The governments of various countries are suffering losses in tourism sector as the initial investments are not paid off. Tourists are constantly exploited and subjected to verbal, physical and financial abuse. Most of the businesses revolving around tourism are running on little profit. Kerala is no stranger to any of these. Although Kerala is a small state in India still in its developing phase, the state has a lot of potential to become a superpower in tourism due to the presence rich scenery, alluring culture and warm society. But all these signature features of Kerala are steadily subsiding due to over-tourism and various problems attached to it. Even after launching several programs and projects for promoting and implementing sustainable tourism in Kerala, the mission has not yet been accomplished.

The lack of education, motivation and awareness are some factors to blame for. However, if a sumptuous future is the goal to achieve, such excuses should be disregarded.

For the successful implementation of sustainable tourism, various factors are to be taken care of. Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria has clearly laid down and defined the factors that should be satisfied for achieving sustainability. It is to be made sure that the policies and strategies designed should be structured, encompassing protection of environment, socio-cultural well-being, economic prosperity of the community without the exploitation of tourists and overall welfare. If even one of the objectives laid by sustainable tourism is not attained, then it cannot be proclaimed that sustainability has been achieved. It is clear that Kerala has not yet accomplished all the said objectives. But it is also a well-known fact that many measures have been taken for the realization of sustainable tourism objectives. Although, it is difficult for general public to track the progress of these projects, because of their unawareness and misconceptions regarding the goals and standards of sustainable tourism. In this situation, the following questions arise:

1. What are the various sustainable tourism projects implemented in Kerala?
2. How cogent has the sustainable tourism projects implemented in Kerala been with reference to GSTC?

Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify various sustainable tourism projects implemented in Kerala.
2. To analyze the cogency of various sustainable tourism projects implemented in Kerala with reference to GSTC.

Scope of the study

Sustainable tourism has become a revolutionizing phenomenon to regain stability in the tourism sector. Havoc wreaked by over tourism on the world population is able to be managed by means of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism in Kerala and its denouements: Stakeholders' perspective covers initial projects implemented in Kerala with the object of promoting sustainable tourism viz. Kumarakom, Kovalam, Thekkady and Wayanad. Data will be collected from 50 respondents who are stakeholders of

the various projects across the state. GSTC for destinations will be used as a scale to measure the cogency and frailty in implementation of sustainability programs.

Research methodology

The design selected for the study, as it explains the various projects implemented for the betterment of sustainable tourism and its denouements, is descriptive in nature as it presents the numerous sustainable tourism enterprises effected in the state of Kerala and their compatibility with GSTC to breakdown the denouements of the same. The study is conducted across the state of Kerala .The study utilizes both primary and secondary data. The sample comprises of 50 stakeholders of sustainable tourism in Kerala. Primary data is used for measuring the success the implementation of sustainable tourism as well as frailties in its implementation. To examine the different sustainable tourism projects initiated, secondary data is employed. An interview schedule is used for collecting primary data from the respondents directly. Collected data were analyzed by using Mean score, Mean score and Chi square tests.

Review of literature

For identifying the research gap and getting a more useful insight to the topic, an exhaustive review of literature has been conducted as a part of this project. Books, journals, articles and websites were made use of. They are summarized below.

Dr. David A. Fennell and Prof. Chris Cooper (2020) conducted a detailed study regarding the principles, contexts and practices of sustainable tourism for exploring the history and evolution of the term sustainable development, for providing an introduction to the fundamentals of the tourism industry and for illustrating why sustainable development is really important in tourism. The study identifies that theorists over the years have placed significant effort into demonstrating that sustainability is divided into weak and strong forms. The weak sustainability camp claims that the form in which capital stocks including manmade capital, human capital, natural capital and cultural capital are passed on to the generations to come is relatively unimportant. With stark contrast, the strong sustainability camp debates that the capital stocks are not open to substitution. The study further depicts the key characteristics of sustainable development in tourism which are: a time span spread over different generations; adaptability of ecological and human systems; changes in foundation variables and mosaic stability. The study clearly states that sustainable development approach is inevitable to the tourism industry because it relies heavily on the natural and cultural environment along with the historic heritage of tourism destinations.

Suraj. C. R (2020) carried out an elaborated research on sustainable MICE tourism proposing an ingenious business model for development of tourism in Kerala. The study seeks to create a new pathway amid sustainability and MICE tourism industry. It is a common misconception among people that ecotourism, which is one of the subsets of sustainable tourism is the only way to attain sustainability goals. But there are several other means to accomplish various objectives of sustainable tourism. Meeting, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibition (MICE) tourism industry is one of the prominent ones among them. Globalization and socio-economic reforms in the last few decades have shaped the MICE tourism industry. Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions endorse the idea of a group of people gathering at a common destination for a short period of time and it comprises a huge part of travel market which is one of the most important components of tourism industry. ITB World Travel Trends Report suggests that 54 percent of the total travel market is underwritten by the MICE industry.

Paul V. Mathew and Sara Sareena Thankachan (2019) explored the difference and similarities in the perceptions of community towards responsible and sustainable tourism across the tourist destinations of Kerala. Responsible tourism is often confused with the term sustainable tourism because they share similar principles. The article published goes on to analyze the theoretical basis of both concepts by quoting several renowned academicians along with endeavoring to examine the community perceptions regarding the two terms. It is clearly stated that responsible tourism fulfills the objectives of sustainable tourism that it is a limited version of the latter as opposed to a synonym.

Xavier Font and Scott McCabe (2019) explore inquired in to the contexts, paradoxes, approaches, challenges and potential of sustainability marketing in tourism. The paper unfolds around how, originally, marketing in tourism was considered exploitative and something that fuelled hedonistic consumerism, but sustainability marketing can make use of marketing techniques for good purposes. Marketing skills could be employed to understand the market needs, design sustainable products and recognize persuasive methods of communications for changing behavioral patterns. The article encapsulates the latest theories of marketing seeking to make tourist destinations better places to visit and live. The basic social responsibility of business is to use the resources available to engage in activities for maximizing profit as long as it stays within the rules of the game without deception or fraud. Firms executing this will contribute extensively to sustainability.

M. Indra al Irsyad, Rabindra Nepal and Sanjay Kumar Nepal (2019) put acknowledgeable efforts to assess the short-term and long-term relationships between arrivals of tourists, per capita income, carbon

dioxide emissions, energy consumption and capital formation specifically citing Nepal for case study. The report rightfully declares that for managing tourism sustainably, it is necessary to reduce the impact of the sector on climate change and curb excessive dependency on energy consumption. Mountain destinations are climatically vulnerable but they are cardinal for global sustainable development as they provide ecosystem services to the whole globe. While the private sector in Nepal is the key beneficiary of tourism, the environmental and socio-cultural costs associated with it are borne by the state. The tests reveal that increases in tourist arrivals may not noticeably contribute to economic growth because of revenue leakages resulting from payments for import of goods and services and lack of support from the part of state for implementing climate-sensitive sustainability policies.

Marianna Sigala and Dandison Ukpapi (2019) embarked on an expedition to throw light on the scope of citizenship engagement in sustainable tourism development. The paper has adopted the SHARE challenge, which is a competition based crowdsourcing venture launched by the Government of South Australia aiming towards engaging citizens in sharing economy entrepreneurial ideas, as a case study. It was found that from the 88 ideas submitted, tourism sector attracted the most ideas from different stakeholders. Citizenship engagement has brought massive innovations into numerous programs including United States Environmental Protection Agency's robust framework for water management, increased community wide participation in protection of renewable energy sources, protection of natural resources and boosted cohesion between several communities.

Devika Ram and K. Arun (2018) engaged in a particularized scrutiny of Kerala model responsible tourism and its responsibility in achieving sustainability. Kerala's exponential growth in tourism has compelled the policy makers to initiate responsible tourism in selected destinations. The main objective behind it is achieving sustainability eventually. Responsible tourism edges the stakeholders to bear responsibility for their activities for their own as well as future's well-being. The wave of sustainable tourism washed Kerala in the last decade and four destinations namely, Thekkady, Kumarakom, Wayanad and Kovalam were targeted as four destinations for initial implementation of responsible tourism. Instantly the notion of responsible tourism turned into sustainable tourism. These destinations showed economic growth, employment opportunities for villagers; agricultural growth; empowerment of women; social responsibility programs; innovative tour packages and contribution to nature.

Bushra Hameed and Anila Khalid (2018) reviewed the impact of ecotourism in ensuring the sustainable development of tourism in India. Ecotourism helps in preserving and conserving the natural as well as

cultural diversity of the world. It accommodates and entertains the visitors in the least intrusive manner. Ecotourism is basically an alternative tourism which involves visiting natural destinations for recreation and learning in an environmentally friendly way simultaneously contributing to economic, social and cultural development. Ecotourism is a sub-component of sustainable tourism which could be used as a tool for achieving peak sustainability. Therefore many developing countries, including India are making great use of this concept. India's reserve of natural beauty, archaeological and architectural monuments have marked itself in the map of popular ecotourism destinations in the world.

Dr. Ravish Mathew, Dr. Anu Chandran R. C and Prof. Sampada Kumar Swain (2017) qualitatively reviewed the responsible tourism initiatives and socio-environmental dynamics of backwater tourism in Kerala by using Vembanad Lake as a valid case study. The state of Kerala possesses a niche identity owing to the extensive backwaters and blue lagoons. With its long coast line, 44 rivers and 10 lakes the water potential of Kerala is exceptional. The cultural and biological diversity of the wetlands represents the invaluable bounty that sustains the hosts as well as visitors. It is found that Kumarakom, a destination in Kerala has accomplished eminently by practicing backwater tourism as USP. Kumarakom was one of the four initial destinations Kerala Government had launched responsible tourism projects in and it evolved as the successful model of responsible tourism. Responsible tourism initiatives have helped the region considerably in different matters including: ardent revival of dying art forms; productive investments and maintenance of environmental pristineness. The study suggests that for the destination to advance in responsible tourism even more, certain measures need to be taken. It includes, curtailment of excessive tourism, limiting the use of motorized boats, prevention of quarrying, maintenance of a conducive environment for flocking migratory birds, solid waste management, effective treatment of sewage, consultation of all stakeholders, organization of skill development workshops and engagement of host community in pro-environment resource conservation ventures. However, the paper states Kumarakom is a model to be cherished.

Dr. Radhika P. C and Dr. Jhoney Johnson (2017) performed a systematic research to identify the role of government in developing sustainable tourism strategies in Kerala. As tourism has become one of the most important economic activities in the world, the negative impacts associated with it is also showing a growing trend. The concept of sustainable tourism is gaining attention and popularity because of its potential to minimize these negative impacts and maximize the positive impacts tourism sector can have. But the study declares that execution of sustainable tourism will only be possible through the active

involvement of government in designing, execution, supervision and follow up of sustainability strategies. Eventhough travel was merely for survival in the ancient times, now a days it is done mainly for recreation and pleasure. This has increased the scope of tourism in leaps and bounds. This is one of the reasons for the concept of sustainable tourism having many dimensions and definitions. Kerala has an important place among the tourism destinations in India due to its uniqueness and diversity. Tourism sector in Kerala traces back to decades. Therefore it is inevitable for the state to pursue sustainable tourism activities or else the envied legacy will go down in flames. This study was conducted among foreign tourist as well as residents to identify the important roles played by the government.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section is particularly deals with the analysis and interpretation of data to get a meaningful picture out of the raw data collected. Here, the opinions of 50 respondents on the compatibility of responsible tourism projects with GSTC are collected and analyzed using statistical techniques of mean, weighted average and chi square.

Hypothesis

1. The awareness about sustainable tourism is not dependent on educational qualification.
2. The awareness about sustainable tourism is not dependent on occupation
3. The awareness about sustainable tourism is not dependent on income.

Table 1
Chi Square Test Comparing Educational Qualification and Awareness about ST

Chi-Square Tests	
	Value
Pearson Chi-Square	.a
N of Valid Cases	50
a. No statistics are computed because awareness about ST is a constant.	

(Source: Primary data)

The chi square test carried out to check whether awareness about sustainable tourism is dependent on educational qualification shows results forcing the researcher to accept the null hypothesis as all the

respondents regardless of their educational qualifications are aware about the concept of sustainable tourism.

Table 2
Chi Square Test Comparing Occupation and Awareness about ST

Chi-Square Tests	
	Value
Pearson Chi-Square	.a
N of Valid Cases	50
a. No statistics are computed because awareness about ST is a constant.	

(Source: Primary data)

The statistics need not be computed here as all the respondents are aware about sustainable tourism. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 3
Chi Square Test Comparing Income and Awareness about ST

Chi-Square Tests	
	Value
Pearson Chi-Square	.a
N of Valid Cases	50
a. No statistics are computed because awareness about ST is a constant.	

(Source: Primary data)

As the results show, all the respondents are aware about sustainable tourism regardless of their income. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted.

Compatibility with GSTC

For evaluating the progress of sustainable tourism programs in Kerala, a five point scale with the points 'Great', 'Good', 'Okay', 'Poor' and 'Terrible' was created and the respondents were asked to mark their

opinions regarding the destinations' compatibility with GSTC. For different sets of scaling questions were created to collect their valid opinion on four different factors related to sustainable tourism viz. GSTC for effective sustainable management, GSTC for maximizing economic benefits to host community and minimizing negative impacts, GSTC for maximizing benefits to communities, visitors and culture and minimizing negative impacts and GSTC for maximizing benefits to the environment and minimizing negative impacts.

Table 4
Mean Scores of GSTC for Sustainable Management

GSTC	Mean
Well defined tourism strategy	3.80
Structured monitoring	3.18
Systematic tourism seasonality management	3.62
Planned climate change adaptation	3.32
Proper access for all	3.38
Ensured safety and security	3.44
Framed crisis and emergency management	3.34
Regular promotion	3.20
Neatly engineered infrastructure	3.26
Sustainable management	3.39

(Source: Primary data)

Table 4 shows the general response of stakeholders on the compatibility of destinations with GSTC for effective sustainable management. All the stakeholders are of a neutral opinion as all the mean scores are close to and above 3. It could be assumed that the destinations are fulfilling the GSTC to a reasonable limit, but there is more to achieve. Well defined tourism strategy has gained the highest mean score with 3.8 and it shows the tourism strategy is somewhat satisfactory.

Table 5
Mean Scores of GSTC for Economic Benefits

GSTC	Mean
Local career opportunities	3.94
Support for local entrepreneurs and fair trade	3.46
Considerable public participation	3.40
Prevention of exploitation	3.42
Economic benefits	3.55

(Source: Primary data)

Table 5 depicts the compatibility of the selected destinations in Kerala with GSTC for maximizing economic benefits to host community and minimizing negative impacts. All the mean scores are above 3 and it is clear that the destinations have fulfilled the GSTC to a certain extent. Public participation is the weakest in this case.

Table 6
Mean scores of GSTC for community benefits

GSTC	Mean
Proper visitor management	3.78
Cultural heritage protection	3.72
Protection of sites	3.70
Explained guidelines for visitor behavior	3.62
Community benefits	3.70

(Source: Primary data)

Table 6 is to present the compatibility of tourism destinations with the GSTC for maximizing benefits to communities, visitors and culture and minimizing negative impacts. The mean scores represent that the

performance of destinations in this matter is above average and effective to a certain extent as they are above 3 and closer to 4.

Table 7
Mean Scores of GSTC for Environmental Protection

GSTC	Mean
Protection of sensitive environment	3.90
Wildlife protection	3.98
Limiting greenhouse gas emissions	3.18
Energy conservation	3.18
Organized water management	3.24
Solid waste reduction	3.12
Minimization of pollution	3.22
Promotion of low impact transportation	3.10
Environment benefits	3.36

(Source: Primary data)

The table shown above named table 7 is a summary of the compatibility of destinations with the GSTC for maximizing benefits to the environment and minimizing negative impacts. Just like the results of other GSTC, this is also on the positive side with mean scores a little above average. Wildlife protection missions are successful to an extent with the mean score of 3.98 and solid waste reduction and promotion of low impact transportation have not been as fruitful owing to the mean score of 3.12 and 3.10 respectively.

From the tables above it could be derived that all the destinations have been mostly cogent in implementing sustainable tourism programs although frailties are accompanied in each matter.

Relevance of sustainability factors in measuring sustainability

Sustainability is a wide concept which covers a lot of different aspects. It includes environmental, economic and socio-cultural factors. For achieving sustainability in tourism, all of these factors should be covered. However, there are arguments that state some of these factors are more involved in the concept of sustainability than others. There is constant disagreement as to which component is more important. For arriving at a conclusion on this respondents were asked to rank four important components in evaluating sustainability viz. environmental protection, social development, protection of culture and heritage and economic prosperity from most relevant to least. The results were as follows:

Table 8

Indicators of sustainability	Number of people voted for Rank 1	Number of people voted for Rank 2	Number of people voted for Rank 3	Number of people voted for Rank 4	Weighted average	New ranks
Environmental protection	41	4	4	1	18.5	1
Social development	4	13	28	5	11.6	3
Protection of culture and heritage	3	30	10	7	12.9	2
Economic prosperity	2	3	8	37	7	4

Weighted Averages of Indicators of Sustainability

(Source: Primary data)

As per the table 8, it could be seen that 41 respondents marked environmental protection as the most relevant indicator of sustainability. 4 respondents consider social development to be the most significant indicator while 3 voted for protection of culture and heritage to be number one and 2 voted for economic prosperity to be the most relevant one. Most people voted for protection of culture to be the second most relevant indicator of sustainability. People opted social development as the third most relevant indicator

while majority of the respondents voted economic prosperity to be the least relevant one. The popular notion of environmental protection being the key indicator of sustainability is visible here as well. But this notion is slowly changing as some people preferred other indicators over this. According to the weighted average, the variables could be ranked from most relevant to least relevant as:

1. Environmental protection
2. Protection of culture and heritage
3. Social development
4. Economic prosperity

Findings

Sustainable tourism is the concept which allows the stakeholders to enjoy maximum benefits of tourism without affecting the ability of future generations to do so. Being a popular tourism destination Kerala is obliged to follow sustainability policies and it is also inevitable for survival. This study involved the evaluation of success of sustainable tourism ventures of Kerala with reference to GSTC. The study found out that:

- Kerala launched responsible tourism as a means to achieve sustainability.
- RT projects were piloted in four destinations viz. Kumarakom, Kovalam, Thekkady and Wayanad. Later on several other destinations were also added to widen the activities. A lot of activities were carried out in these destinations covering every aspect of sustainability.
- The respondents included both male and female and both of them are equal beneficiaries of sustainable tourism regardless of age, educational qualification, occupation and income.
- All the respondents are thoroughly aware about the concept of sustainable tourism.
- According to the opinion of respondents, Thekkady has been most successful in the implementation of sustainable tourism policies.
- People consider environmental protection to be the key indicator of sustainability, with cultural protection and social development following behind.

Suggestions

- Eventhough all the destinations are moderately successful in the implementation of sustainable tourism programs, more effort should be dedicated towards educating the society about the need for these. People should be made well aware that maintaining sustainability is a responsibility and not a privilege.
- More public participation should be ensured in the formulation and implementation of policies.

- All the programs should be closely monitored, regularly evaluated and frequently revised.
- Tourists are advised to forego pollution, over utilization and exploitation of resources, cultural invasion and overlooking of local entrepreneurs.
- Government is supposed to forego blind privatization, relaxation of rules, cold shouldering locals and snubbing pollution immediately.
- Businesses should adopt reasonable pricing policies and an environmental friendly attitude. They should create employment opportunities for locals and promote local products.
- Host community should keep an open mind to the tourists and accept them as they are. They should try to create a decent atmosphere, avoid exploitation and present the authentic culture for improved visitor experience.

Conclusions

The state of Kerala has benefited a lot from RT. This has brought the state a notch closer to attaining sustainability. The overall brand image, revenue, social development, has all showed progress. But these projects need to be evaluated and revised as they have only shown minimum success so far. GSTC is the most reliable standard for measurement and should be applied systematically for the best of Kerala Tourism.

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