



A GENERAL STUDY OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM IN KERALA



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Abstract

The massive increase of international travellers and tourism development is a direct result of the globalisation process. The emergence of high capacity airplanes in the 1950s opened the doors for the growth of the tourism industry. The 1990s decade further increased the expansion rate of the industry with more growth forecasted for the future. The internet has also facilitated the growth of the sector, with low-cost holidays and travel destinations available all over the world.

Keywords : Kerala, tourism, globalisation, holidays, travel

Research Paper :

Tourism is travel for recreational leisure or business purpose usually of a limited duration. It is commonly associated with international travel but may also refer to travel to another location within the same country.

WTO defines tourists as ‘people travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure business and other purpose’¹.

In an era when tourism is hailed and given enough importance in generating income and employment to the people, we must consider the drawbacks of the traditional methods of tourism, such as environmental pollution, unequal distribution of income, cultural diffusion and several others. Hence, the search for a kind of tourism that causes minimum damage to the nature led to the formation of the idea of responsible tourism.

The concept of Responsible Tourism (RT) was put forward by Jost Krippendorf in the 1980s, on the basis of his experience in the Alpine plateaus of Switzerland where tourism has had significant negative impacts on the environment and communities. Krippendorf (1987)² called for rebellious tourists and rebellious locals to create new forms of tourism. His vision was to develop and promote new forms of tourism, which will bring the greatest possible benefit to all the participants such as travellers, host population, tourist business without causing much ecological and social damage. In short, Responsible Tourism is tourism ‘that creates better places for people to live in, and better places to visit’.

Being the most acceptable form of tourism the RT has its benefits both globally and locally. The wide range of the acceptance for the Responsible Tourism practices are due to these unparalleled benefits of this new wave of thinking. Some of the major benefits of the Responsible Tourism are as follows:

- The RT programme, in many ways helps villagers reap the benefits of tourism, by facilitating better income earning opportunities such as handicraft making, hotel industry, home stay, and agricultural activities related to tourism.
- The various production units under the RT programme have not only provided a livelihood to the villagers, but have also instilled self-confidence in them and encouraged self-

¹Understanding Tourism: Basic Glossary, World Tourism Organisation, UNWTO

²Holiday Markets, 1987, Krippendorf, Jost

sufficiency. Even the people with a low level of education can engage in tourism related jobs and that will bring them more income as well as an up rise in the standard of life.

- Women so far were considered only as house wives that they were too focused on their house hold works. The main drawback of this attitude is that the half of the total population mainly in local areas remained economically unproductive .The Responsible Tourism activities helps the unskilled and less educated women to find an employment that would suit their capacity. Self-help groups of women play a crucial role in the RT activities. They are given many related employments in the Responsible Tourism area.
- The RT programmes encouraged agricultural activities and proved that it can be profitable even in a tourism-driven economy. With the mushroom growth of hotel industry the demand for agricultural products increased and that led to the reemergence of vegetable cultivation and other related agricultural activities. The Responsible Tourism experiments brought many who had left farming in the wake of tourism, back to the agriculture sector. The NREGA programmes are being conducted in sync with the RT activities. One such activity nowadays (obvious to any tourist to the village) is that of people removing weeds from the waste ponds. Enabling these ponds for fish farming, converting the fallow land into cultivable land.

ICRT India which stands for *International Centre For Responsible Tourism* works in collaboration with private sector, government and local communities to make India one the finest Responsible Tourism destination. Kerala has emerged as one of the prime tourism destinations on the national and international map and is considered as the tourism trend setter in the country. The availability of plenty of natural resources, skilled manpower, supportive entrepreneurial community, strong local-self-governments, civil society organisations, multitude of micro enterprises, streams of professionals and academicians, responsible media and responsive tourism industry, provide the state an ideal setting to implement and practice 'Responsible Tourism.' The State Level Responsible Tourism Committee met on 20th April 2007 and decided to take up the implementation of Responsible Tourism initiative in phases. Kumarakom, Wayanad, Kovalam and Thekkady were identified for the implementations of Responsible Tourism initiative in the first phase. They provide an eco-friendly tourism growth to the economy and income generation for the local people.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kelly S Bricker and Rosemary Black (2012) discusses how ecotourism and sustainable tourism can assist in supporting and meeting the MDG by drawing on case studies and discusses

how ecotourism and sustainable tourism can assist in supporting and meeting challenges and goals that need to be considered in the future.

P. Diaz (2013) says that some researchers perceive tourism as a process, which creates dependency and causes loss of socioeconomic and environmental control, and is harmful to traditional socio-cultural structures. For others it is clearly an opportunity for development and convergence among societies. The main consequences of tourism are economic, socio-cultural and socio-ecological ones. These directly affect the natural and cultural landscape, as well as the inhabitants of the destinations. 'Proper management' can unite the local community; strengthen the historical memory and promote the recognition that the landscape is a legacy worth preserving.

Donald G Reid (2003) focuses on tourism in developing and less-developed countries. He examines its social and environmental impact and offers a timely critical analysis of the part it plays in globalisation. Many of the world's poorest countries rely on the tourist trade for the major part of their income. However, all too often, the local communities involved do not reap the benefits of this trade. Developers often exclude local communities from the initial planning and decision-making process, viewing them either as a gentle resource to be exploited, or as an obstacle.

Manhas Parikshat Singh (2006) says that Tourism is one of the most dynamic and challenging industries across the globe. Since tourism is a multi-dimensional service industry, it becomes a responsibility of national and local governments, private sectors and voluntary organisations to make it more sustainable and responsible for minimising negative environmental, social and cultural impacts and generating greater economic benefits for local Residents.

Going through the literature on Responsible Tourism and related areas it was noted that it is tender time to go in deep to review the past studies on the performance evaluation. Even though there are books that prescribe the concepts and ideologies of Responsible Tourism, the books that analyse its performance are rare. So the study on the impact of RT on local people is significant.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN KERALA

Responsible Tourism (RT) in Kerala is mainly conceived with three kinds of responsibilities which are termed as the 'triple bottom-line', they are economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility. In Kerala, the major RT centres are Wayanad, Kovalam, Thekady and Kumarakom. The major activities taking place in these areas are the following :

Fallow land cultivation and enhanced agricultural production

The resource mapping carried out through household surveys and physical reconnaissance of the project area identified large chunks of un-cultivated land in the villages. These were left fallow either because of low yield, low demand for agricultural produces or because of spiralling prices of non-agricultural land induced by the development of tourism. The RT Cell at Kumarakom, however, was able to mobilise Kudumbashree volunteers to take up paddy cultivation in 55 acres of land and Grama Panchayat to introduce vegetable cultivation in another 30 acres of land. In addition, 612 homestead farmers were motivated to take up vegetable cultivation to enhance vegetable supplies to local hotels.

Fish Farms and Lotus Cultivation

The resource mapping exercise identified many un-used ponds with reasonable water levels throughout the year. The RT Cell took up the cleaning of these ponds and promoted fish cultivation in twenty ponds and lotus cultivation in six ponds by the local community. The tourism industry provided a ready market for the produce of the fish farms and lotuses. It thus had a positive impact on improving the living conditions of the local community.

Establishing linkages

The RT Cell identified the items of purchase for the hotel industry and initiated a dialogue to encourage them to resort to local purchases to the maximum possible.

Development of Souvenir Industry

Tourists visiting any particular destination, usually like to carry with them small items typically produced in the place of visit, as mementoes of their visit. The production of these souvenirs by the local craftsman attracted the attention of the hotel industry and contracted exclusive marketing rights through their outlets. It has led to accelerated growth of souvenir industry and the consequent benefits to the craftsman, which pushed him above the poverty line.

Promotion of Local Art Forms and Culture

Kerala has a rich cultural heritage with many art forms and cultural troupes. A professional Sinkari Melam Group of Children and Women was formed under the banner of Responsible Tourism and it became the first such cultural group in Kerala. The tourist, visiting these places during the festival season, gets the chance to watch the traditional art forms of that particular locality.

Protection of Environment

The environmental initiative of Responsible Tourism succeeded in declaring many places as a plastic-free zone, promoting bicycle journey around hotels and resorts, promotion of organic

farming, mangrove protection and control of backwater pollution with the help of the community.

A survey of plastic use by sales outlets in the area was conducted and promoted the manufacture and use of eco-friendly carry bags by the establishments.

Energy Saving Measures

A survey of energy and water use as well as the generation and disposal of waste by the hotels was undertaken to assess the extent of green practices by the industry. The data collected was used for developing environmental criteria for granting green certificates.

Tourist activities, as traditionally defined by the tourism industry, fundamentally involve the transportation and hosting of the tourism consumer in a local community, i.e., “tourist destination,” where the tourist product is consumed. No other global industry structures itself in such a way that the consumer is brought to the product, rather than the product being delivered to the consumer in his or her own community. This structural difference produces unique social impacts upon the local tourist community, including the interruption of local customs and lifestyles, the spread of infectious diseases, changes in local demographics, and changes in local housing and labour markets.

Now the study on the RT practices reveals the fact that the economy of local communities grew rapidly with the initiation of RT practices. The income earning of the local people increased considerably and their standard of living also increased. The Kudumbasree workers with other women empowered programmes helped the Government to implement this very effectively and with the arrival of women into the production sector the income earning and the overall level of production increased.

RT also helped in the shift of employment pattern of the locals. Many shifted to major tourism related jobs many unemployed got jobs as guides and salesman in the local craft shops. The income of the people increased considerably in the peak time. The daily income of the locals increased from 250 rupees to 350 rupees on an average. Despite these advantages there are some disadvantages as well. The hike in the price in the local market due to increase in demand for the high and better quality goods by hotels and home stays, cultural eradication due to the blend of various cultures in one locality, sexual harassment and increased use of drugs are some among that. But when compared with the other forms of tourism RT has very little negative impacts. Because it focuses more on local culture and tradition and promotes it. Solutions to adverse tourism impacts are to be found in the shared interest of local communities, tourism businesses, and tourism consumers to maintain the natural wealth and social heritage of the tourist destination. In the first instance, therefore, an institutional mechanism

must be established, relative to each destination preserving all their indigenous peculiarities. To secure the legitimacy of these mechanisms, the participation of all interested local groups or interests must be guaranteed and legislations must be passed for the same. Dialogue must take place in an open and transparent way. Experience demonstrates that if dialogue among interested parties is to have a real impact on development, it must generate accountability among these parties with regards to future investments, practices and policies. Consensus or decisions arising from dialogue must be reflected in institutional action. Only through such accountability we can preserve our nature and tourism potential in its natural way

Appendix – I

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ABBREVIATIONS

C.B.O : Community Based Organisation

G.I.T.P.A.C : Great India Tourism Planners and Consultants

I.C.R.T : International Centre for Responsible Tourism

R.T : Responsible Tourism

W.T.O : World Tourism Organisation

W.T.T.C : World Travel and Tourism Council