

Topic: IMPACT OF ECOTOURISM IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

(With Special Reference to Kottayam District of Kerala)

INTRODUCTION

The term 'tourism' is now widely known phenomenon around the world, and different people define it differently. Some define it as a way to go out to explore nature and its beauty, while others define it as a way to get relaxed, and to escape from their busy, tidy, and monotonous life schedule. But in real sense, it has much wider scope. Thus tourism is a business activity connected with providing accommodation, services and entertainment for people who are visiting a place for pleasure, recreation, leisure, business, and so on. It has become an integral part of today's life style.

Tourism plays an important role in the Indian Economy. In India, tourism has created direct and indirect employment for some seventeen million people. It generates earnings for hoteliers, travel agents, taxi drivers, crafts men, souvenir- sellers, transporters, airlines, tourist guides etc.

Ecotourism is now defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment sustains the well being of the local people and involves interpretation and education". Ecotourism plays a great role towards socio- economic changes. There is an immediate impact on the host environment due to the direct contact of visitors and also an indirect impact on the local economy and the society.

The origin of ecotourism lies in nature and outdoor tourism. Environmental aesthetics is the most significant pull factor innate in any ecotourism destination. Ecotourism is a form of tourism that is inspired primarily by the natural history and the environment of an area. Ecotourism projects are less capital intensive. Ecotourism has recently come to be regarded as the panacea that enables us to aggressively seek tourism dollars with no obvious damage to eco systems, since wild resources are not being harvested and there is no apparent associated development.

The entire Kerala is an ecotourism hotspot. Kerala is a green strip of land in the South West Corner of Indian Peninsula. Backwaters, hill stations, wild life sanctuaries, and cultural festivals are the major ecotourism attraction in Kerala. Eco tourists are mostly interested in

trekking, hiking, bird watching, nature photography, wildlife safari, camping, mountaineering, angling, surfing, river rafting, kayaking, and botanical study and all these are easily done in the ecotourism destination in Kerala. The main ecotourism attractions of Kottayam are backwaters, Kumarakom bird sanctuary, Vembanad Lake, Illaveezhappoonchira hill station etc.

Statement of the problem

The government of Kerala views ecotourism as one of the alternative to develop the economy especially in the context of limited prospects of the manufacturing sector, problems in the agricultural and traditional sectors and uncertainties in fading expatriate employment in the gulf recording to 10th five year plan document ecotourism has emerged as the vital sector for generating employment and income. It is no longer possible to ignore the vital role that ecotourism is destined to play in the economy of Kerala. We need a careful management to get maximum benefits and minimum negative impacts. In this developmental stage of ecotourism a study on this field is pertinent. In this study focus on importance, performance and problems of ecotourism development in Kerala can be explained and understand through the study of ecotourism projects in Kottayam district. In study of ecotourism destinations in Kottayam district provide a picture about the economic impact and trends of ecotourism and hence the study stated "Impact of Ecotourism in Economic Development".

Significance of the study

In Kerala tourism has become one of the major sectors of the economy contributing to a large proportion of income and generating huge employment opportunities. Ecotourism is a growing area in the tourist friendly state of Kerala. Kottayam is a land of striking beauty with long backwaters and sprawling paddy fields. Kumarakom back water in Kerala attracts thousands of tourists from all over the world various eco tourism promotional programmes are taking place in Kottayam district.

Objectives of the study

1. To identify important ecotourism destinations in Kottayam district
2. To analyses trends in the field of ecotourism in Kottayam district.

3. To examine the role of ecotourism on the standard of living and economic growth in an economy.
4. To understand the problems, performance, growth and economic significance of ecotourism.
5. To make an evaluation of ecotourism destinations in Kottayam.

Summary of Findings

The main ecotourism attraction of Kottayam is Backwaters, Kumarakom Birds sanctuary, Vembananad Lake, ilaveezhapoochira hill station, Ayyapara etc. Foreign exchange earnings of Kerala from tourism are Rs. 6398.93 crores in 2014. This is a highest figure compared to the foreign earnings of last ten years. Total revenue generated from tourism (Direct and Indirect) in Kerala is Rs. 24885.44 crores which is highest revenue compared to last ten years. Majority of eco tourists to Kottayam are belonging to Kerala itself (63%). 26% tourists are Foreigners. Tourists are generally highly educated. There is fairly good representation of both men and women. Out of the total respondents most of the tourists come from within Kerala. Majority of the respondents selected Kottayam as they wanted to pleasure (89%). More than 37% of the tourists were satisfied with this destination as it is nature based. Eco tourists have good opinion about the tourism centres. So 89% of the tourists are satisfied. They are satisfied due to three main reasons. They are tourism places are qualitative, informative and natural based. They also satisfied due to convenience of the tourism place. According to tourists roads and other infrastructure are good and properly maintained in the tourism places. Star hotels are the attractive accommodation facility. Boating is the attractive tourism programme in Kottayam. Behaviour of local people with tourists is in good manner. About 75% tourists are satisfied with the amenities provided to them. Medical facility and shopping and communication facilities are good in tourism destination. 75% of the tourists believe that the security measures provided to them are good.

Costs of visiting the eco tourism place are moderate. Above 50% opined that there are some pollution problems exists in the tourism destination. According to tourists' more ecotourism activities can be seen in tourism destinations during the regular visit. Tourists suggest that plastic should be removed from the tourism destination and thereby reduce pollution in the area. 100% local people opined that their standard of living has been improved due to ecotourism development. 57% local people believe that there is pollution related problems in

the tourism places. 79% local people enjoy the employment opportunities due to ecotourism development. 36% gets permanent employment status from the tourism development. 93% of local people say that there is infrastructural development due to tourism. 86% local people get direct and indirect economic benefits from ecotourism. It consists of improvement in acquisition of assets and housing. 93% of the local people benefited in income and employment due to ecotourism development. 100% foreign tourists prefer ecotourism to general tourism. 67% respondents reveal that involvement of private sector in ecotourism activities leads to exploitation of natural resources. It also says that globalization discourages ecotourism. Government policies are adequate for the promotion of ecotourism development. Main aim of Home Stay operators are profit. They opined that their business is always profitable. Food, accommodation and boating facilities are provided by home stay operators. Testing of hypothesis reveals that ecotourism leads to economic development.

Suggestions of the study

Suggestions for Improvement of Facilities for Ecotourism Development are as follows:-

- The government should plan to build world class infrastructural facilities to attract foreign visitors.
- Tourism can be promoted in a big way by establishing tourist resorts at strategic locations proper accommodation centres with modern amenities suitable for stay of the international tourists must be constructed. Construction of day shelter is another step for ecotourism development.
- There should be some improvement in marketing facilities for eco tourism promotion. Steps should be taken to market tourism potentials of Kottayam district in India and abroad.
- There should be provision for proper security to the tourists' visit. Also implementation of security measures during boating should be a must.
- Waste management is an important aspect for promoting ecotourism. The tourist spots should be plastic free adequate waste boxes should be kept in all tourist areas to keep the surroundings clean. These wastes should be collected and disposed in a scientific manner.

- This is concerned with assessing the predicted effects of development upon the environment and thereby providing decision makers with information on the likely consequences of their decision to proceed with development.
- Provide more quality services at reasonable rate.

Conclusion of the study

Tourism in ecologically sensitive area needs close monitoring. In short tourism in nature based areas should be ecologically sustainable. There should also be provision for learning process for a visitor. Ecotourism could be a tool for environmental conservation local empowerment poverty alleviation and so on. So it requires well planning on the basic of regulations. This study reveals that tourism has a positive impact on the economic impact on economic development as it provides more and high quality services. Ecotourism enjoys a significant superiority over general tourism with regard to tourist arrivals and economic social and environmental benefits. It can be concluded that ecotourism development and protection of environment can be made possible with the careful planning and execution by the government departments' tourist officials along with the cooperation of the public in future ecotourism will continue to grow in several parts of the world as a profitable way of life.