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Impact of ecotourism on the socio-economic upliftment of local people in Wayanad

Dr. Sajith M and Dr. Ramya Krishnan M

Abstract

Tourism has a direct impact on the national revenue for all touristic countries, it creates work opportunities, industries, and several investments to serve and raise nations performance and culture, also distributes their history, civilization, and traditions. Tourism is considered as a good source of revenue. Tourism has been acknowledged world widely as a tool for economic development. Wayanad occupies a prominent position among the tourism destinations in Kerala, which promises a variety of wildlife safari, ecotourism, lake tourism, adventure tourism etc. The present study tries to assess the level of awareness of local people and tourists towards the concept of ecotourism, and to measure the impact of ecotourism on the social & economic upliftment of local people. Three ecotourism destinations, namely Pookode lake, Kuruva island and Muthanga wild life sanctuary were selected in first stage. Then, 50 local people and 50 tourists each (25 Domestic tourists and 25 Foreign tourists) were selected purposively from the selected ecotourism destinations, thereby constituting a total of 300 respondents (150 local people and 150 tourists). The study revealed that all the respondents have high awareness towards the concept of ecotourism. As regards the social upliftment of local people the ecotourism has provided market for their products, protects the arts & craft, provides employment opportunity, improved the living condition, knowledge & communication skill etc. As regards the economic upliftment, the ecotourism has led to the increase in land value, helping them to owning a quality house, owning a vehicle and other assets etc. All these points lead to the conclusion that there is both social and economic upliftment of people due to ecotourism in the district.

Keywords: Ecotourism, awareness level, social impact, economic impact

1. Introduction

Tourism is a visit to a place or several places for the purpose of entertainment which leads to an awareness of other civilizations and cultures, also increasing the knowledge about countries, cultures, history etc. Tourism is the business of providing accommodation, food, travel, entertainment for the people who are on travel, tours, trade etc. Tourism has a direct impact on the national revenue for all touristic countries, it creates work opportunities, industries, and several investments to serve and raise nations performance and culture, also distributes their history, civilization, and traditions. Tourism is considered as a good source of revenue. It has major economic significance for any country. The receipts from international tourism are a valuable source of earning for both developing and developed countries. The spending of tourists generates income for both public and private sectors. It also leads to the generation of employment opportunities in a country. The income from tourism is showing an increasing trend in India. Kerala which is having a low industrial base compared with the nearby states is also taking measures to earn more income from the tourism activities. The promotion of tourism has been identified as a key strategy that can lead to economic up-liftment, community development, infra-structural development, poverty alleviation, employment generation etc within the state. Tourism has long played an important role in the Indian economy as being the third most important industry sector of national economy.

Kerala "the Gods own country" has been rated as one of the 50 must see destinations in the life span of a human being. Today Kerala is the most sought and trusted tourism brand in India. No other state in the country is blessed with natural resources having a very long coastal region, Western Ghats, waterways, mountains etc. Kerala offers a variety of tourism products. The literature reveals that the tourism products of the state can be categorized into

three; namely Natural tourism products, man-made tourism products and symbiotic tourism products. Natural tourism products include mountains, hills, climate, beaches, etc. Man-made tourism products include festivals, architecture, sculpture, paintings etc. Symbiotic tourism products is a proper mix of both natural and man-made tourism products; such as, water sports, wildlife safaris, house boats, home stays etc.

Wayanad occupies a prominent position among the tourism destinations in Kerala, which promises a variety of wildlife, ayurveda, plantation resorts and spas with a distinct culture and a tradition of its own. The difference in altitudes of each locality within the district presents a variation of climatic condition. Tourism products like cultural tourism, heritage tourism, pilgrimage tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, cave tourism, hill tourism, lake tourism, hydal tourism, waterfalls tourism, medical tourism etc. were offered in the district.

1.1 Ecotourism

As a result of the environmental issues faced today, now a day there is an increased concern from all parts of the state towards the concept of eco tourism. Ecotourism refers to the “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.”. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. One of the goals of ecotourism is to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment, and to foster a greater appreciation of the natural habitats. The ecotourism includes programs that minimize the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Many view tourism as a tool for community development. Especially in the rural areas experiencing economic hardships, tourism often is considered an instrument for revitalization of a local economy helping to improve quality of life and protect natural and cultural resources. Empirical studies suggest that development of tourism brings environmental, socio-

cultural, and economic changes to the community where it is developed.

It is evident that the ecotourism leads to some changes in the social and economic aspects of the lifestyle of the local people. It would be worthwhile to investigate into the socio-economic benefits of ecotourism on the local people of Wayanad district. The present study intends to examine the impact of ecotourism on the social and economic upliftment of local people in Wayanad district. The study also checks the awareness level of tourists and local people towards the concept of ecotourism and their variability with regard to domestic tourists, foreign tourists and local people.

2. Methodology

The study is designed as a descriptive one based on both secondary and primary data. The primary data has been collected from the ecotourists coming to the selected ecotourism destinations, with the help of a structured pre-tested questionnaire. The sample selection has been done in two stages. At the first stage, three ecotourism destinations, namely Pookode lake, Kuruva island and Muthanga wild life sanctuary were selected purposively. In the second stage, 50 tourists each (25 Domestic tourists and 25 Foreign tourists) and 50 local people each were selected from the selected ecotourism destinations. Altogether there are 150 tourists and 150 local people as respondents constituting a total of 300 respondents.

3. Demographic profile of the respondents

It can be observed from table 1, that majority of the ecotourists visiting the destination are male. As regards the age category, majority of the ecotourists are youngsters in the age group of 21- 40 Yrs., who were married. Most of the tourists are having a monthly income of Rs. 40001- Rs. 80000 with an educational qualification of post graduation. As regards of the local people, majority of the respondents are male and in the age group of 21-40 years. Majority of the respondents are having high school as their educational qualification. The respondents are having a monthly income of Rs.10001- Rs.20000.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Particulars		Domestic Tourists		Foreign Tourists		Local People	
		No	%	No	%		
Gender	Male	47	62.67	54	72.00	108	72.00
	Female	28	37.33	21	28.00	42	28.00
Age	Upto 20 Yrs	7	9.33	0	0.0	10	6.70
	21-40 Yrs	47	62.67	38	50.7	100	66.67
	41-60 Yrs	21	28.00	37	49.3	40	26.67
Marital status	Unmarried	28	37.33	35	46.67	20	13.30
	Married	47	62.67	40	53.33	130	86.70
	Separated	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Educational Qualification	High school	0	0.00	0	0.00	90	60.00
	Higher secondary	0	0.00	0	0.00	45	30.00
	Graduation	14	18.67	7	9.33	10	6.67
	P.G.	21	28.00	46	61.33	5	3.33
	Professional	40	53.33	22	29.34	0	0.00
Monthly Income	Upto Rs.10000	0	0.00	0	0.00	30	20.00
	Rs.10001- Rs.20000	7	9.33	0	0.00	70	46.70
	Rs. 20001- Rs. 40000	35	46.67	0	0.00	50	33.30
	Rs. 40001- Rs. 80000	33	44.00	30	40.00	0	0.00
	Above Rs. 80000	0	0.00	45	60.00	0	0.00

(Source: Survey data)

4. Awareness level about the concept of ecotourism

The table 2 shows the awareness level of the tourists and local people towards the concept of ecotourism. It is clear from the table that the Domestic tourists have high awareness about the variable 'No plastic use' (mean score 4.36), 'Protection of natural resources' (mean score of 4.31) etc. They have only moderate awareness about the variable 'conservation of cultural diversity' (mean score of 2.85 only). So far as concerned with the foreign tourists, they have very high awareness about the variables 'minimal impact on Environment'(mean score of 4.96), 'Conservation

of biological diversity' (mean score of 4.91) etc. On an overall, the foreign tourists have very high awareness about the concept of ecotourism. As regards the local people, they have very high awareness about the variables 'No plastic use', (mean score of 4.73) and 'Ecotourism is concerned with ecological system', (mean score of 4.53) as they got highest mean score. On an overall the foreign tourists are having very high awareness where as the local people & domestic tourists are having high awareness about the concept of ecotourism.

Table 2: Awareness Level about the concept of Ecotourism

Variable	Domestic tourists		Foreign tourists		Local people	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
It is concerned with ecological system	3.85	0.83	4.53	0.50	4.53	0.75
It protects ecological system	3.80	0.40	4.64	0.48	4.27	0.62
It is concerned with protection of natural resources	4.31	0.46	4.72	0.45	4.33	0.64
It promotes recycling	3.31	0.46	3.56	0.50	3.27	0.60
It is Energy efficient oriented	3.25	1.19	4.27	0.62	3.67	0.96
It is oriented towards conservation of water	3.99	0.92	4.47	0.50	4.33	0.78
Conservation of biological diversity	4.27	0.62	4.91	0.29	4.47	0.42
Conservation of cultural diversity	2.85	1.11	4.47	0.50	4.46	0.89
Sustainable use of bio-diversity	3.64	0.65	4.49	0.50	3.33	0.58
Minimal impact on Environment	4.27	0.45	4.96	0.18	4.47	0.54
Respect for land, nature, people and cultures	3.07	0.70	4.27	0.44	4.27	0.68
No plastic use	4.36	0.90	4.79	0.41	4.73	0.93
Overall	4.02	0.57	4.51	0.54	4.18	0.69

(Source: Survey Data)

4.1 Result of hypotheses testing - awareness level about the concept of ecotourism

Even though there are differences in the level of awareness among various tourists and local people, it is important to know whether these differences are statistically significant or not. So a hypothesis was fixed with regard to the level of awareness. An analysis of variance carried out to test the

statistical significance of the above hypothesis at 5% level shows that there is significant difference in the awareness level of domestic tourists, foreign tourists and local people with regard to all variables except 'ecotourism promotes recycling' as the P value is less than 0.05. Hence, the hypothesis is rejected. The result of ANOVA in this respect is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Result of ANOVA – Awareness Level about the concept of Ecotourism

Attributes	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F Value	P Value
It is concerned with ecological system	23.210	2	11.605	29.362	.000
It protects ecological system	26.623	2	13.312	67.452	.000
It is concerned with natural resources	8.837	2	4.418	15.548	.000
It promotes recycling	4.490	2	2.245	4.638	.010
It is Energy efficient oriented	39.160	2	19.580	34.992	.000
It is oriented towards conservation of water	9.493	2	4.747	12.260	.000
Conservation of biological diversity	16.440	2	8.220	26.437	.000
Conservation of cultural diversity	138.943	2	69.472	126.284	.000
sustainable use of bio-diversity	67.640	2	33.820	97.180	.000
Minimal impact on environment	22.250	2	11.125	63.541	.000
Respect for land, nature, people and cultures	75.610	2	37.805	90.608	.000
No plastic use	8.747	2	4.373	12.835	.000

(Source: Survey Data)

5. Social impact of ecotourism on the local people

One of the objectives developed for the study is to identify the impact of ecotourism on the social upliftment of local people. This objective has been satisfied by studying the social impact of ecotourism on the local people. Table 4 shows the social impact of ecotourism on the local people. Here a list of statements about ecotourism is supplied to the respondents. They were asked to tick the appropriate column according to their degree of agreement. The result is shown below. It is clear from the table that, the local people at the tourism destination have strongly agreed with the

statement, 'Ecotourism help to provide a market for forest goods such as honey, forest amla etc' with a mean score of 4.67 and S.D. of 0.47. They agreed with the statement 'Ecotourism has improved our living condition', 'Ecotourism helped me to provide good education to children', 'Ecotourism helped me to provide good health care to family', 'Ecotourism help to preserve arts and crafts' and 'Ecotourism help to create employment opportunity to women in various tourism establishments'. It can concluded that the ecotourism has resulted in the social upliftment of local people by providing market for their products, by

protecting the arts & craft, providing employment opportunity, improved the living condition, knowledge & communication skill. The ecotourism at the destination has

also resulted in the provision of good academic and health care facility to the family members of local people.

Table 4: Social Impact of Ecotourism on the local people

Statements/Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ecotourism has improved our living condition	4.20	0.40
Ecotourism has improved my knowledge	3.40	0.61
Ecotourism has improved my communication skill	3.13	0.96
Ecotourism helped me to provide good education to children	4.33	0.47
Ecotourism helped me to provide good health care to my family	4.40	0.49
Ecotourism help to preserve arts and crafts	4.00	0.00
Ecotourism help to create employment opportunity to women in various tourism establishments	4.33	0.47
Ecotourism help to provide a market for forest goods such as honey, forest amla etc	4.67	0.47

(Source: Survey data)

6. Economic impact of ecotourism on the local people

In order to measure the Economic impact of ecotourism, the respondents are supplied with some statements and asked to tick the column according to their degree of agreement. Table 5 shows the result of analysis of economic impact of ecotourism on the local people. The local have strongly agreed on the statement that, ‘Ecotourism helped to increase the asset value such as land value’. They have agreed on the other statements such as, ‘Tourism is a source of income for me’, ‘More tourist will increase the health of local

economy’, ‘Shopping has increased the scope for preserving rural handicrafts’, ‘Tourism provides jobs to the local population’, ‘Tourism plays a vital role in local area development’, ‘Ecotourism helped me to own a quality house’ and ‘Ecotourism helped me to own vehicle’. That is the local people have the opinion that, tourism has improved their value of assets, helped to own vehicles and quality house etc. On an overall it can be said that the economic position of local people has improved and there is economic upliftment of local people due to ecotourism.

Table 5: Economic Impact of Ecotourism on the local people

Statements/Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tourism is a source of income for me	4.73	0.44
More tourist will improve the health of the local economy	4.40	0.49
Shopping has increased the scope for preserving rural handicrafts	4.60	0.49
Tourism provides jobs to the local population	4.00	0.00
Tourism plays a vital role in local area development	3.80	0.83
Ecotourism helped me to own a quality house	3.93	0.68
Ecotourism helped me to own vehicle	4.40	0.49
Ecotourism helped to increase the asset value such as land value	5.00	0.00

(Source: Survey data)

7. Conclusion

Tourism has been acknowledged world widely as a tool for economic development. Majority of the population in Wayanad district is engaged in the agriculture and allied activities. The various problems in the agricultural sector have affected the economic position of the local people. It is in this context the tourism activities have gained momentum in the district. As the district is blessed with a large number of natural attractions, nature based tourism has got importance. Accordingly, the authorities have implemented the concept of ecotourism. The present study tries to assess the level of awareness of local people and tourists towards the concept of ecotourism and to measure the social & economic upliftment of local people due to ecotourism. All the respondents such as domestic tourists, foreign tourists and local people have high awareness towards the concept of ecotourism. As regards the social upliftment of local people the ecotourism has provided market for their products, protects the arts & craft, provides employment opportunity, improved the living condition, knowledge & communication skill etc. The ecotourism at the destination has also resulted in the provision of good academic and health care facility to the family members of local people. As regards the economic upliftment, the ecotourism has led to the increase in land value, helping them to owning a quality house, owning a vehicle and other assets etc. All

these points lead to the conclusion that there is both social and economic upliftment of people due to ecotourism in the district.

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