

Kerala's Responsible Tourism Model: Perspectives Of Stakeholders

¹THUSHARA R.V., ²Dr. R. POORNIMA RANI,

¹Ph.D. Research scholar in Commerce, Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal

²Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal.

Abstract

The aim of governments around the globe to accelerate economic growth through market-oriented policies has resulted merely in increasing GDP while deterring certain groups from becoming a part of their development agenda. Travel for leisure purposes has evolved from an experience reserved for very few people into something enjoyed by many. Historically, the ability to travel was reserved for royalty and the upper classes. From ancient Roman times through to the 17th century, young men of high standing were encouraged to travel through Europe on a "grand tour". Through the Middle Ages, many societies encouraged the practice of religious pilgrimage, as reflected in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and other literature. The word hospitality predates the use of the word tourism, and first appeared in the 14th century. While sustainable tourism and responsible consumption are widely endorsed, their implementation is complex and sometimes oversimplified. Responsible tourism, a holistic approach to travel, seeks to minimize the adverse social, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism while maximizing its benefits. It involves fostering positive relationships between tourists, host communities, and the environment, ensuring that tourism is sustainable and beneficial for all stakeholders. The Government of Kerala also decided to launch Responsible Tourism initiatives in the state on a pilot basis in May 2007 in four destinations that are known for their tourism attractions. The destinations selected were Kovalam (beach), Kumarakom (back water) Thekkady (forest) and Wayanad (hill). Destination Level Responsible Tourism Committees were formed in each of the destinations and also Working Groups on Economic, Social and Environmental fronts to address issues at the destinations. The aim of this research paper is identifying the perception of stakeholders in Responsible Tourism destinations in Kerala. From the study, we can understand how the different stakeholders perceive the idea of responsible tourism in their respective local community.

Key Words: Tourism, Responsible tourism, tourism committee, stakeholders

1. Introduction

The Responsible Tourism (RT) initiative in Kerala adopted a 'trial and error' mechanism where learning by doing was given prominence. The project has succeeded in creating visible benefit to the local community on economic, social and environmental fronts as the stakeholders in these pilot destinations were placed in the forefront of RT initiatives. The Kerala Government, realizing the role of tourism in deciding the growth momentum focusing on sustainability, took efforts to enable the community members to take an active role in tourism development. A public debate in this direction was mooted in 2007, involving elected representatives, NGOs, policy makers, industry practitioners, community leaders, social activists, environmentalist, media persons and academicians, which decided to promote RT in Kerala giving due emphasis to triple bottom line approach - economic, social and environmental aspects.

1.1. Objectives of the study

- 1) To Understand the perspective of Tourism and its contribution to the growth of Tourism industry in Kerala
- 2) To study about the initiatives of Government of Kerala towards Responsible Tourism.
- 3) To understand the opinion of tourism development among the local Populace.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Tourism has rapidly become the world's largest industry, bringing employment opportunities and revenue to governments through taxes. However, it also poses significant environmental and social challenges, including air and noise pollution, aesthetic degradation and potential increases in crime. In response Government of Kerala launched Responsible Tourism initiatives fostering sustainable tourism development, involving stakeholders in product development, marketing, skill building and livelihood practices. What are the key initiatives implemented by Government of Kerala under Responsible Tourism? what extent have these initiatives achieved their intended objectives? How do the implemented efforts contribute to environmental protection and cultural preservation? are some of the pertinent questions in this regard. Hence the study aims to analyse the perception of stakeholders in responsible tourism destination in Kerala.

The reporting of the study is done in three sections. Section I deals with Review of Literature, Section II deals with Analysis of Primary Data and Section III deals with Discussions and its implications.

2. Review of Literature

Environmental sustainability is a core component of responsible tourism. Tourists and tourism businesses are encouraged to adopt practices that reduce environmental impact, such as minimizing waste, conserving water and energy, and protecting wildlife and natural habitats (*Becken, S., & Hay, J. E.2007*).

RT initiatives should be introduced with the main agenda that it should maintain the environmental sustainability without curtailing the aspirations of future generations. Responsible tourism in India faces several challenges. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of awareness among tourists, and the need for more comprehensive policies and regulations remain significant hurdles (*Joshi & Tiwari, 2018*). Although RT have moved in a better way to improve the standard of living of local community, there arise the problem of adequate rules and regulations to handle the hurdles that may arise in the tourist destinations.

In the northern state of Uttarakhand, community-based tourism initiatives have been instrumental in providing livelihoods to remote mountain communities. These initiatives involve homestays, guided treks, and local handicrafts, which offer tourists an authentic experience while generating income for local residents (*Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board*).

The focus is on sustainable practices that protect the fragile Himalayan ecosystem and promote cultural exchange. Investments in infrastructure, such as airports, roads, and public transportation systems, are frequently motivated by the need to accommodate and attract tourists' source of income for local communities (*Sinha, P. 2013*). The income level of local communities was raised through RT initiatives with the improvement in infrastructure facilities in the destinations.

3. Methodology

The study is analytical and descriptive in nature. The scope of the study is limited to four key responsible tourism destinations such as: Kovalam, Kumarakam, Thekkady, and Wayanad in the state of Kerala. The efforts of various governments and non-governmental agencies in connection with tourism, its impact on environment and culture will be covered through the study. The same is analyzed with the help of literature and opinion of the stake holders.

The nature of study is descriptive. It describes the efforts and perception of stake holders towards the impact of responsible tourism on environment and culture. Primary and secondary data will be collected from both supply side and demand side. The stake holders of different tourist destinations in Kerala form the demand side and the government and implementing agencies forms the supply side.

The secondary data are those which have already been collected by someone else. The secondary data can be collected from journals, newspapers, internet, booklets, KTDC, RT Manual etc.

3.1. Sampling design

- Selection of RT Destinations:
- Major 4 RT destinations were selected through purposive sampling.
- selection of sample stake holders: 400
 - a. Host community - convenient

- b. Tourists – incidental

3.2. Limitations of the Study:

The main limitation is that the area of study in connection with responsible tourism is limited to four destinations only- Kovalam, Thekkady, Kumarakom and Wayanad and this is an opinion survey.

4. Analysis and Interpretations

4.1. Analysis of Perception of Stakeholders in RT Destination in Kerala

The study focuses on analysing Perception of Stakeholders in RT Destination in Kerala. For conducting this study, four key responsible tourism destinations were selected: Kovalam, Kumarakam, Thekkady, and Wayanad. These locations were among the first in Kerala where responsible tourism was implemented by the government. It deals with the demographic profiles of the stakeholders, their associations with the destinations, the issues and challenges they normally face, their awareness about responsible tourism elements, the negative impacts observed, and the development of the destinations following the implementation of responsible tourism initiatives. The study employs methods such as mean difference analysis, weighted average mean.

4.2. Profile of the Stakeholders in RT destinations

For the analysis responses from 400 stakeholders were collected using questionnaire from four selected responsible tourism destinations in Kerala, viz Kovalam, Kumarakam, Thekkedy and Wayanad. Stakeholders comprise of Tourism Professional Local Resident, Business Owner, Government Official & Environmentalist. Profile of the stakeholders on the basis of Gender, Age, location, educational qualification, profession and association with RT destination are detailed in the table below.

Table 1: Profile of the stakeholders

Variables	Particulars	Number	Percent
Gender	Female	165	41.3
	Male	235	58.8
	Total	400	100
Tourist Destinaton	Kovalam	100	25
	Kumarakam	100	25
	Thekkedy	100	25
	Wayanad	100	25
	Total	400	100
Profession	Tourism Professional	134	33.5
	Local Resident	156	39
	Business Owner	72	18
	Government Official	35	8.8
	Environmentalist	3	0.8
	Total	400	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 1 indicates that 41.3 per cent of the respondents are female and 58.8 percent are male. It is found that male ratio is significantly higher than the female ratio and hence it is inferred that male respondents took more interest in responsible tourism initiatives as compared to their female counterparts.

Table 1 shows the location wise distribution of respondents. Responsible tourism initiative is concentrated mainly in four destinations. Among these, Kovalam is an international destination,

Kumarakom a famous backwater destination, Thekkedy a wildlife destination and Wayanad a hill station. The table shows that there is an equal distribution of respondents among the destination region. Table 1 indicate that 39 percent are local residents, 33.5 percent are tourism professionals, 18 percent are business owners ,88 percent are government officials and 0.8 percent of the respondents are environmentalist.

4.3. Opinion towards concepts of RT

The opinions towards the concept of responsible tourism are depicted in Table 2. The opinions considered include viewing responsible tourism as an ethical business practice, a tool for future business sustainability, a means of minimizing impact while maximizing benefits, a responsibility to the community, and a way of creating better places to live and visit. The level of agreement with these opinions is analysed in detail in the table below.

Table 2: Opinion towards concept of RT

Concepts	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	WAM	Rank
An ethical business practice	0	9	77	215	99	4.01	1
Future sustainability of the business	8	25	123	193	51	3.635	6
Minimising Impact and Maximising benefit	10	27	111	193	59	3.66	5
Responsibility to the community	7	16	102	206	69	3.785	2
Creating Better places to live and visit	8	32	100	202	58	3.675	3

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 presents the opinions towards the concept of responsible tourism (RT) cross various aspects, along with the Weighted Average Mean (WAM) scores and rankings. The majority of respondents strongly agree that responsible tourism embodies ethical business practices, indicating a high level of support for this concept within the community. There is strong support for the idea that responsible tourism entails a responsibility to the community, with a significant portion of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. Respondents generally agree that responsible tourism contributes to creating better places to live and visit. Most respondents agree that responsible tourism aims to minimize negative impacts and maximize benefits, although some disagreement exists. While there is agreement that responsible tourism contributes to the future sustainability of businesses, some respondents are disagreed.

While there is also agreement that responsible tourism contributes to creating better places to live and visit, and minimizing impact while maximizing benefit, there is some disagreement or neutrality on these points. There is slightly less consensus regarding the future sustainability of businesses through responsible tourism, with a notable portion of respondents expressing neutrality or disagreement on this aspect.

4.4. Development of Tourism After the implementation of RT

The development of tourism following the implementation of responsible tourism elements was analysed across three key dimensions: environmental, social, and economic factors. These factors were evaluated to assess the impact of responsible tourism elements on the development of tourism in the selected areas.

Table 3: Development of tourism after implementation of responsible tourism

	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	WAM	Rank
Environmental	14.4	62.5	157.2	120	45.9	3.30	3
Social	13	54	152.78	130	49.89	3.38	2

Economical	11.6	43	144	137	64.8	3.5	1
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Source: Primary Data

From the above table 3 it is revealed that the among the factors economic factors rank primary importance followed by social and environmental factors.

Table 4: Development of Tourism After the implementation of RT: Environmental Factors

ENVIRONMENTAL	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	WAM	Rank
Energy conservation practices	13	41	182	125	39	3.34	2
Careful use of natural resources	10	79	137	116	58	3.33	3
Water conservation practices	8	67	153	130	42	3.33	4
Efforts to minimize environmental impacts	18	46	185	116	35	3.26	6
Tourists' contribution to conservation programs	17	24	174	140	45	3.43	1
Efforts to maintaining biodiversity	7	92	122	135	44	3.29	5
Average	12.17	58.17	158.8	127	43.8	3.33	

Source: Primary Data

Above table 4 shows the environmental factors that influence the responsible tourism. Among the factors Tourists' contribution to conservation programs ranks the highest preference, followed by 'energy conservation practices and Careful use of natural resources'. As tourists' play a greater role in promoting the environment conservation by minimising waste and adopting sustainable practices.

Table 5: Development of Tourism After the implementation of RT: Social Factors

SOCIO CULTURAL	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	WAM	Rank
Healthy cultural interactions	8	54	145	138	55	3.45	4
Skill upgradation of local people	18	40	138	150	54	3.46	2
Support from local panchayat bodies	15	50	153	116	66	3.42	5
Awareness on how to interact with guests	17	39	137	146	61	3.49	1
Promoting equitable business practices	11	25	175	150	39	3.45	3
Average	13.8	41.6	149.6	140	55	3.45	

Source: Primary Data

Social cultural dimension of the responsible tourism after the implementation is shown on the table 5. Various factor affecting the socio-cultural aspects were analysed among them 'Awareness on how to interact with guest' ranked first followed by 'skill upgradation of local people' and 'promoting equitable business practices. Least sort factors were 'Support from local panchayat bodies' and 'Healthy cultural interactions.'

Table 6: Development of Tourism After the implementation of RT: Economic Factors

ECONOMIC	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	WAM	Rank
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Better employment opportunities	14	27	120	164	75	3.65	2
Fair Income from the tourism related job	9	29	106	163	93	3.75	1
Procurement of local products	15	51	181	106	47	3.30	4
Maximising local economic benefits	13	60	135	133	59	3.41	3
Average	12.75	41.75	135.5	141.5	68.5	3.5	

Source: Primary Data

Economic factors of the responsible tourism after the implementation is shown on the table 6. Various factor affecting the economic aspects were analysed among them 'Fair Income from the tourism related job' ranked first followed by 'Better employment opportunities' and 'Maximising local economic benefits.' Least sort factor was 'Procurement of local products.'

4.5. Discussions of the study

Tourism significantly impacts the personal and social lives of local residents. Responsible tourism initiative is concentrated mainly in four destinations. Among these, Kovalam is an international destination, Kumarakom a famous backwater destination, Thekkedy a wildlife destination and Wayanad a hill station. Study reveals that there is an equal distribution of respondents among the destination region. Study shows 39 percent are local residents, 33.5 percent are tourism professionals, 18 percent are business owners ,88 percent are government officials and 0.8 percent of the respondents are environmentalist. The majority of respondents strongly agree that responsible tourism embodies ethical business practices, indicating a high level of support for this concept within the community. The development of tourism following the implementation of responsible tourism elements was analysed across three key dimensions: environmental, social, and economic factors. Among the three factors, economic factors rank primary importance followed by social and environmental factors. Among the environmental factors Tourists' contribution to conservation programs ranks the highest preference. Various factor affecting the socio-cultural aspects were analysed among them 'Awareness on how to interact with guest' ranked first. Least sort factors were 'support from investors' and 'Involvement in planning and decision making'. Various economic aspects analysed, 'Fair Income from the tourism related job' ranked first followed by 'Better employment opportunities' and 'Maximising local economic benefits.' Least sort factor was 'Procurement of local products.' Employment opportunities are viewed as the most significant positive impact of tourism development.

4.6. Implications of the study

Over exploitation of resources, such as water and natural habitats, is a significant negative impact. This suggests that tourism can strain local resources and lead to sustainability issues. Procurement of local products at fair price should be included in the prime category so that local people can be benefited through responsible tourism. Supply chain management system should be given more importance for regular and prompt distribution of natural resources, proper planning and decision-making process also should be of prime focus.

5. Conclusion

Kerala's Responsible Tourism (RT) Mission is a pioneering initiative that seeks to integrate local communities into the tourism value chain. By creating tourism products based on local crafts, cuisine, and culture, the RT Mission ensures that tourism revenues directly benefit the local populace. This not only provides economic opportunities but also helps preserve traditional skills and cultural practices. The RT initiative in Kerala adopted a 'trial and error' mechanism where learning by doing was given prominence. The project has succeeded in creating visible benefit to the local community on economic,

social and environmental fronts as the stakeholders in these pilot destinations were placed in the forefront of RT initiatives.

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