



## A Descriptive Study On Perceptions About Responsible Tourism In Kumarakom Grama Panchayat, Kerala

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism is not only one of the biggest and smokeless industries in the world, it is also a service industry that provides multiple recreational and pleasure services to the people. In terms of natural and cultural assets for tourism, Kerala has a varied portfolio of attractions such as beaches, backwaters, hill stations, festivals and ayurveda. Responsible tourism is 'managing the business in a way that benefits its local community, natural and business environment and itself'. The responsible tourism authorities of Kumarakom have implemented various projects with these focus areas in mind. Although the local government advocates that the project has been a success, the local population is not being benefitted through responsible tourism and they have not enough knowledge about responsible tourism and its activities. Adequate awareness regarding the responsible tourism needs to be provided to the public through awareness classes and training programs.

### KEYWORDS :

### Introduction

Tourism is not only one of the biggest and smokeless industries in the world, it is also a service industry that provides multiple recreational and pleasure services to the people. Tourism is travel for pleasure; also the theory and practice of touring, the business of attracting, accommodating, and entertaining tourists, and the business of operating tours. Tourism may be international, or within the traveller's country. The World Tourism Organization defines tourism more generally, in terms which go "beyond the common perception of tourism as being limited to holiday activity only", as people "traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes".

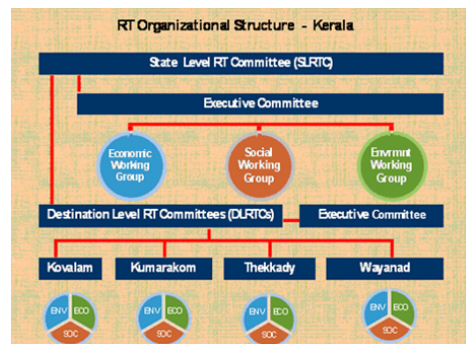
Tourism can be domestic or international, and international tourism has both incoming and outgoing implications on a country's balance of payments. Today, tourism is a major source of income for many countries, and affects the economy of both the source and host countries, in some cases being of vital importance.

Responsible tourism is a concept that emphasizes the role of businesses in achieving sustainability. George and Frey, (2010, 12)<sup>1</sup> defines responsible tourism management as 'managing the business in a way that benefits its local community, natural and business environment and itself'. A slightly more expanded definition is used by the South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT). They define responsible tourism as 'tourism that promotes responsibility to the environment through its sustainable use, responsibility to involve local communities in the tourism industry; responsibility for the safety and security of visitors and responsible government, employees, employers, unions and local communities'.<sup>2</sup>

### Tourism in Kerala

Kerala is located on the East coast of the Arabian Sea and has a population of about 33.4 million (2011 census). It is well known for its scenic beauty and is a popular tourist destination. In terms of natural and cultural assets for tourism, Kerala has a varied portfolio of attractions such as beaches, backwaters, hill stations, festivals, ayurveda (the traditional Indian medical practice), wildlife, traditional cuisines, classical and folk art and dance forms, unique artefacts and a distinctive style of architecture (Kelly and Kokkranikal, 2010)<sup>3</sup> Kerala has not been free from some of the environmental and socio-cultural problems attributed to tourism however (Kokkranikal, 1993).<sup>4</sup> Resentment has thus grown amongst the general public with increasing concerns about the pressure exerted by tourists, on the already over-stretched infrastructure and resources in the state (Kokkranikal, 1993).<sup>4</sup> The above pressures and public discontent has now induced the Government to adopt the concept of 'responsible tourism' as a way forward. An initiative to

implement responsible tourism began in the state with a state level consultation on organised by the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala in association with the International Centre for Responsible Tourism and EQUATIONS (a non-government activist organisation and 'hard' campaigner on tourism related issues) in 2007. A 'State Level Responsible Tourism Committee (SLRTC) was formed with 40 representatives from different groups of stakeholders (Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012).<sup>5</sup> The SLRTC meeting identified four destinations to pilot responsible tourism initiatives. These destinations were chosen for their importance as tourism destinations, differing on tourist volumes and the ecological sensitivity of the destination. These were Kovalam (a coastal destination), Kumarakom (a backwaters destination), Wayanad (hill resort destination) and Thekkady (a wildlife reserve with contained settlements).



**Figure 2:** Organisational layout for the implementation of Responsible Tourism in Kerala (adapted from [http:// www.keralatourism.org/rt-impactsocial.php](http://www.keralatourism.org/rt-impactsocial.php))

Responsible Tourism – Kumarakom Model Responsible Tourism (RT) activities focus mainly on three areas – the economic, social and environmental aspects of the destination. The responsible tourism authorities of Kumarakom have planned and implemented various projects with these focus areas in mind. It was in March, 2008, that the Responsible Tourism project was officially inaugurated in Kumarakom. The project has been a big success. The local bodies and the self-help groups are very receptive to its plans and initiatives. It also provides opportunities for interaction with tourists giving the natives exposure to new ideas and cultures, and also gives them a platform for showcasing their talents. To sum up, the RT project makes the natives an integral part of the growing tourism industry in the village and promotes pride in their land and culture. Owing to all this, the village won the National Tourism Award for Best Responsible Tourism Project for the year 2008-2009. The travel industry can bring many benefits to local communities, including an injection of cash and employment for local people, preservation of

native habitats and indigenous wildlife, and cultural exchange. However, without care, tourism can also have a negative impact: destruction of natural habitats; diversion of scarce resources; disturbance of wildlife; and the violation of tribal peoples' rights. Though responsible tourism can lead to many changes in the community, responsible tourism also creates lots of employment opportunities and economic development for the local people.

The present study was conducted to study the perceptions about responsible tourism in the community with special reference to Kumarakom grama panchayath.

**Materials and Methods**

A cross sectional study was conducted among 60 adults residing in kumarakom panchayat. Data on Age, gender, education, occupation, socioeconomic status, marital status, type of family, was collected. Study participants were interviewed on their perceptions on responsible tourism. Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaire by interview .The data collected from the study was entered into Microsoft Excel and statistical analysis was done using IBM SPSS Statistics. Categorical variables are expressed in percentages. Informed verbal consent from the subjects was obtained. Confidentiality of the subjects was ensured.

**Results**

Out of the 60 study participants, majority were males (57.1%).Majority were Christians(64.3%),educated upto high school(58.9%)and belonged to APL families. Socio-demographic profile of study participants is given in Table 1.

**Table 1 : Socio-demographic profile of study participants**

Study variable	Frequency(Percentage)
<b>Age distribution</b>	
Less than 25 yrs	5(8.9%)
25-44 yrs	32(53.6%)
Greater than 45 yrs	23(37.5%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	34(57.1%)
Female	26(42.9%)
<b>Religion</b>	
Hindu	20(33.9%)
Christian	39(64.3%)
Muslim	1(1.8%)
<b>Education</b>	
Illiterate	6(10.7%)
High school	35(58.9%)
Above high school	19(30.4%)
<b>Occupation</b>	
Self-employed	2(3.6%)
Others	58(96.4%)
<b>Land area owned</b>	
Less than 50 cents	50(83.9%)
50 cents-2 acres	9(14.3%)
Greater than 2 acres	1(1.8%)
<b>Socioeconomic status</b>	
Above Poverty Line( APL)	40(62.5%)
Below Poverty Line( BPL)	20(37.5%)
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Married	48(78.6%)
Unmarried	10(17.9%)
Widow	2(3.6%)
<b>Type of family</b>	
Nuclear	59(98.2%)
Joint	1(1.8%)
<b>No. of persons employed in tourism industry</b>	
1-3	6(12.5%)
4-6	4(8.9%)
>7	10(16.1%)
Not working	40(62.5%)

Table 2 shows the Perceptions of study participants on responsible tourism.While majority of study participants consider tourism to be beneficial to the community,only 43% of the study participants had heard about responsible tourism.

**Table 2: Perceptions of study participants on responsible tourism**

Study variable	Frequency(Percentage)
<b>Heard about responsible tourism</b>	
Yes	26(42.9%)
No	34(57.1%)
<b>What is the purpose of responsible tourism?</b>	
To help people	2(7.6%)
To increase the co-operation of locals with tourism	2(7.6%)
To protect nature	2(7.6%)
To increase the number of tourists	20(76.9%)
<b>Is responsible tourism helpful to the community?</b>	
Yes	21(35.7%)
No	39(64.3%)
<b>What are the benefits to the community from responsible tourism?</b>	
Tourism employee	30(50%)
Home stay	15(25%)
Others	15(25%)
<b>Does responsible tourism create employment opportunities?</b>	
Yes	25(41.1%)
No	35(58.9%)
<b>Did u get any awareness classes on responsible tourism?</b>	
Yes	13(21.4%)
No	47(78.6%)
<b>Does responsible tourism have any negative impact?</b>	
Yes	3(3.6%)
No	57(94.76%)
<b>Has there been an economic benefit in the panchayat through responsible tourism?</b>	
Yes	21(35.7%)
No	39(64.3%)
<b>Has there been an improvement in the standard of living through tourism?</b>	
Yes	14(23.2%)
No	46(76.8%)
<b>Do you participate in responsible tourism activities?</b>	
Yes	9(14.3%)
No	51(85.7%)
<b>Do you motivate others to be a part of responsible tourism?</b>	
Yes	9(14.3%)
No	51(85.7%)
<b>Why do you think tourism will be beneficial to the community?</b>	
Good earning	37(62.3%)
Employment	13(23.6%)
Good industries	7(9.9%)
Others	3(4.6%)

**Discussion**

Although the state of Kerala in India has been regarded as a 'model of development', its achievements may be unravelling due to a host of internal and external problems. Tourism is an excellent source of foreign exchange and employment for the growth of the local

economy. At the same time negative influence of tourism in Kerala on ecology and environment is high.. The state needs new and bold ideas for rejuvenation and renewal of its tourism sector.<sup>6</sup> A Critical Examination of Kerala's Claim in Development and Tourism is a study done by Sharmila Sreekumar. The study argues that "Kerala model of development" and Kerala tourism with its advertisement slogan "God's own country" are simply creations of brochures and planned advertisement. They contradict the reality of facts.<sup>7</sup> If tourism has to be sustainable and contributing to the development of rural regions, it has to be implemented ensuring community participation. If the benefits to the local communities are minimum, tourism development will not be sustainable.<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The Kumarakom model responsible tourism activities focus mainly on three areas the community, social and environmental aspects of the destination. Although the local government advocates that the project has been a success, the local population is not being benefitted through the responsible tourism and they have not enough knowledge about responsible tourism and its activities. Adequate awareness regarding the responsible tourism needs to be provided to the public through awareness classes and training programs. Responsible tourism provides many employment opportunities economic development and community development so encouraging people to be part of responsible tourism will help the people in future. One of the important objectives of responsible tourism is community development. Local bodies are the intermediaries between responsible tourism and community and can take initiatives to strengthen community through responsible tourism.

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