

## Responsible tourism and its role in Community tourism initiatives in Kerala



### Tourism

**KEYWORDS :** Community tourism, Rural community tourism, Responsible tourism, Kerala

**Dr.Vinay Raj R**

Director, De Paul Centre for Research & Development

### ABSTRACT

*Kerala is considered as the land with blue lagoons and pearly beaches, emerald hills, green vales, incomparable charm and elusive beauty. Kerala (or Keralam) is an Indian state, located south most on its west coast. Community-based tourism is a growing market, as new generations of travelers worldwide seek more meaningful experiences from their leisure time. Successful community tourism is mutually beneficial for the communities and for the travelers, rural community tourism takes place in already marginalized areas. Created with good intentions, community-based tourism projects are abandoned when political pressures rise, jealousies intensify or the heralded ecotourists don't arrive. Responsible Tourism (RT) is mainly conceived with three kinds of responsibilities which are termed as the 'triple bottom-line' economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility. RT encompasses all forms of tourism and seeks to minimize negative economic, environment and social impacts. It generates greater economic benefits to local people and enhances the wellbeing of local communities. It also makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and maintenance of the world's diversity. This paper addresses these issues and the importance of Responsible tourism initiatives.*

### 1.0 Introduction:

After independence in 1947, the state of Kerala was created in 1956 from the former state of Travancore-Cochin, the Malabar district of the Madras State, and the Kasaragode taluk of Dakshina Kannada. Kerala is a popular tourist destination famous for its backwaters, ayurvedic treatments and tropical greenery. Kerala has a higher Human Development Index than all other states in India. The state has a literacy rate of 94.59 percent, the highest in India. Kerala has witnessed significant migration of its people, especially to the Persian during the Kerala Gulf boom, and is heavily dependent on remittances from its large Malayali expatriate community. On resident Keralites contribute large to the economy. 'Kerala has suffered from what were until recently fairly anti-market policies, with deep suspicion of market-based economic expansion without control. So its human resources have not been as well used in spreading economic growth as they could have been with a more complementary economic strategy, which is now being attempted in the country'. Adopting sustainable practices has become a necessity rather than a choice for the tourism industry of our country, especially after what the global economic downturn has taught us by visibly demonstrating how drastically the tourism industry can be affected with any negative alteration in the economic, environmental, or social scenarios occurring worldwide.

Achieving sustainability tops the list in any strategies that the world economies are adopting to recover from the downturn, and there is an increased level of awareness on the impacts that climate change has on all sectors including tourism. For India, Kerala Tourism should take the lead in actually demonstrating the power of adopting sustainable practices through the proactive steps. Though Responsible Tourism initiatives had embarked since last two years Improvement is very slow. The sustainable tourism practices into its travel, tourism and hospitality sector would not only help to remain competitive in the tourism market, but also to achieve the much

needed harmony between the industry, the host community and the natural and manmade attractions that together make or break a tourism destination. To achieve the objective of sustainable tourism there is a dire need that our tourism businesses, visitors and most importantly our destinations and the host communities should take a well planned stride towards achieving sustainability in its management, operations and even in the simplest of actions that are taken to support tourism in a destination.

Community-based Tourism is used to describe a variety of activities that encourage and support a wide range of objectives in economic and social development and conservation. Respon-

sible travel and Conservation groups have begun to create marketing networks to help raise the profile of these community based tourism projects and open them up to tourists all over the world. Tourism industry generates employment directly and indirectly, for almost more than 14 million people. Employment opportunities if possible should be doubled of the present level before the

turn of the century. The rationale for carrying out this research project lies in the well documented findings about the topic. This is due to the conceptually demanding nature of the community tourism and involvement of communities in tourism. Community-based Tourism has to contribute to ever increasing and improving conservation of natural and cultural resources, including biological diversity, water, forests, cultural landscapes, monuments, etc.

### 2.0. Community tourism and its scope

With the rapid development of tourism, more and more communities become stakeholders of tourism, either because they are affected by tourism development passively, or because they are using tourism as a tool for their development. As a matter of fact, most communities can use tourism as a development tool to some extent. Also all the community may be influenced by the tourism directly or indirectly. A spectrum of community tourism can be recognized based on the importance of the tourism to the host and the importance of the host to the tourism product. The two may not overlap. Some of the tourism activities rely on host communities, such as village tourism, while others can survive without communities' support even though these activities have impacts on the communities. For example, some enclave resorts can attract foreign investment because foreign tourists sometimes are interested in having little contact with the local communities. There is limited opportunity for local communities to participate and many such developments will tend to be exploitable and not necessarily sustainable.

Most community based tourism indicates a close relationship between tourism and community. Communities use tourism as a development tool and tourism activities rely very much on communities. Community based tourism product often refers to village tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism and protection of natural resources etc. However, it needs to be understood that community based tourism so defined is a niche market and only covers a limited segment of community tourism. To fully use tourism development opportunities to achieve sustainable development, a broader and wider scope of community tourism should be considered.

### 3.0 Community development and empowerment

By advancing the notion of empowerment and its associated power and powerlessness, Empowerment can overlook the concept of power, being an integral element of the term itself. Empowerment of and by communities cannot occur without social forces at some point in time combining with political forces of the state to arrive at a new balance of power relations. Power can exist in a hierarchical manner. This is often imposed power, such as in village governance in

terms of leaders, elders, councils and so on, or organizationally in terms of local council, state government, national government and so on, which is often seen as Communities and political power. Power can also exist in a non hierarchical manner among communities and groups (which has often been conferred by the community members), often considered to be social power. One of the most widely accepted definitions of power comes from Weber who states that power is 'the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance'. Power itself governs the way in which our communities develop and whether tourism will be a part of that development and if so, what 'type' of tourism will be encouraged.

### 4.0. Key elements of Community Based Tourism model:

#### Natural and Cultural Resources

- Natural resources should be well preserved
- Local economy and modes of production is depended on the sustainable use of natural resources
- Customs and culture are unique to the destination it can attract tourists.

#### Community Organizations

- The Community shares consciousness, norms and ideology and culture.
- The Community elders hold local traditional knowledge and wisdom.
- The Community has a sense of ownership and wants to participate in its own development

#### Management

- The Community has rules and regulations for environmental, cultural, and tourism management.
- A local organization or mechanism exists to manage tourism with the ability to link tourism and community development.
- Benefits are fairly distributed to all.
- A percentage of profits from tourism is contributed to a community fund for economic and social development of the community.

#### Learning

Tourism activities and services aim at:

- Fostering a shared learning process between hosts and guests.
- Educating and building understanding of diverse cultures and ways of life.
- Raising awareness of natural and cultural conservation among tourists and the local community.

### 4.1.Kerala -responsible tourism--kumarakom (existing model)

Responsible Tourism (RT) activities focus mainly on three areas that are the economic, social and environmental aspects of the destination. In March, 2008, that the Responsible Tourism project was officially inaugurated in Kumarakom. The project in Kumarakom has been a big success. The local bodies and the self-help groups are very receptive to its plans and initiatives. The project was also been successful in assuring the villagers that tourism can give them a livelihood. The project helps the natives

reap the benefits of the new industry by offering their products and services to visitors. It also provides opportunities for interaction with tourists giving

the natives exposure to new ideas and cultures, and if given them a platform they can show cast 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. Since this is already applicable in kerala; a new model of community tourism can be added to this.

### 4.2. The success mantra-community participation

There are about 180 Kudambashree units in Kumarakom, each of which has an average of 30 members. All these units have joined hands with the Responsible Tourism programme. The 10 farmers' groups consisting of 450 members and the 612 homes involved in homestead farming also play a part. Altogether, about 2000 families take part in the RT activities. All the RT initiatives are planned in such a way that they engage various industries in the region, people, NGOs, media, academicians, communities and local administration. Small production units like the Kudambashree and the Harithasree, homestead farmers, farmers' groups, various cultural and

environmental groups and clubs are also involved. The programmes coordinated by the local bodies under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) are clubbed with the RT activities. To upgrade the standard of living of the local people, it was imperative that a major part of the revenue generated from tourism reach them. Ensuring the participation of the local community in the supply of goods and services was the one of the ways to achieve this goal. Thus, the RT initiative was kicked off with vegetable cultivation by the locals. Kudambashree (self-help groups of women) were involved in the cultivation and for the procurement, supply and delivery of the produce, Samrudhi Responsibility Tourism Activity groups were formed. The Grama Panchayat also formed a Price Fixing Committee and Quality Committee. GITPAC (Great India Tourism Planners & Consultants) International is the technical agency for managing the competitive bidding process. The vegetables were supplied to about 15 hotels in Kumarakom, including luxury ones. There is a roaring demand for the vegetables as they come fresh and are grown organically. Farmers and self help groups were encouraged to produce for commercial supply fish, chicken, egg and agricultural produce. Soon they began to be involved in other tourism-related activities and services that brought them extra money. Though the Kudambashree started with vegetable cultivation, it didn't take long for them to diversify into other areas. Micro-enterprises under the Kudambashree units now produce paper bags, processed food, local snacks, rice powder and handicrafts all of which have a market in the bustling tourist spot. These small-scale industries along with the tourism industry have brought prosperity to the local people.

### 5.0 Responsible Tourism and the environment

Kumarakom is a very famous tourist destination in kerala. Many environmental activities have been taken up by the Responsible Tourism programme in Kumarakom. The Kudambashree units have started making eco-friendly bags with non-woven fabric and paper and efforts are on to make Kumarakom plastic-free. Destination cleaning groups of women (Parisara sevikas) have been set up in the village. They also collect waste from hotels and resorts and dispose it through eco-friendly methods using biogas or vermin compost plants. The move to eliminate plastic carry bags in Kumarakom is supported by the Grama Panchayat. The RT authorities also support studies and surveys related to the environment in Kumarakom. These surveys help check the status of the ecological balance and act accordingly. On the basis of the survey, For example, a study on waste ponds was conducted. Consequently, fish farming was undertaken

in these ponds. Measures for the protection of the avian fauna were taken as a result of a study on the bird life at the sanctuary. Researcher also suggests this as new investment area in CBT. RT provides the vision and the direction for the preservation of the beautiful environment in and around Kumarakom. Strict rules have been implemented to keep plastic bags out of Kumarakom. The authorities are also planning to implement a programme called Zero waste Kumarakom, aiming to make the locality waste-free. Energy management and waste management for all the commercial establishments in the area, including the houseboats, have been made more eco-friendly. Organic farming and green practices have been encouraged. Special attention was given to the protection of mangrove forests and the efforts of those who try to preserve them were Recognized. Bicycle tourism is another novel attempt in Kumarakom planned under the Responsible Tourism programme.

#### 6.0. Planning tourism for a community

One of the major difficulties in undertaking planning from a community perspective, which is exacerbated with tourism planning, is the political nature of the planning process as discussed above. The whole notion of community planning implies a high level of community involvement and participation, yet often the community does not have the control that is implicit in such a notion. This is not always possible in certain political environments and structures. However, this does not mean we should not try. By taking the journey down the community engagement and empowerment path, problematic areas, power imbalances, lack of social capacity and capital can be highlighted, which can then work in our favour. Capacity building and empowering the community members are one of the strengths of engaging the community in its own development process is also one of its weaknesses. Volunteers from the community, not paid outsiders, handle the majority of the community based work. However, recruiting and maintaining an enthusiastic,

committed volunteer group is problematic, particularly in small communities and those used to a hierarchical, top down power structure. In the first instance (small community), responsibility for many of the community based projects can fall to the same few people, which negates the notion of empowerment and capacity building and may also result in burn out of those involved. The second issue can be even more problematic, where the community is used to being told what to do by a person in a position of power. Even if the person genuinely desires to empower the members, they will tend to resist any move of responsibility to them this is the contradiction inherent in community development, much like the contradiction of tourism (carrying with it the seeds of its destruction).

#### 7.0. Conclusion

Strategies need to be planned and communicated to others, so they are usually written down in some form or other. In the past, many strategic plans were so physically impressive that they made very good door stops but were useful for little else. Strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation are the main procedural steps to be undertaken when strategically managing an enterprise, destination or community. In terms of tourism to and within communities, the first step of strategy formulation includes a series of decisions taken to determine the mission or vision of the community (usually a destination) and the specific objectives and policies required to realise that vision. The objectives and policies that flow from such a vision may include encouraging tourists to visit, training young people to open up tourism service businesses and using the historical knowledge of the older members to interpret the place for visitors.

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