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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT IN KERALA AS A TOOL OF GROWTH

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#### ABSTRACT

The state of Kerala in Southern India has been portrayed as a possible 'model of development' thanks to its ability to improve the social and economic conditions of the poor through public action and popular mobilisations. Kerala's hard-won achievements in social development may be unravelling because of serious economic and financial crises that have afflicted the state in recent times as well as because of squabbling between major political camps within the state. Tourism is one of the fast growing industries in the world. When considering India, undoubtedly there is an unlimited scope of tourism development in the South Indian state of Kerala which would definitely bring up the economic growth of the country. Kerala is today the most acclaimed tourist destination in India with its Super brand 'God's Own Country' and is continuing as one of the prime tourist destinations of South Asia. Tourism industry in Kerala not only facilitates infrastructure development but also help in balanced and sustainable regional growth by generating income and creating employment opportunities. There is a high degree of widening the service in this industry with the help of technology and infrastructure in connection with the globalisation process. The scope and opportunity of developing the tourism in Kerala, focusing and exploring its natural resources and cultural inheritance and the very traditional nature of simplicity and service is very essential to examine in the present context of development scenario.

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#### INTRODUCTION

"Travel and Tourism" is the world's largest industry and creator of jobs across national and regional economies. It has great strategic importance for Kerala's economy due to its capacity for wealth-generation and job-creation. According to the World Travel and Tourism Centre (WTTC) statistics<sup>1</sup>, an investment of Rs 12 lakh in tourism creates 89 jobs, as against 45 in agriculture, and 13 in manufacturing for the same investment. In 2012, the industry generated, directly and indirectly, 9.2 per cent of GDP and nearly 261 million jobs in the world-wide economy. By 2030, it is expected to increase to 12.9 per cent and 389 million respectively. Jobs generated by Travel & Tourism are spread across the economy - in retail, construction, manufacturing and telecommunications, as well as directly in Travel & Tourism companies. It thus, plays an important role in driving growth and bringing about economic prosperity. Tourism's importance to the economy of Kerala also rests in its capacity to help bring about non-economic benefits. For instance, tourism can help in conserving/reviving past traditions; and promoting cultural heritage, cultural performances and festivals, etc. It can also reinforce a positive sense of community identity, which in turn will encourage local communities to maintain their traditions and identity. Further, tourism, particularly ecotourism, can place a greater focus on the conservation of natural resources by ensuring

financial or in-kind support by the government, in recognition of their importance to visitor experiences. But, the benefits of tourism are not unequivocal. It is often seasonal and mainly generates part-time and unskilled jobs for local people. Further, if not planned carefully, tourism can be destructive of culture and local traditions. Such criticism can be characterised by the billiard ball model<sup>3</sup>. In this model, the cue constitutes the interests of tourism (big business, investors, government planners, etc.). These are the forces behind the white ball (tourism) which strikes a static (red) ball, culture. The red ball can only move in the direction dictated by the white ball at a pace determined by the white ball: it has no control over its own movement. Finally, tourism can have severe environmental implications. It can be associated with destruction of natural habitat, pressure on natural resources, in particular, land, freshwater and marine resources; damage to ecosystems; excessive energy consumption; and considerable waste and pollution generation.

#### Tourism in Kerala

Tourism is one of the few sectors where Kerala has clear competitive advantages. Kerala has natural advantages in this industry, in terms of beautiful hills and valleys, lakes, waterfalls, backwaters, lagoons, and beaches. The state is also well-known for its manmade natural advantages, such as national parks and wild life sanctuaries. Kerala's traditional dance forms, cultural festivals, temples, and traditional

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medicine are major tourist attractions. Kerala is also India's most advanced society in terms of educational attainment. These advantages notwithstanding, for the major part of the 20th century, Kerala largely ignored its tourism potential. Kerala was a relatively unknown destination. Great strides forward have been made since 1986 when tourism was declared as an industry in Kerala. Realizing its economic potential, the Government of Kerala declared tourism as an industry in 1986. In 1995, the state government announced a comprehensive tourism policy underpinning public-private partnership for the following:

- Development of infrastructure,
- Tourist product,
- Human resources, and
- Marketing

### Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism can play a key role in creating a global 'green economy', reducing poverty, boosting job creation and addressing major environmental challenges. The significance of international tourism is manifested not just on its voluminous growth, but also the styles and forms that it takes in due course. There has been an unprecedented growth in tourism styles such as cultural tourism, rural tourism and ecotourism that looks for places and people exotic to the advanced societies to get experienced. There is increase in travelers who move away from beaten track routes and find leisure in experiencing the remote and pristine ecological and cultural settings. The tourism growth in several Asian and African regions hints to these trends. Even though tourism in these regions is not comparable to the tourism economy of Europe or America, several countries in these regions have taken note of the importance of tourism development and started bestowing attention to it. For the ever changing taste of international tourists for more diversified and specialized experience, these regions offer an unparalleled stream of tourism forms. The relatively less explored ecological and cultural resources of these regions are attractive in contemporary tourism market. In the advent of globalization, an ever-growing middle class population, even in the economically less privileged countries, is joining the band of leisure class.

Eventually more and more locations are systematically scavenged by the travel service providers to give them the experience of the "exotic" and the "unexplored". The same process that create the global village of an ever growing undistinguished mass, also generate quest for those dwindling refugees of difference (Elliot, 2001:57). There is a paradoxical outcome for this process which is vital for the planners and service providers to get aware of. With the advent of tourism development in any given place, the place becomes less attractive for the exotic seekers. Also, such places and culture become extremely exposed to consumerist pursuit, losing its authenticity. Both the regional government as well as private service providers are then in a constant pressure to refashion the existing destination experience or rediscover the new places and experiences to present before the post-modern tourists of ever changing tastes. These lead to adding more and more remote locations, naturally rich interiors and culturally exotic regions of the globe as tourism destinations. This is not

to mention that contemporary tourism is taking place more in such locations. Rather, it hints to the fact that, along with the continued attraction and concentration of popular mass tourism centres, the international tourist flow into exotic locations are increasing in a pace faster than before. More and more natural landscape are constantly been under the scanner of tourism sector to widen its reach; while the cultural landscape of the regions refashioned to highlight its 'otherness' and 'exotism'. Thus one could see the most innovative and creative tourism product development in alternative tourism destinations. For the planners and service providers the quest of post-modern tourists for experiencing the "different", put-forth the twin-sided challenge of creating authentic tourism experience for the tourists while ensure the conservation and sustainable regional development of the host region.

### Importance of tourism

Tourism in Kerala provides a number of economic benefits, some of which are Generation of employment opportunities, earns foreign exchange without exporting anything tangible, leads to balanced regional development, helps to improve per capita income and standard of living, facilitates development of basic infrastructural facilities, promotes a hub by economic activities, promotes related industries such as handicrafts, spices, coir, textiles, gems and jewellery and furnished goods, generates income for the Government, enhances Multiplier effects, promotes social mobility, promote universal brotherhood, international understanding and world peace, facilitates preservation of many vanishing arts, promotes pilgrimage to holy places, promotes urbanization in the host regions, revives local architectural traditions, regional peculiarities, the ancestral heritage and the cultural environment, preserves ancient monuments and historical sites, wildlife tourism will be a check against poaching and plundering of forest wealth, helps exchange of cultural values. The lack of safeguards for environmental and cultural sustainability in tourism policies and programmes poses threats particularly to areas inhabited by Indigenous Peoples, whose cultural landscapes and even their traditional knowledge, ceremonies and sacred sites are being exploited for tourism purposes, often without their consent.

At the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and many other UN events, Indigenous leaders stressed that all processes on sustainable tourism under the CSD, CBD and IYE were not representative of Indigenous Peoples (McLaren, 2003; Johnston, 2007a). Most sustainable tourism advocates are aware of the fact that tourism competes with local activities for the use of limited natural resources. But to make tourism ventures successful, they suggest that 'tradeoffs' are inevitable. Tourism as 'sustainable development' proves to be a myth when 'trade-offs' are made in the narrow interests of the industry, while local residents draw the short straw and end up making sacrifices in quality of life. The effects can be experienced the world over: Ecosystems are still being destroyed and biodiversity lost on a massive scale to build more hotels and resorts; small communities turn into polluted and ugly urban areas increasingly plagued by congestion, infrastructure bottlenecks and social problems. Over the last decade, international, government, non-governmental and private sector organizations have given increasing attention to

the argument that tourism can be made a viable tool to alleviate poverty. It is generally assumed that the international tourism industry can generate economic and other benefits for poor people and communities in the context of responsible and sustainable tourism development and can thus serve as an instrument to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - an agreed set of eight goals adopted by world leaders in 2000 that aims to tackle the world's major development challenges by 2015 (UNDP, 2011a). The UNWTO (UN World Tourism Organization) has stated, for example: "Tourism, one of the world's top job creators and a lead export sector, especially for developing countries, can play a significant role in the achievement of MDG1 - eradication of poverty, MDG3 - gender equality, MDG7 - environmental sustainability and MDG8 - global partnerships for development. Responsible and sustainable tourism allows destinations and companies to minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and on cultural heritage while maximizing its economic and social benefits." (UNWTO, 2010:3)

It is assumed that poverty can be reduced when tourism creates employment and diversified livelihood opportunities, which provides additional income. Moreover, tourism can contribute to direct taxation and by generating taxable economic growth, since taxes can then be used to alleviate poverty through education, health and infrastructure development. Over the last decade, international, government, non-governmental and private sector organizations have given increasing attention to the argument that tourism can be made a viable tool to alleviate poverty.

### Kerala's Tourism Assets -Categorization

The various tourist attractions in Kerala can be classified broadly as cultural attractions and natural attractions.

**Table 1. Tourism Assets -Categorization**

Cultural attractions	Natural Attractions
History, architecture, archeology	Beach
Culture, heritage, arts & crafts	Backwater
Museum, palace	Picnic spot
Fort	Hill station, hill, mountain peak
Religious place, pilgrimage center, place of worship	Wild life/bird sanctuary, forest
	Water falls
	Lake

### Types of tourism in Kerala

Kerala is far ahead of many other states in India in terms of planning & project implementation in tourism. The state is also a veritable treasure trove of tourism assets of diverse nature. There are at least 175 distinct tourist/pilgrim centers of varying degrees of importance and development potentials across the state.

#### Heritage and cultural tourism

Heritage tourism constitutes a dominant component among both domestic and foreign tourists visiting the state. Among the available assets, it is imperative to identify and focus upon those that are outstanding enough to attract and satisfy varied interests. Possible models for tourism development that would draw strength from the local culture, arts and lifestyle of

Kerala include Rural tourism, development of a heritage village and business tourism packages incorporating cultural performances, local cuisine etc.

#### Eco tourism

It is type of tourism that provides the responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of the local people". Ecotourism, also known as ecological tourism, is responsible travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and small scale. It helps educate the traveler; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights. It is a nature - oriented travel that promotes conservation and resource protection and also adds to the local economy.

#### Medical tourism

Medical tourism in Kerala grew without much willful collective efforts. It was recognized as an opportunity by some sectors, particularly the Ayurveda sector who took some collective effort to convert Kerala as a source for Ayurveda treatment. Dentistry and modern medicine also took the role. A combination of many factors has led to the increase in popularity of medical tourism in Kerala.

- Traditional systems of medicine like Ayurveda and siddha are widely popular in the state, and draws increasing number of tourists.
- High costs of healthcare in industrialized nations
- Ease and affordability of international travel
- Improving technology and standards of care.

#### Hill station tourism

Kerala is famous for its Hill station tourism. There are many hill station destinations in Kerala such as Munnar, ponmudi, Wagamon, Ranipuram, Nelliampathy, Pythalmala, places in Wayanad District etc. Tourism development is having a negative impact on the local plantation based economy. One of the important suggestions put forward is that tourism development may be encouraged in places where the plantation or other form of local economy is on the downslide due to extraneous reasons.

**Rural tourism** focuses on participating in a rural lifestyle. It can be a variant of ecotourism. Any village can be a tourist attraction, and many villagers are very hospitable. Agriculture is becoming highly mechanized and therefore requires less manual labor. This is causing economic pressure on some villages, leading to an exodus of young people to urban areas. There is however, a segment of urban population that is interested to visit the rural areas and understand their perspective. This segment has been rapidly growing in the past decade and has led to Rural tourism becoming a good business prospect.

**Culture tourism** is the subset of tourism concerned with a country or region's culture, specifically the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, the history of those people, their art, architecture, religion(s), and other elements that

helped shape their way of life. Cultural tourism includes tourism in urban areas, particularly historic or large cities and their cultural facilities such as museums and theatres. It can also include tourism in rural areas showcasing the traditions of indigenous cultural communities (i.e. festivals, rituals), and their values and lifestyle. It is generally agreed that cultural tourists spend substantially more than standard tourists do. This form of tourism is also becoming generally more popular throughout the world, and a recent OECD report has highlighted the role that cultural tourism can play in regional development in different world regions. Cultural tourism has been defined as 'the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs. These cultural needs can include the solidification of one's own cultural identity, by observing the exotic "other".

**Dental tourism** is a subset of the sector known as medical tourism. It involves individuals seeking dental care outside of their local healthcare systems and may be accompanied by a vacation. Dental tourism is growing worldwide. As the world becomes ever more interdependent and competitive, technique, material, and technological advances spread rapidly, enabling providers in "developing countries" to provide dental care at significant cost savings when compared with their peers in the developed world.

**Water tourism** is traveling by boat while on holiday, with the express purpose of seeing things meant for the water tourist. This can be traveling from luxury port to luxury port in a cruise ship, but also joining boat-centered events such as regattas or landing a small boat for lunch or other day recreation at specially prepared day boat-landings. Also known as a boating holiday, it is a form of tourism that is generally more popular in the summertime.

**Wildlife tourism** can be an eco and animal friendly tourism, usually showing animals in their natural habitat. Wildlife tourism, in its simplest sense, is watching wild animals in their natural habitat. Wildlife tourism is an important part of the tourism industries in many countries including many African and South American countries, Australia, India, Canada, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Maldives among many. It has experienced a dramatic and rapid growth in recent years worldwide and is closely aligned to eco-tourism and sustainable-tourism.

**Religious tourism**, also commonly referred to as faith tourism, is a type of tourism, where people travel individually or in groups for pilgrimage, missionary, or leisure (fellowship) purposes. The world's largest form of mass religious tourism takes place at the annual Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia

**Yoga tourism** is a new concept for "celebrating your destination with yoga". A generally accepted idea by the foreigners is, that india is a land of billions of people, of millions of gods, of great variety of religions, of enormous number of temples, of philosophers and sadhus or saints, of festivals and fares, of deserts and hills, of cows and snakes etc.etc.

## Forest tourism

Development of tourism in forest areas has often been a subject of considerable debate. The Tiger Trail (guided trekking programme for tourists) in the periyar Tiger Reserve is projected as a model success story in Wildlife tourism. Thattekakd Bird Sancturay, Parambikkulam, Wayanad (Muthanga), and Aralam Wildlife sanctuaries, Silent valley National park etc is famous for forest Tourism.

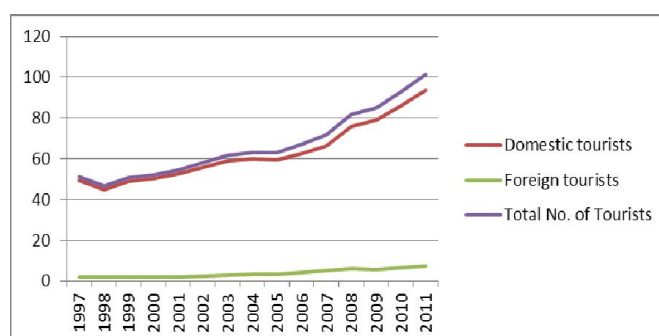
## Ayurveda Tourism

There has been a spontaneous growth in Kerala for Ayurveda which has no competition in the Whole world. By unorganized but collective effort the name Ayurveda got branded all over the world. With Ayurveda rejuvenation treatments becoming available widely in different parts of India and abroad, Kerala would have to strengthen its positioning as the real destination for Ayurveda. Traditional Ayurveda treatments in Kerala are famous among the tourists.

## Achievements

### Rapid growth in tourist arrivals

Over the past more than one and a half decades, the total number of tourists increased sharply in Kerala. Between 1997 and 2011, it almost doubled from 51 lakh to 121 lakh, registering an annual growth rate of 9.3 per cent (Figure 11.1).



While the number of domestic. It is significant to note that Kerala is able to capture an increasing percentage of the national pie in foreign tourist arrivals. Its share in India's foreign tourist arrivals has grown from less than 8 per cent in 1997 to 12.1 per cent in 2012. Clearly, foreign tourist flow has been growing faster in Kerala than at the national level.

## Economic contribution of tourism in Kerala

Tourism's role in the economy is often perceived as being limited to the hospitality industry (cafés, hotels and restaurants), and outbound and inbound travel agencies and carriers. However, the economic impact of tourism is much greater, since many inputs are needed in order to produce tourism and leisure services, spanning the whole range of farm, agri-food and industrial production, including the production of capital goods as well as construction and public works. Besides, tourism activities also have wider impact on the economy in terms of creating jobs and income for the households through tourists' spending in the local economy. In

broad terms, economic impact of tourism has been defined under three categories. They are:

**Direct impact:** Direct impact refers to changes in the industries associated directly with visitor spending.

**Indirect impact:** It is a multiplier impact through backward and forward linkages. It is about the intermediate consumption for the production of goods and services in the tourism sector. These are goods and services that tourism companies purchase from their suppliers, forming the tourism supply chain. Indirect effects can be particularly important for the production of local products. The economic impact of tourism revenue in a country or region can be maximized if the tourism sector procures locally produced goods and services.

**Induced impact:** relates to sales, income or jobs resulting from household spending as a result of income earned from visitor spending (either directly or indirectly). Induced effects also include the consumption of companies that are benefited directly or indirectly from initial expenditure in the tourism sector. An example of such induced effects would be purchases of consumer goods such as food, clothing and electronic goods by people employed in the hotel sector. For companies, this would be purchases of capital goods or expenditure related to the reinvestment of profits.

**Total impact of tourism** = (direct impact) + (indirect impact) + (induced impact)

A global analysis of the contribution of tourism industry to national value added or GDP shows that the countries where tourism sector contributes more than 50 per cent of GDP

### Revenue Earnings from Tourism

11.4.6 The total revenue generated from tourism (direct & indirect) increased sharply from Rs 4,500 crores in 2001 to Rs 19,037 crores in 2011 registering a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.5 per cent in the total tourism receipts in Kerala

### Question of Loss of resources and traditional livelihoods as part of tourism

Poverty is not just a factor of jobs and wages. It is necessary to note that while many rural and indigenous communities appear to live in poor economic and social conditions, they do not consider themselves as poor if they can preserve their culture, living close to the natural environment and utilizing land water and biological resources for their livelihood. According to Johnston, "The 'pro-poor' argument is particularly disturbing in light of the tourism industry's penchant for Indigenous territories. Indigenous Peoples who exercise their ancestral title are *not* poor. It is only when they are stripped of their lands, relocated and/or corralled into a colonial reserve that they live in the severest of poverty. Even then, they are not 'poor', if poverty is understood spiritually. How people lost their homes and livelihood, often without any compensation, when protected areas were established for the sake of 'ecotourism'. "They have been pushed onto marginal lands with harsh climatic conditions, poor soils, lack of water resources, and infested with human and livestock diseases,

making survival impossible... The designation of ecotourism sites tends to disentitle the poor by depriving them of their traditional use of land and natural resources. Despite local resistance, property rights have often been reallocated by influential figures in order to allow investors to make profits. With such an approach, local communities face exploitation and abuse, including the loss of cultural and social identity."Undoubtedly, rapid and uncontrolled tourism development across the world is still aggravating poverty on a massive scale. Available documentation shows that in many parts of the world, small-scale farmers continue to be driven from their land and fisher-folks are denied access to beaches, mangrove forests and marine resources because of tourism. In tourism areas, frequent land conflicts constitute a fundamental issue, as developers use all legal and not-so-legal methods to appropriate land for tourism purposes. The property market becomes a highly volatile affair due to speculation and skyrocketing prices, seriously impacting traditional livelihoods. For the ordinary people, there is not much point in continuing careful productive cultivation because land as a commodity divorced from production has got unprecedented monetary value. If pro-poor tourism advocates believe that tourism can easily be linked to the agricultural sector so that poor farming communities can capture a share from the tourism income by providing their products to hotels and restaurants, experiences indicate the contrary. The significant land use changes, increasing land alienation and landlessness among farmers have rendered many new tourism areas dependent on import of food from other places. For example, "Kerala has now become a net importer of its staple food rice and depends heavily on neighbouring states for the everyday supplies of vegetables, meat, egg and milk". While the communities confront food shortage, one cannot expect them to provide locally produced food to tourists and earn an income.

**Table 2. Trends in Domestic and foreign tourist arrivals in to Kerala**

Year	Domestic tourists	Foreign tourists
	Nos.	Nos.
1991	948,991	69,309
1992	994,140	90,635
1993	1,027,236	95,209
1994	1,226,722	104,568
1995	3,915,656	142,972
1996	4,403,002	176,855
1997	4,926,401	182,427
1998	4,481,714	189,941
1999	4,888,287	202,173
2000	5,013,221	209,933
2001	5,239,692	208,830
2002	5,423,000	219,000
2003	5,613,000	230,000
2004	5,809,000	242,000
2005	6,013,000	254,000
2006	6,223,000	267,000
2007	6,441,000	280,000
2008	6,666,000	294,000
2009	6,900,000	309,000
2010	7,141,000	324,000
2011	7,391,000	340,000
2012	7,650,000	357,000

Source: Tourist Statistics, Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala

### Tourism aggravating Sustainable development or environmental impoverishment

'Sustainable tourism' is offered as an answer to both poverty and environmental concerns. But as with 'ecotourism', sustainable tourism means different things to different people, with the industry often misusing the term to cultivate a positive and 'green' image for themselves. Mowforth and Munt argue that the concept of sustainability has emerged in a hegemonic discourse. In many areas of the developing world there is "a grassroots groundswell to take control of, and exploit, tourist opportunities at the sustainable tourism can play a key role in creating a global 'green economy', reducing poverty, boosting job creation and addressing major environmental challenges.

### Conclusion

The lack of safeguards for environmental and cultural sustainability in tourism policies and programmes poses threats particularly to areas inhabited by Indigenous Peoples, whose cultural landscapes and even their traditional knowledge, ceremonies and sacred sites are being exploited for tourism purposes, often without their consent. At the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and many other UN events, Indigenous leaders stressed that all processes on sustainable tourism under the CSD, CBD and IYE were not representative of Indigenous Peoples. Most sustainable tourism advocates are aware of the fact that tourism competes with local activities for the use of limited natural resources. But to make tourism ventures successful, they suggest that 'tradeoffs' are inevitable. Tourism as 'sustainable development' proves to be a myth when 'trade-offs' are made in the narrow interests of the industry, while local residents draw the short straw and end up making sacrifices in quality of life. The effects can be experienced the world over: Ecosystems are still being destroyed and biodiversity lost on a massive scale to build more hotels and resorts; small communities turn into polluted and ugly urban areas increasingly plagued by congestion, infrastructure bottlenecks and social problems.

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