

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM INITIATIVES IN THEKKADY- AN ANALYSIS

Dr. Santhimol M.C*

Abstract

Responsible tourism is a management strategy embracing planning, management, product development and marketing to bring about positive economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts. It provides more rewarding holiday experiences for guests, enables local communities to enjoy a better quality of life and conserve the natural environment. The responsible tourism initiative in Kerala was first implemented in four destinations viz., Kovalam, Kumarakom, Thekkady and Wayanad. The Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS) under Kerala Tourism is the nodal agency to implement RT initiatives in the State. Thekkady in Kerala State, India's largest wildlife sanctuary is a dream destination for any tourist visiting India. There are a lot of responsible tourism initiatives (activities) such as cultivation of vegetables, rearing of cows, hens and other domestic animals at households, papad making, rice flour making, samrudhi unit and community based tourism products etc put forward by local as well as state and central government for the development of Thekkady and the local community. These responsible tourism initiatives at Thekkady are expected to generate direct benefits to local people by contributing to the development of local economies which in turn expected to provide better living condition for the host communities. The present paper analyses the responsible tourism in Thekkady.

Key words: *responsible tourism, responsible tourism initiatives, problems in RT implementation, responsible tourism cell*

* Assistant Professor in Commerce, Government College, Kattappana, Pin 685508

Introduction

Tourism is conceptualized as a service industry that provides marketing, transport, accommodation and other related services to satisfy the needs of tourists. As an industry, it creates a tourism-based economy for the local communities whose livelihood activities are shaped, based, entirely linked and dependent on the activities of the tourism industries. Responsible tourism is a management strategy embracing planning, management, product development and marketing to bring about positive economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts. It provides more rewarding holiday experiences for guests, enables local communities to enjoy a better quality of life and conserve the natural environment.

Responsible tourism envisions a triple bottom line approach viz., economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility. Though each area has its own relevance, utmost importance is for economic responsibility that seeks to make use of optimum local resources by encouraging local spending, employment generation and promotion of local procurement so that the local economy and the local people get the benefit of tourism development (Paul & Rupesh, 2014).

The responsible tourism initiative in Kerala was first implemented in four destinations viz., Kovalam, Kumarakom, Thekkady and Wayanad. Among these destinations Kumarakom was honored by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India for the best responsible tourism initiative in Kerala and it also bagged the national award for rural tourism. Other significant destinations now pursuing this initiative include Kumbalangi in Ernakulam, Vythiri and Ambalavayal in Wayanad and Bekal in Kasargod.

The Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS) under Kerala Tourism is the nodal agency to implement RT initiatives in the State. The Responsible Tourism classification system chalked out on the lines of Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria was followed up by the decision to include more RT destinations. The system will be used to review responsible tourism initiatives in Kerala. An RT Classification Committee with the Secretary, Kerala Tourism as Chairman and the Director of Kerala Tourism as convener has been constituted to implement the system.

Thekkady in Kerala State, India's largest wildlife sanctuary is a dream destination for any tourist visiting India. The 120 years old 'Surki' dam built across Periyar is a major tourist attraction. This sanctuary is spread over an area of 777 Sq.Kms, surrounded by an artificial lake over an area of 25 Sq.Kms. The Country's sole Tiger reserve, Thekkady, with its bountiful treasures of tropical flora and fauna is the ultimate reservoir of many an endangered species and a rich tribal culture. Thekkady is placed at an altitude of 700m above the sea level. Located in the Idukki district of Kerala, Thekkady is a perfect retreat for anyone who loves adventure, fun, wildlife and nature. Nestled between the ever-green and semi-evergreen forests of Western Ghats, Thekkady has so many things to offer for the tourists who visit this place. In the biggest wildlife sanctuary, can sight Asian Elephants, Bison, Sambar Deer, Boars, Tigers, Leopards, Wild Squirrels, Lion, Tailed Monkeys etc. Thekkady offers a very peaceful and calm atmosphere. The forest areas around Thekkady is strictly uninhabited by the Forest Department to preserve the Mother Nature. The nearest town to Thekkady is Kumily, which is 4 kilometer apart. Thekkady is also blessed with several luxury hotels, resorts and homestays.

As a tool for sustainable tourism development, responsible tourism in Thekkady strives to bring people at marginalized level to the main stream society by ensuring sustainable livelihood and curbing various pressing social concerns. The present study analyses the factors stimulated the growth of responsible tourism initiatives and the level of satisfaction of the local people as regards the responsible tourism initiatives in Thekkady.

Review of Literature

The idea of sustainable development has been discussed in tourism research for almost a quarter of a century. Sustainability has emerged academically as an important field of research with an emphasis on defining the limits to growth and responsibilities in tourism (Saarinen, 2014). Social and environmental impacts, responses and indicators are reviewed for the mainstream tourism worldwide in five categories: population, peace, prosperity, pollution and protection (Ralf, 2012). Responsible tourism is an approach to the management of tourism aimed at maximizing economic, social and environmental benefits and minimizing costs to destinations (Responsible tourism policy for the city of Cape Town, 2009). To ensure faster, sustainable and inclusive growth, participation of people from all walks of life is essential especially for the

marginalized sector. The concepts of local self-governance and participatory approach pave way for democratic decentralized and sustainable development of villages. In par with these concepts, responsible tourism charts new trend in grass-root level empowerment by ensuring involvement of all the different sectors of society (**Paul & Rupesh, 2014**).

The awareness and implementation of responsible tourism principles is critical for the tourism industry and it serves as an indicator as to whether this sector can contribute toward sustainability in reducing its carbon footprint (**Hugh & Baldie**). Governments who wish to develop and promote tourism, should focus their capacity- building efforts on suppliers, using such methods as legislated compliance (e.g., environmental, reputation and business probity), ensuring that resources are available for training and learning by suppliers and, where needed, fill resource gaps. Governments must work with stakeholders to ensure such criteria are being met (**Rachel Dodd, 2009**). One of the major problems with the government is that their concern for making money outweighs the need to implement sustainable tourism behaviors, therefore, leaving the environment and communities at a disadvantage, which eventually causes problems for destinations and the economy, at large (**Joyce, 2012**). In the light of the growing demands of the local community, it is necessary to stand precisely on the most urgent requirements and to diversify the means for making people life and environment better (**Futa, 2013**). Cost savings and branding-related outcomes are the greatest benefits from CSR implementation. Increased consumer and managerial learning of CSR activities from a holistic perspective is critical to moving the CSR program forward in the lodging industry (**Leuy, Stuart, & Sun, 2011**).

Many studies have been conducted in the field of responsible tourism and its various dimensions. But no specific study has been conducted so far to analyze the responsible tourism initiatives in Thekkady. The present study is directed towards this end.

Significance of the study

Kerala has emerged as one of the prime tourism destinations on the national and international map and is considered as the tourism trendsetter in the country. The responsible tourism destinations in Kerala became models for other destinations with their initiatives and strong support from local self-government, Kudumbasree groups, farmers and industry partners. There are a lot of responsible tourism initiatives (activities) such as cultivation of vegetables,

rearing of cows, hens and other domestic animals at households, papad making, rice four making, samrudhi, development of souvenir industry, community based tourism products, promotion of local arts and culture, ethnic cusine and food courts etc put forward by local as well as state and central government for the development of Thekkady and the local community. These responsible tourism initiatives at Thekkady are expected to generate direct benefits to local people by contributing to the development of local economies which in turn expected to provide better living condition for the host communities. In this backdrop, a study on the responsible tourism in Thekkady is found significant.

Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the opinion of the local communities as regards the performance of responsible tourism work groups in Thekkady.
2. To examine the opinion of the local people as regards the responsible tourism initiatives in Thekkady.
3. To find out the problems or difficulties in the implementation of responsible tourism initiatives in Thekkady.

Hypotheses of the study

1. The opinion of the local communities as regards the performance of responsible tourism work groups is equal to average.
2. The opinion of the local people as regards the responsible tourism initiatives is equal to average.
3. There is no significant difference between mean rank towards the problems or difficulties in the implementation of responsible tourism initiatives.

Methodology

The study uses both secondary and primary data. The secondary data is collected from various books, journals, official publications and websites. Primary data is collected from local communities in Thekkady. The population of the study comprises 18 participating hotels, 826 farmers, 46 Kudumbasree units and one Samruthi units in Kumily Grama panchayat. From the population, 96 samples (8 participating hotels, 66 farmers, 20 kudumbasree members and 2 members from the samrudhi unit) were purposefully picked and approached to gather primary

data. The tools used for analysis consists of simple percentage, mean score, one sample t-test and Friedman's test.

Results and Discussions

General profile analysis

The general profile of the respondents' viz., gender, age, educational qualification, occupation, type of tourist related business and monthly income are shown below:

Table 1: General profile of the respondent

<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender	Male	52	66.7
	Female	44	33.3
Age	Below 25 years	14	14.6
	25-50 years	78	81.3
	Above 50 years	4	4.2
Educational qualification	SSLC	12	12.5
	Secondary	18	18.8
	College level	52	54.2
	Others	14	14.6
Occupation	Agriculture	66	68.75
	Tourist related	30	31.25
Type of tourist related business	hotel	8	26.66
	Samrudhi unit	2	6.66
	Rice flour making	9	30.0
	Handicraft unit	4	13.36
	Cleaning and gardening	7	23.33
Monthly income	Below Rs. 20000	32	33.33
	Rs.20000-40000	44	45.83
	Above Rs.40000	20	20.84

Source: Field survey

From the above table it may be understood that most (66.7 percent) of the respondents are males. Majority (81.3 percent) of them falls under the age group of 25 to 50 years old. Most of them are graduates (college level) and are doing agriculture (68.75 percent). Many (30 percent) are involved in rice flour making. Another 26.66 percent are involved in hotel business. 23.33 percent of them are involved in cleaning and gardening work. A meager percent of the respondents run samrudhi unit and handicraft unit. As far as the monthly income of the respondent's is concerned, many (45.83 percent) are earning in between Rs.20000 to Rs.40000 a month. A considerable number (20.84 percent) earn more than Rs.40000. However 33.33 percent of them earn only less than Rs.20000 a month.

Performance of responsible tourism work groups

The opinion of the respondents about the performance of the responsible tourism workgroups is gathered in a three point scale. The result is given below:

Table 2: Opinion about the performance of the RT work groups

Performance	Poor	Average	Good
Transfer of knowledge & capacity building		29(60.4%)	19(39.6%)
Training programmes in organic farming		32(66.7%)	16(33.3%)
Training programmes in bee-keeping		29(60.4%)	19(39.6%)
Health and sanitation awareness programmes		31(64.6%)	17(35.4%)
Package tour to experience village life	1(2.1%)	27(56.3%)	20(41.7%)
Collection of the vegetables cultivated	12(12.5%)	19 (19.79%)	65 (67.71%)
Support to the samrudhi unit	6 (6.26 %)	27 (28.13%)	43 (44.79%)
Support to the handicraft unit	2(2.08%)	21(21.87%)	73 (76.04%)

Source: Field survey

From the above table it may be interpreted that most of the respondents have average opinion as regards transfer of knowledge and capacity building (60.4%), training programmes in organic farming (66.7 percent), training programmes in bee-keeping (60.4 percent), health and sanitation awareness programmes (64.6 percent) and package tour to village life (56.3 percent). But most of them have a good opinion about the collection of cultivated vegetables (67.71 percent), support to samrudhi unit (44.79 percent) and support to handicraft unit (76.04 percent).

In order to get a better understanding about the performance of RT workgroups, one sample t-test has been applied. The result is shown below with the hypothesis formulated in this regard:

Ho: The opinion of the respondents as regards the performance of RT work group is equal to average.

Ha: The opinion of the respondents as regards the performance of RT work group is not

equal to average.

Table 3: Performance of RT work groups- Test Statistics

	samples	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-test (test value=16)	P-Value
Performance of RT work groups	96	15.86	1.50	.193	.848

Source: Field survey

The above table shows that the p value is 0.848. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted and concluded that the performance of RT workgroup is equal to average.

Opinion about the RT initiatives

The opinion of the respondents as regards the responsible tourism initiatives is gathered in a three point scale. The result is given below:

Table 4: Opinion about RT initiatives

<i>Responsible Tourism Initiatives at Thekkady</i>	<i>poor</i>	<i>average</i>	<i>good</i>
1. Capacity building and skills development		32(33.3%)	64(66.7%)
2. Alleviation of poverty and creation of employment opportunity		42(43.8%)	54(56.2%)
3. Marketing of local resources and cost reduction measures	2(2.1%)	34(35.4%)	60(62.5%)
4. Reducing tourism carbon footprint and climatic changes	8(8.3%)	68(70.8%)	20(20.8%)
5. Support to tourism business, reduction of all forms of pollution and waste management	6(6.3%)	66(68.8%)	24(25%)
6. Involvement of local people in decisions that affect their life and life chances	6(6.3%)	64(66.7%)	26(27.1%)
7. Conservation of social, cultural and natural diversity	2(2.1%)	50(52.1%)	44(45.8%)
8. Improvement in health and education		50(52.1%)	46(47.9%)
9. Access to disadvantaged society		62(64.6%)	34(35.4%)
10. Establishing linkages with hotel industry and demand for local produce		60(62.5%)	36(37.5%)

11. Community based tourism products	2(2.1%)	50(52.1%)	44(45.8%)
12. Creation of social awareness and tourism management	2(2.1%)	32(33.3%)	62(64.6%)

Source: Field survey

The above table shows that the respondents have good opinion about four initiatives. They are capacity building and skill development (66.7 percent), alleviation of poverty and creation of employment opportunities (56.2 percent), marketing of local resources and cost reduction measures (62.5 percent), creation of social awareness and tourism (64.6 percent).

However they have only an average opinion about eight responsible tourism initiatives. They are, reducing tourism carbon foot print and the climatic change (70.8 percent), support to tourism business, reduction of all forms of pollution and waste management (68.8 percent), involvement of local people in decision that affect their life and life chances (66.7 percent), conservation of social, cultural and natural diversity (52.1 percent), improvement in health and education (52.1 percent), access to disadvantaged society (64.6 percent), establishing linkage with hotel industry and demand for local produce (62.5 percent) and community based tourism products (52.1 percent).

In order to get a better understanding about the opinion of responsible tourism initiatives, one sample t-test has been applied. The hypothesis formulated in this respect and the test result is given below:

Ho: The opinion of the respondents as regards the responsible tourism initiatives is equal to average.

Ha: The opinion of the respondents as regards the responsible tourism initiatives is not equal to average.

Table 5: Opinion about RT initiatives- Test Statistics

	samples	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-test (test value=24)	P-Value
RT initiatives	48	27.58	2.41	10.29	< 0.000**

Source: Field survey

Note: ** denotes significant at 1 percent level.

The p-value of the above table is less than 0.000. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected

and concluded that the opinion of the respondents as regards the responsible tourism initiatives in Thekkady is not equal to average. Based on the comparison of the mean value with the test value it may be seen that the mean value is more than the test value. Hence it may be interpreted that the opinion about responsible tourism initiatives is good.

Problems/difficulties in the implementation of RT initiatives

An attempt was made to find out the problems or difficulties in the implementation of responsible tourism initiatives. For this Friedman's test has been applied. The result is given below:

Ho: There is no significant difference between mean rank towards the problems or difficulties in the implementation of responsible tourism initiatives.

Ha: There is significant difference between mean rank towards the problems or difficulties in the implementation of responsible tourism initiatives.

Table 6: Problems/difficulties in the implementation of RT initiatives

<i>Problems or difficulties in the implementation of overall RT initiatives</i>	<i>Mean rank</i>	<i>Chi square</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Lack of interest at the Grama Panchayat level	5.76	164.314	≤.000**
Lack of support from the guests/ tourists	2.41		
Lack of coordination between RT cell and Kudumbasree and clashes between them	6.88		
Clubbing of personal interest with the RT initiatives	6.49		
Nearness of large scale market	6.53		
Shortage of locally grown vegetables and other items	6.73		
Fluctuation in prices	3.73		
Diversion of loan amount to personal needs and defaulting EMI	5.62		
Lack of motivation/support from the part of local community	7.13		
Lack of demand for the local produce	2.31		

Source: field survey

Note: ** denotes significant at 1 percent level.

The above table shows that the variables with high mean rank are lack of motivation/support from the part of local community (mean rank 7.13), lack of coordination between RT cell and Kudumbasree and clash between them (mean rank 6.88), shortage of locally grown vegetables and other items (mean rank 6.73) and nearness of large market (mean rank 6.53).

Conclusion

Responsible tourism is considered as one of the best strategies to uplift the local communities in terms of employment generation, capacity building and creation of awareness among them. The responsible tourism initiatives in Thekkady is quite appreciable. But the coordination between the RT cell and the Kudumbasree groups is to be made little more effective. The authorities responsible to implement responsible tourism initiatives should make every effort to convince and motivate the local community to participate in the initiative to make it success. Appropriate measures are to be taken to cultivate more quantity of local produce such as vegetables, eggs and other items on which an agreement is already been made with the hotel and resorts so that they may not finding any difficulty in getting the supply of them. The Kumily Grama Panchayat is to take every effort to give priority to the responsible tourism initiative at Thekkady by considering its importance to the local community development.

References

- (2009). *Responsible tourism policy for the city of Cape Town*.
- Assel, S., Magana, S., Vladimir, G., & Boolaley, M. (2009). Ethical Practices & Social Responsibility of Kazakhstani Tourism Business: A pilot study in the Tour Operator Sector. *Central Asian Business Journal*, 2(1).
- Chettiparamb, Angelique, Kokkranikal, & Jithendran. (2012). Responsible Tourism and Sustainability: The case of Kumarakom in Kerala, India. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism*, 302-326.
- Farmaki, A., Panayiotis, C., Yiasemi, I., & Karis, P. (2014). Responsible tourism in Cypres: The rhetoric and the reality. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 6(1), 10-26.
- Futa, S. M. (2013). The relationship between social responsibility and organisational citizenship behaviour in 5 star hotels operating in Petra City. *European Scientific Journal*, 9(14), 119-127.
- Hugh, B., & Baldie, C. (n.d.). Responsible tourism practices in the non-hotel accommodation sector in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
- Joyce, K. F. (2012). *An evaluation of responsible tourism practices in the Tanzanian Tourism Industry*. Cape Town Campus: Cape Peninsula University of Technology.
- Leuy, Stuart, E. P., & Sun, Y. (2011). An analysis of the CSR in the lodging industry. *Journal of Tourism and Hospital Management*, 18(1).

- Luis Garay, X. F. (2011). Doing good to do well? Corporate Social Responsibility reasons, practices and impacts in small & medium accommodation enterprises. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.
- Nissar, P., & Azeem, M. (2014). Kerala Model Responsible Tourism- An evaluation. *Sai Om Journal of Commerce and Management*, 1(6).
- Paul, M., & Rupesh, K. (2014). Responsible Tourism - A grass root level empowerment mechanism: Case study from Kerala. *Innovative Issues and Approaches in Social Sciences*, 7(1), 53-70.
- Rachel Dodd, M. J. (2009). The Demand for , and Participation in Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Tourism - Implication for tech Caribbean. *ISSN 1997 2520*, 2(1).
- Ralf, B. (2012). Sustainable tourism: Research and reality. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(2), 528-546.
- Saarinen, J. (2014). Critical sustainability: setting te limit to growth and responsibility in tourism. *Sustainability*, 6(1), 1-17.