

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF ECO-TOURISM ON RESIDENTS COMMUNITY LIFE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WAYANAD DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that involves visiting natural areas in the remote wilderness or rural environments. Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial tourism.

Ecotourism promotes greater understanding and appreciation for nature, local society, and culture. In Kerala a number of ecotourism potential centers have been identified by the authorities. Moreover, if ecotourism is developed properly in this region it will help to achieve sustainable balanced regional development. However, ecotourism industry experiences certain issue in this region. Even though there are great possibilities and potentialities for the promotion of ecotourism in Kerala, The initiatives on the part of the Government and tourism authorities is not up to the mark.

Research into tourism impact is an important part of tourism geography. To investigate residents perception is a good method to study whether resident's perception of community life satisfaction vary with the level of tourism development in their community. The purpose of this study is to investigate resident's perceptions of the importance of ecotourism and their satisfaction with different dimensions of community life in order to determine which dimensions are most sensitive to change in the level of tourism development.

Keywords: Perception of Ecotourism, Dimensions of community life, Community life satisfaction

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Introduction

Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving visiting pristine, fragile and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial tourism. Its purpose may be to educate the traveler, to directly benefit the economic development, to provide funds for ecological conservation and political empowerment of local communities or to foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. Eco-tourism promotes greater understanding and appreciation for nature, local society, and culture. In Kerala a number of ecotourism potential centres have been identified by the authorities. Moreover, if eco tourism is developed properly in Kerala it will help to achieve sustainable Balanced Regional development. Eco-tourism resources are deserts, wild life sanctuaries, coralreefs, mangroves, national parks, beaches, flora and fauna, protected areas etc. Ecotourism deals with living parts of the natural environments. It focuses on personal growth, socially responsible travel, and environmental sustainability.

Eco tourism refers to” ***responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy study and appreciate nature/conserves the environment and improves the well being of local people.***”

Significance of the study

Wayanad district is a district in the north-east of Kerala state, with headquarters at the town of Kalpetta. The district is 3.79% urbanised, with only one municipal town of Kalpetta. Wayanad is 3.79% urbanised. Agriculture is the main stay of the economy. Tourism is the major non-agricultural income earner for the district. Wayanad is one of the exquisite hill stations of Kerala. The Western Ghats mountain ranges coupled with several water bodies and wildlife reserves makes it an attractive leisure tourism destination.

Tourism development will affect the local culture and residents' life. One indicator of tourism appropriateness is residents' attitudes towards tourism. How they experience tourism will affect their attitude towards tourism. Positive attitude towards tourism could lead to pro-tourism behavior such as local participation in tourism development and the conservation of the resources on which tourism depends. Therefore, results of this study can contribute to the

development of a form of tourism appropriate for the people who live in that locality which is able to foster positive attitudes and inspire pro-tourism behavior.

Literature review

As **Lisette van engelen (2011)** has observed that the poor have benefited mostly in a financial way due to development of employment opportunities. Apart from these middle and high income group also got benefit from the tourism development in wayanad. It also brings negative influences to the life style of local peoples.

According to **Mowforth& Munt(2009)** tourism is able to contribute the millennium development goal by improving living conditions and creating employment opportunities with low entry barriers in developing countries.

According to **UNEP and WTO(2005)**, tourism is one of the few sectors in which the natural and cultural resources of poor countries give them a comparative economic advantage.

Neto(2003) has suggested that although the tourism industry is recognized to have much potential for development and poverty alleviation, countries engaged in tourism have become increasingly concerned with the environmental and socio-cultural problems resulting from the new industry.

As **Andrew Lepp (2006)** points out that Residents' positive attitudes towards tourism were connected with the belief that tourism creates community development, opportunities for earning income, improved agricultural markets, and a chance at good fortune.

Paul brunt & Curtney(1999) has shown that the results in this study are best described as "mixed" with both positive and negative attitudes apparently having little relation to the type of respondent.

It has been suggested (1996) by **Nicholas& Abrahamit** was found that the majority of respondents had very positive perceptions of the impacts of tourism on certain issues related to the role of women and young adults in the community's social and economic life.

A study concerning the experiences that the residents felt from the tourism development in Wayanad district has not been done yet, so we identify that as a research gap, and to fill that gap we undertake this study.

Statement of the Problem

From 2004 onwards the tourism industry in Wayanad has grown increasingly benefiting the rich and poor, men and women, insiders and outsiders. Many commentators suggest that tourism often contributes to social and cultural and economic change to the residents of that locality. The experiences got from the tourism depending upon the demographic characteristics of the people. Tourism development will definitely give both positive and negative effect on the resident's community life.

So, how the residents perceive about the effect of tourism on their different dimensions of community life (such as socio-cultural & economic) is an important issue to understand whether tourism development has a negative or positive impact on the inhabitants. So that the concerned authorities can take the necessary actions against the factors which have led to the negative perception of residents' community.

Objective of the study

1. To assess the perceived socio-cultural and economic impact of eco-tourism development on residents' community life.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between perception of residents about social aspects of community life before and after tourism development.
2. There is no significant difference between perception of residents about economic aspects of community life before and after tourism development.
3. There is no significant difference between perception of residents about cultural aspects of community life before and after tourism development.

Scope of the study

The study area covers the economic & socio-cultural impacts of eco tourism. Area of the study confined to Wayanad district. Data were collected from different parts of the districts where tourist concentration is high.

Variables used for the study

Social variables	Economic variables	Cultural variables
Disturbances for living	Price hike	Seasonal change
Recreation opportunities	Local business	Foreign language
Infrastructural facilities	Land price	Traditional culture
Restoration of heritage	Employment opportunities	Cultural activities
Overcrowding	Destruction of nature	Crime rate
Air pollution	Pressure on local service	Traffic congestion

Research Methodology

The study is designed as a descriptive one based on secondary and primary data. Secondary data relating to the study collected from various journals, periodicals and reports. The study is mainly based on primary data. The study population consists of people residing in tourism areas. The data has been collected by resorting to a survey, specifically a questionnaire method. The research tool used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. In addition to demographic information of respondents, 18 single five point scale item questions were used to gather responses on 18 different aspects of ecotourism development.

The questionnaire was personally administered to local residents and their responses were recorded. After elimination of questionnaires with missing data, 100 responses were left with.

Data analysis

In order to test whether the development of eco tourism has any significant impact on various dimensions of residents community life such as socio-cultural and economic fields. **Paired sample T test** is conducted in order to determine the effect of eco-tourism before and after its

development on residents. As evident from paired sample T test result illustrated in Table 1, there is statistical significant improvement in different dimensions of residents community life after development of eco-tourism, both positive and negative effects increased more or less equal. Land price increased greatly after tourism development (mean score 1.74 vs 4.12, $p < .05$), whereas there is very little improvement on infrastructural (roads and other local services) development (mean score 1.76 vs 2.8, $p < .05$).

Table 1**Mean values of eco tourism benefits presently and before tourism development**

Socio-cultural and economic factors		Mean
Pair 1	Disturbance 2 comunity life	1.7700
	Disturbances 2 comnity life1	2.3700*
Pair 2	Recreational faciiteis	1.7700
	Recreational faciiteis1	3.5100*
Pair 3	Infrastuctural facilities	1.6600
	Infrastuctural faciliteis 1	2.8000*
Pair 4	Restoration of historical places	1.7600
	Restration of historical places 1	3.180*
Pair 5	Overcrowding	1.7200
	Overcrowding 1	3.7700*
Pair 6	Airpollution	1.9400
	Airpollution 1	2.7000*
Pair 7	Price hike	1.6700
	Price hike1	4.1000*
Pair 8	Local business	1.7900
	Local business1	4.0000*
Pair 9	Land price	1.7400
	Land price 1	4.1200*
Pair 10	Employment oportunitieis	1.7800
	Employment oportunitieis1	4.0800*
Pair 11	Dstrction of environment	1.8900

	Destruction of environment1	3.6400*
Pair 12	Pressure on people	1.8400
	Pressure on people	3.3700*
Pair 13	Alterations in life	1.7300
	Alterations in life1	2.9400*
Pair 14	Foreign language learning	1.8600
	Foreign language learning1	2.4800*
Pair 15	Change in culture	1.8000
	Change in culture1	3.3600*
Pair 16	Cultural activities	1.8900
	Cultural activiteis1	3.6600*
Pair 17	Crime rate	1.8300
	Crime rate1	2.8000*
Pair 18	Traffic congession	1.8500
	Traffic congession1	3.7000*

Note: Unshaded values represents current status and shaded values represents status before development of eco-tourism.* denotes $p < .05$.

Findings

- 1.The negative aspects of social factors like air pollution,over crowding and disturbances to community life have increased,likewise the positive effects of restoration of historical places and recreation facilities also improved significantly.
- 2.Economic aspects related to ecotourism development also shows significant positive as well as negative growth.
- 3.The result shows significant improvement in cultural activities at the same tourism development brings more traffic congestion in the affected areas.

Suggestions

- 1.There is little improvement in infrastructural facilities after tourism development,this needs serious consideration.

2.The harmful effects of tourism development in the way of change in precious traditional culture should be handled carefully.

3.More profitable local business development and employment opportunities can be nurtured for more economic development.

Discussion and conclusion

The study examines the positive and negative effects of eco tourism development on local people residing in nearby areas of tourist areas.The result clearly indicates that there is a marked improvement in all aspects such as economic,socio-cultural domains of community life.From the close evaluation of all 18 aspects it has revealed that negative impacts like over crowding and destruction of environment has increased whereas the positive impacts like employment opportunities and local business are also reach better hikes.The authorities should take needed steps to alleviate the negative effects without harming the fruitful positive effects.

The present study has limitations too.The limited sample used for the study through representative of the population,limit the scope of generalization of the result of the study.The study would have provided more meaningful insights if the tourism impact in wayanadu were compared with other ecotourism areas in kerala.

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