



THE TOURISM ECONOMY OF KERALA: POTENTIAL AND IMPLICATIONS

ANITTA G KUNNAPPILLY¹

¹ Research scholar Marthoma College Tiruvalla,

Abstract- *Tourism is an emerging sector with a huge possibility to generate employment, income and rural development through its backward and forward linkages. The tourism economy also has the potential to absorb the unemployed youths of Kerala through entrepreneurship programmes and be a consistent source of foreign remittances throughout the year. Thus the tourism policy of the state should be on the basis of rejuvenating the rich legacy that the state owns in the area of Spices, arts, martial arts and the splendid religious places. Thus a tourism policy on the basis of Ecological, Economic and Environmental sustainability will make the Kerala tourism industry to leap forward.*

Keywords- *Backward-forward linkages, Entrepreneurship, Foreign remittances, Spices, Sustainability.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Guyer – feuler gave the first definition of tourism in the year 1905, as “a phenomenon unique to modern time which is dependent on the people's increasing need for a change and relaxation, the wish of recognizing the beauties of nature and art and the belief that nature gives happiness to human beings and which helps nations and communities approach each other thanks to the developments in commerce and industry and the communication and transportation tools becoming excellent.” [1] while the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines it as “Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one year for leisure, business and another purpose”[2]. Thus from the above two definitions, it can be inferred that tourism comprises of three aspects - movement outside the usual environment, the tourism enabled displacement can be of maximum one year and minimum can be from hours, the purpose of tourism can be varied from pleasure to health aspects. Thus, modern definition of tourism comprises of all these elements in it.

The ancient kingdoms of India had a lot of visitors's from the abroad like Megasthenes: Greek (302 -298 BC), Fa – Hien: Chinese (405-411 AD), Hiuen – Tsang: Chinese (630-645 AD), Marco Polo: Venetian (1292-1294 AD) who visited Indian kingdom for various purposes. The ancient universities like Nalanda even had foreign students who were patronaged by these rulers. Much of the ancient facts about ancient India is actually reconstructed using the foreign accounts of these authors. While these are the documented foreign travelers Kerala had foreign visitors even from the time of Indus civilization. The strong spices route was the main factor that attracted the foreigners to ancient Kerala. The Peutinger tablet reveals the amount of foreign settlement that the Muchiripattanam had and the Muziris papyrus speaks about the large transaction that held between Muziri s and ancient Egypt. Thus the foreigners who came to the ancient era for trade, education and pleasure were a source of huge foreign remittances to the kingdoms[3].

The tourism sector is a fastest emerging sector in Kerala which is a prominent source of foreign remittances, employment and income. Kerala with her scenic beauty and acceptable climate has been always a preferred tourist destination. The tourism sector accounts for 10 percent of Kerala's Gross State Domestic Product which has a potential to increase further. The linkage effect of the tourism sector is remarkable as it can initiate developments in the rural economy, infrastructure development etc. The government of Kerala in recognition of the growing importance of Tourism has introduced many concepts like Backwater tourism, Beach tourism, Heritage tourism, Festival tourism, Health tourism, Sports tourism, Pilgrimage tourism and rural tourism to elevate the standard to that of an international competitiveness. These areas are identified on the basis of requirements as well as the resources of the state. The classical and traditional festivals of Kerala like Onam and Vallam Kali (boat race) attracts a lot of tourists to Kerala as well as the art forms like Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Thiruvathira and martial arts like Kalari has always been on high demands among the tourists to Kerala especially among the international tourists of the state.

The government of Kerala has initiated many alternative concepts of tourism like Eco-tourism and Responsible tourism taking into account the necessities and unique features of Kerala. An Eco-tourism is an alternative form of tourism wherein there is an integration and ensuring co-existence of both the human beings and nature. The Kerala economy has one of the most fragile ecosystems which are a center of tourist attraction due to the immense flora and fauna of the area like the Western Ghats. At the Western Ghats, the environment is so fragile that the increasing tourist population in the area can

seriously disrupt the ecological balances in the area. There are many species which are endemic to the area which has to be well protected. The concept of Responsible Tourism is yet another flagship programme of the state government. The responsible tourism comprises of a 'Triple bottom – line' which means three kinds of responsibilities like Economic, Social and Environmental responsibilities. Though this concept was introduced in 1996 it was the Cape town declaration of 2002 that a detailed picture of it was conceived like reducing the negative impacts of tourism[4]. The initiative was implemented in four destinations like Kovalam, Kumarakom, Thekkady and Wayanad. The government of Kerala bagged the Ulysses award for innovation in public policy and governance for responsible tourism initiative at Kumarakom[5].

The year 2017 was declared as the 'International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development' which actually recognizes the contribution of this emerging sector in the Inclusive and Sustainable economic growth thus helping in achieving the 2030agenda for sustainable development. The main tenants of Sustainable tourism are as follows: 1) Social inclusiveness, employment and poverty reduction 2) Resource efficiency, Environmental protection and climate change 3) Cultural values, diversity and heritage 4) Mutual understanding, peace and security. These concepts were introduced in Kerala as well giving priority to the rural economy[6]. Since Kerala is an ecologically fragile area the aspect of sustainability holds a significant position in the state. The growing population density, pollution and destruction of habitats of endemic flora and fauna caused by development activities, encroachment of forests land has called for a sustainability aspect of tourism. An Eco- friendly approach has to be taken to preserve the fragile ecosystem like banning the plastic waste and preventing the pollution of the lakes.Kerala has emerged as a tourist destination with an all round year tourist visit due to her favorable climatic conditions. The state has a perfect blend of trained manpower, favourable climatic conditions, natural resources which can attract huge tourists both international and domestic tourists to the state. The artistic forms, the martial arts, the culinary and the rich traditions of the state has the potential to grow further. Since the tourism sector has many linkage effects on the economy it also requires a concurrent development like in health, sanitation, urban and rural planning, transport, connectivity, local self-government and another sphere.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are; 1) To analyze the economic state of Kerala tourism sector 2) To propound innovative strategies to revive the tourism sector

III. METHODOLOGY

The study was mainly conducted using Secondary data. The secondary data was collected from various issues of the Economic Review of Kerala, and Journal publications.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The economic state of Kerala's tourism sector

Table 1. Kerala's share in country's tourism

year	Kerala's share in countries tourism (percent)
2006	9.6
2007	10.2
2008	11.16
2009	10.91
2010	11.81
2011	11.65
2012	12.07
2013	12.31
2014	12.02
2015	12.18
2016	11.79

Source; Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala

The above-given table shows that Kerala maintains a good share of India's share in the tourism sector. Even during the recession period 2008-2009 Kerala has maintained a good share, while there is a marginal decline in 2006 due to various reasons like strikes and assaults against women.

Figure 1.

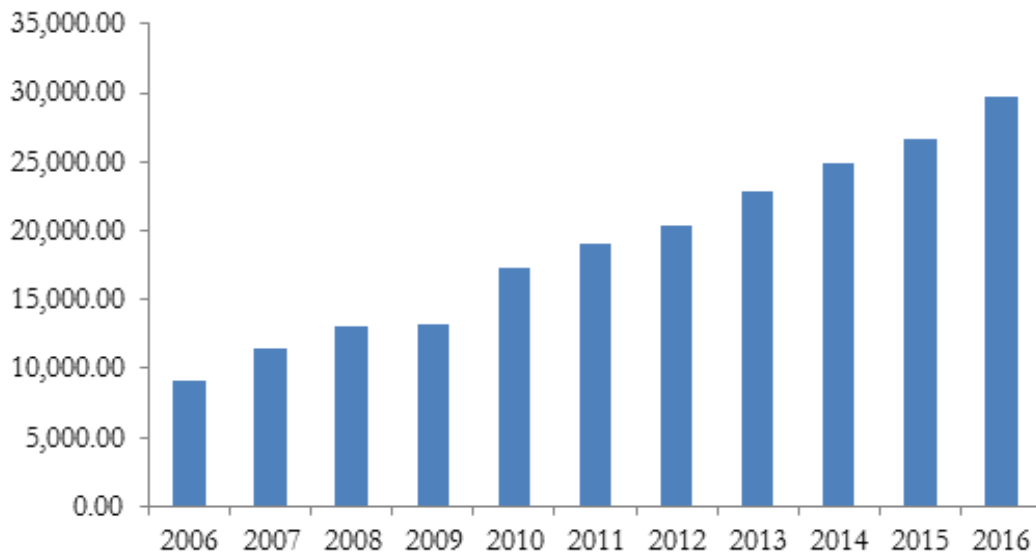


Source; Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala

Annual growth rates in the arrival of foreign tourists in india and kerala in percent

The above-given diagram shows the increasing foreign tourists in Kerala. The figure also shows the impact of the international economic phenomenon in the sector. The year 2008-2009 shows the global recession which negatively affected the tourism sector. Thus its imperative that the state should forecast such global breakdowns and take necessary steps since the forward and backward linkages can be severely affected.

Figure 2.



Source; Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala

Total revenue generated from tourism in crores

The above-given figure shows the increasing remittances from the tourism sector, which signifies the growth potentials of the state as a tourist hub. The remittances thus received can be instrumental in developing the backward and forward linkages.

4.2 Innovative strategies to revive tourism sector

Though tourism is a thriving and high potential sector it faces serious consequences and challenges from foreign nations. The main reason for such influx of tourist is mainly due to our rich legacy in trade, arts, culinary, spices and arts. Even during the ancient times, Kerala was famous for her rich aromatics and spices thus what is required is a revival of that ancient culture. Thus the revival of ancient 'Spices Route' can be a lot significant in this area. The Chinese government has already started to revive the silk route which they believe that increasing the influx of tourists. The spices route will connect kodungalloor, Fort Kochi, kaduthuruthy, Kottayam, and Kollam. During this integration the rich heritage of these districts can be showcased to the tourists, this also connects the Jewish- Islam-Christianity advent into India as well as the ancient rulers like Chera-Cholapandyas. Through spices route, we can integrate thirty countries with which ancient Muziris had a trade. The rich legacy should be well showcased with the tourists with souvenirs as well as best quality spices that can be purchased.

Kerala has a rich water-transport system which is yet to be better realized. An interlinking of river water service system also with the traditional boats can provide a new experience for the tourists. It will provide them with a first-hand experience as to how the transport systems were as well as away from the traffic. The water transportation system is also a cheap method of transportation which makes it affordable for all sectors of travelers like students, family and elderly population. With so much of foreign influx, a better infrastructure has a prominent place with well-developed roads and connectivity, public toilets and health care services. The Ayurveda treatment that the high rated hotels provide cannot be affordable for all sections of the tourists. So it's time the governments step in and make the services available at an affordable price.

The recurrent hartals and bandhs are also creating a lot of problems for tourists especially when the alternative forms like autorickshaws and taxis charge exorbitant rates from the travelers. If the government can codify the alternative means of transportation this will have a favorable impact on the tourists. The recent increasing sexual violence against foreign women are a growing concern among the younger couples, strong messages and precautions must be taken to completely eradicate such incidents since it will decrease the tourist inflow.

The tourism sector has the potential to generate and create employment among the unemployed and skilled or semi-skilled manpower of the state. The entrepreneur activities in the state, especially in the hospitality area, can enhance the employment as well as the infrastructure of the state. The youths can be provided with the required training with government aid in varied fields. A region-centric development along with the concept of sustainability will enhance the employability of the youths.

V. CONCLUSION

Thus Kerala – the God's Own Country has an immense potential in the tourism sector even though it faces numerous challenges and competition. Tourism sector ensures good foreign remittances to the state as well as it has potential to increase the employment, income and rural development. The tourism sector has a lot of forwarding and backward linkages which if implemented properly have the potential to revive and improve the growth trajectory of the state.

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