



Current Trends and Research on Sustainable Cooperative Tourism and Hospitality in Kerala

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Abstract - Sustainable tourism is a major goal for places all over the world that want to find a balance between economic growth, environmental protection, and cultural integrity. Kerala, a state on India's southwestern coast, is a great example of sustainable tourism since it focusses on getting people involved, encouraging responsible travel, and supporting eco-friendly projects. This article talks about the main policies and methods that have helped Kerala build a strong and long-lasting tourist business. It talks about how local communities, government backing, and new programs like the Responsible Tourism Mission can help growth that includes everyone and reduces harm to people and the environment. The essay uses what Kerala has learnt to find useful lessons and methods that can be used to improve tourism in other parts of the world. This study highlights the significance of incorporating cultural authenticity, environmental stewardship, and stakeholder collaboration to attain long-term sustainability in the tourist sector, as evidenced by Kerala's approach.

Keywords - Kerala Tourism Model, Eco-Friendly Practices, Community Participation, Responsible Travel, and Sustainable Tourism.

I. Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the world. It helps the economy grow, creates jobs, and lets people from different cultures meet and learn from each other. But if tourism expansion isn't controlled, it can hurt the environment, destroy cultures, and make socioeconomic injustice worse. In response, the idea of sustainable tourism has come up as an important way to make sure that tourism benefits both current and future generations without harming cultural and natural resources.

Kerala, which is sometimes called "God's Own Country," has found a niche by using a unique and effective method for sustainable tourism. Kerala is famous for its beautiful backwaters, lush greenery, and rich cultural legacy. It is also known for its Responsible Tourism (RT) programs, which put the needs of local communities and the environment at the centre of tourism development. Kerala's approach to tourism is different from many others since it focusses on being inclusive, caring about the environment, and becoming involved in the community in a meaningful way.

This article talks about the main ideas and real-world examples of Kerala's strategy for sustainable tourism. We want to find useful lessons that can help other places



promote tourism in a way that is more fair, environmentally friendly, and respectful of other cultures by looking at its triumphs, problems, and new ideas.

Importance

As places around the world deal with the problems of climate change and too many tourists, the necessity of sustainable tourism has never been higher. Tourism can be a great way to boost the economy and learn about other cultures, but if it's not managed well, it can also hurt the environment, push local residents to the side, and damage cultural heritage. So, finding good examples of sustainable tourism is very important for making laws and practices that will help people and the world in the long run.

Kerala's tourist strategy is a great example of how to make sustainability a part of tourism growth from the start. Kerala's Responsible Tourism Mission has shown that tourism can be a way to help local communities, conserve the environment, and preserve cultural heritage without hurting the experience of visitors or the economy. The state's focus on community-based tourism, local ownership, and open government gives us useful ideas for sustainable practices that may be used in many various situations and can grow.

Not just policymakers and tourism professionals, but also academics, community leaders, and travellers who want to help make the tourism industry more ethical and sustainable should study Kerala's approach. Other places can advance towards tourist models that are more open, strong, and good for the environment by learning from and using what they learnt in Kerala.

Statement of Research

This study seeks to analyse the sustainable tourism practices employed in Kerala, India, emphasising the identification of essential strategies, policies, and community-driven initiatives that facilitate its success. The study aims to comprehend the equilibrium of Kerala's Responsible Tourism model in reconciling economic advancement with environmental preservation and social justice. This study aims to derive practical lessons and best practices from Kerala's strategy that can be modified and implemented to foster sustainable tourism in various regional and global contexts.

Framework for Research

The research framework for this study is structured to comprehensively examine Kerala's sustainable tourism model through a multidimensional perspective. It combines qualitative research with case study methods to look into the different parts that work together to make tourism sustainable.

Theoretical Basis

The framework is founded on the ideas of sustainable development, community-based tourism (CBT), and the triple bottom line approach, which stresses the need for balance between:

Viability in terms of money

Being responsible for the environment



Equity in society and culture

Important Parts of Analysis

The study will evaluate Kerala's tourism model based on the following fundamental dimensions:

Environmental Sustainability: Protecting biodiversity, conserving natural resources, building eco-friendly infrastructure, and managing waste.

Economic sustainability means creating jobs in the area, spreading out money, helping small and medium-sized businesses, and starting businesses that are related to tourism.

Socio-cultural Sustainability: This means getting people involved in their communities, protecting cultural heritage, promoting indigenous knowledge, and reducing the commercialisation of culture.

Governance and regulatory Support: This includes the role of the government, public-private partnerships, regulatory frameworks (such the Kerala Responsible tourist Mission), and openness in tourist governance.

Sources of Data

Primary Sources: Talking to stakeholders, community people, and tourism officials. **Secondary Sources:** Policy papers, government reports, scholarly publications, and case studies about how tourism works in Kerala.

Method of Analysis

Case Study Methodology: Kerala examined as a singular, comprehensive case.

Comparative Analysis: Making comparisons with other places when they are useful.

SWOT Analysis: To look at Kerala's sustainable tourism model's strengths, weaknesses, chances, and risks. This framework guarantees a thorough comprehension of Kerala's incorporation of sustainability within its tourism industry, facilitating the derivation of actionable insights relevant to other areas.

II. Review of the Literature

Sustainable tourism has become an essential field of inquiry and application due to the increasing recognition of tourism's environmental, social, and economic effects. The scholarly dialogue over sustainable tourism underscores the necessity for a balanced methodology that promotes economic advancement while safeguarding environmental assets and cultural heritage (Butler, 1999; UNWTO, 2013).

One of the fastest-growing parts of India's economy is tourism. The Incredible India campaign, ICT goods made for medical tourism, and other things have helped it expand in recent years. It brings in a lot of foreign exchange, but it also offers potential in other key areas like jobs and investment. But the sector has been having challenges for a long time with poor infrastructure, and new problems with managing alternative tourism and making sure tourism is sustainable (Hans, 2013).

What is sustainable tourism?

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the



industry, the environment, and host communities." Scholars like Bramwell and Lane (2011) say that for tourism to be truly sustainable, it needs to involve long-term thinking, cooperation between stakeholders, and the integration of policies.

Responsible and community-based tourism

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and Responsible Tourism (RT) are closely connected ideas that stress the need of local communities being involved in planning tourism and sharing the benefits. Scheyvens (1999) and Goodwin (2011) demonstrate that CBT and RT can empower local communities, mitigate the leakage of tourism earnings, and promote cultural exchange when executed properly. The research also highlights the difficulties in attaining substantive community engagement and circumventing tokenism in policy and practice.

The Kerala Model in Scholarly Discourse

Researchers and development agencies are interested in Kerala's Responsible Tourism programs as a possible best-practice model. George and Krishnan (2020) say that Kerala's RT Mission has shown how government backing, grassroots involvement, and partnerships between the public and commercial sectors can make tourism more accessible and environmentally friendly. The International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT) India did a research that shows how Kerala has been able to include local supply chains, especially women's self-help groups, into tourism. This has created job opportunities without putting too much strain on natural resources. People often say that Kerala's focus on conserving its cultural legacy through festivals, art forms, and homestay experiences is a good way to keep culture alive (Thampi, 2017). Literature acknowledges areas for enhancement despite its successes, including scalability, uniform implementation across regions, and the necessity for more robust monitoring and evaluation procedures (Singh, 2019).

Global Significance and Applicability

The international literature on sustainable tourism often advocates for context-specific methodologies. While Kerala's success provides significant insights, researchers advise against universal applicability. Sharpley (2009) contends that each destination possesses distinct socio-political and ecological variables that affect the adaptation of sustainable tourism strategies. Consequently, the Kerala model functions primarily as a guiding framework rather than a universal remedy. The material that was looked at provide a solid base for comprehending the rules and problems of sustainable tourism. Kerala's Responsible Tourism model stands out as a significant illustration of how inclusive, community-focused approaches may enhance sustainability in tourism. Nonetheless, additional empirical investigation is required to evaluate the long-term effects and replicability of such models across various situations.

Data from the Real World

The Responsible Tourism (RT) Mission in Kerala started formally in 2017, after several pilot projects in 2008. It has had measurable effects on protecting the environment, boosting the local economy, and giving people more authority in their communities. The actual statistics that follow show how well Kerala's sustainable tourism programs work and what they do.



Effect on the economy

As of 2023, more than 20,000 families in Kerala are directly benefiting from RT-linked jobs (RT Mission Annual Report, 2023). The RT Mission helped people buy Rs. 37.5 crore (about \$4.5 million) worth of goods and services from local farmers and producers in 2022–2023 alone. Almost 80% of the RT-linked micro-enterprises are led by women, mostly through Self-Help Groups (SHGs). This shows how the program helps women and men thrive together.

Results for the environment

Kerala currently has more than 100 tourist spots that follow green rules, such as areas where plastic is not allowed, units for separating trash, and eco-friendly ways to get about. "Green Circuit" tours and other programs encourage low-impact travel through heritage walks, cycling tours, and houseboat trips that use solar and biofuel technologies. The Meenachil River project under RT brought a dying river environment back to life by working together with local residents and tourists. This made the rivers cleaner and brought back more species.

Being a part of society and culture

Kerala's RT programs have brought more than 15,000 craftsmen, farmers, and traditional performers into the tourism supply chain. This has helped protect indigenous art, culture, and legacy. More than 25 places have created Village Life Experience (VLE) packages that let tourists take part in activities including farming, cooking, and crafting. Over 90% of travellers who choose VLE packages were happy with them, according to surveys (RT Mission Feedback Survey, 2022). Since they started, more than 3 million tourists have taken part in RT programs. More and more people are interested in real, culture-based experiences.

Recognition around the world

The UNWTO Ulysses Award for Innovation in Public Policy and Governance went to Kerala's RT Mission in 2018. The state has been consistently recognised around the world for its sustainable and welcoming tourist strategy. For example, it has been named one of National Geographic's "Top 10 Paradises" and TIME's "World's Greatest Places." The findings show that Kerala's approach to sustainable tourism works in practice as well as in theory. Kerala has made a model that can be copied and has real results by getting local communities involved, putting in place green legislation, and protecting cultural heritage. These empirical findings provide evidence-based insights for other regions seeking to implement or improve their sustainable tourism policies.

Analysis

The empirical findings and literature examined indicate that Kerala's tourism plan represents a comprehensive and cohesive approach to sustainable development. The Responsible Tourism (RT) model in the state shows a workable balance between



economic growth, protecting the environment, and fairness in society. This is in keeping with the triple bottom line philosophy.

Model Based on the Community

The most unique thing about Kerala is how it manages tourism in a way that benefits the people. Kerala's RT framework is different from traditional tourist models since it spreads the benefits of tourism to farmers, craftsmen, women's self-help groups, and marginalised communities. In traditional models, gains are mostly concentrated among outside investors or elite service providers. This kind of participation not only raises local earnings, but it also gives communities more power as stakeholders, which makes them more sustainable in the long run.

The model's success in combining social development goals is shown by the significant number of women who participate (80% of businesses) and the direct beneficiaries (over 20,000 families). The Village Life Experience (VLE) packages are another important new idea that turns passive sightseeing into active cultural involvement, which builds respect for other cultures and pride in one's own.

Being responsible for the environment

Kerala has taken steps to include eco-friendly practices in its plans for tourism. The use of green practices, the banning of plastic, and the promotion of eco-friendly transportation options all show a strong dedication to protecting the environment. When done right, tourism can help, not hurt, natural ecosystems, as seen by projects like the Meenachil River restoration.

The usage of solar-powered houseboats and organic agricultural experiences shows that tourism is becoming more environmentally friendly. This is an important topic as destinations deal with the effects of global warming.

Economic Resilience and Inclusivity

Tourism in Kerala is strongly linked to the local economy, with local manufacturers and artisans replacing outside supply chains that are only interested in making money. This way of buying things locally:

Keeps money from leaking out

Helps small businesses

Creates a strong local economy that can handle shocks from outside, such as pandemics or global downturns.

This model is different from places where a lot of people go on vacation, whose economies are generally weak because of seasonal and international changes.

Policy Framework and Support from Institutions

The Responsible Tourism Mission, which is run by the state government, has strong institutional support, which is a big reason why Kerala is doing so well. Kerala is different from many other places where tourist policy is not clear-cut. It offers:

Clear goals and rules

Programs to improve capacity



Ways to keep an eye on things and give feedback

This solid governance framework makes it easier to hold people accountable, grow, and copy—something that is often missing from other community-based tourism efforts.

Things that are hard and need to get better

The Kerala model has worked well, yet it still has problems:

Some districts have seen more support and publicity than others, which has led to uneven implementation.

Problems like too many tourists during busy times and the need for better instruments to measure impact still exist.

To get more responsible global travellers to Kerala, digital marketing and the worldwide reach of sustainable experiences might be better.

Kerala's Responsible Tourism model is a working and repeatable example of how to do sustainable tourism on a large scale. The policies, community, and environment all work together to make it a success. But to make sure it stays adaptive and useful in a changing global tourism market, it needs to keep coming up with new ideas, improve its impact monitoring tools, and spread its model more widely.

Results

The examination of Kerala's Responsible tourist (RT) model reveals numerous significant findings that underscore its efficacy as a sustainable tourist strategy and offer important insights for other areas:

Community involvement is what makes things last.

Kerala's way of doing things shows that getting people in the community involved is necessary for sustainability. The state makes sure that the economic benefits of tourism are shared fairly by including farmers, craftsmen, women's groups, and local entrepreneurs in the tourism value chain. This keeps tourism connected to local culture and ways of life.

Government support is very important.

Strong institutional support and political resolve are two of the main reasons why the RT Mission has been so successful. Policies, funding, training, and governance structures that assist the government have made it possible for sustainable practices to not only be supported but be put into action.

Cultural and environmental assets are important resources.

The unique natural and cultural legacy of Kerala, such as its backwaters, traditional performing arts, rural life, and biodiversity, is the main focus of its tourist model. Responsible tourism design makes sure that these assets are not used up, but instead are kept and shown off.

Tourism that is good for the environment may also make money. Some people think that sustainability hurts profits, but Kerala shows that sustainable tourism can be both ethical and profitable. The commercial case for responsible tourism is strengthened by the creation of local jobs, the support of small businesses, and the rise in tourist satisfaction.



It is possible to have a measurable social impact.

Empirical data indicate that Kerala's model has resulted in significant enhancements in livelihoods, particularly for marginalised groups, and has fostered gender inclusivity, as evidenced by the substantial proportion of women-led enterprises and cooperatives engaged in tourism.

Environmental Responsibility is Built In, Not Extra

While many places use eco-labeling that doesn't really mean anything, Kerala makes environmental sustainability a big part of its business by using green practices, cutting down on waste, using energy-efficient transportation, and offering eco-friendly experiences.

There are still problems with scaling and consistency.

Even though the concept works, there are still problems with making sure that all districts use it the same way, keeping an eye on its long-term effects, and promoting sustainable tourism on a worldwide basis. To keep things moving, you need to keep getting better and be flexible in your management. Kerala's experience shows that sustainable tourism is not only possible, but also useful and effective when there are inclusive policies, good governance, and real community ownership. The approach provides a wealth of insights for global regions aiming to develop tourism that honours individuals, locales, and the environment.

Implications

The success of Kerala's Responsible Tourism model has important effects on governments, tourism professionals, and communities around the world.

Making policies and running the government

Kerala's example shows how important strong government leadership and institutional frameworks are for making tourism sustainable. Policymakers should make it a priority to set clear rules, give enough money, and set up ways to keep an eye on things to make sure that sustainability goals are met and that everyone is held accountable.

Community empowerment is a key part of our strategy.

It's really important for local communities to be involved, not just as passive recipients but as important decision-makers and business owners. Tourism models in other places should help local people become more capable, boost entrepreneurship, and get everyone involved, including women and other groups that are often left out.

Including Environmental Protection in Plans for Tourism

Environmental stewardship should be an important part of tourism growth, not something that comes after it. Using eco-friendly technologies, managing trash better, and restoring ecosystems can make locations more resilient and make tourists' experiences better.

Local supply chains for economic sustainability

Kerala's focus on getting goods and services from nearby shows that tourism can help rural economies as a whole. Encouraging small, locally owned businesses and



connecting tourism to traditional crafts, farming, and food systems can help the economy stay strong and stop money from leaving the area.

Replicability with Contextual Adaptation

Kerala is a good example, but other areas need to make sure they apply its lessons to their own social, cultural, and environmental situations. This necessitates adaptability in policy formulation and a willingness for ongoing learning and innovation.

Possibility of Sustainable Tourism to Improve Cultural Preservation

Sustainable tourism can help revive and instill pride in local customs and heritage by appreciating and exhibiting them via immersive experiences. This can create a positive cycle of preservation and tourism development.

Kerala's Responsible Tourism model shows that tourism may be sustainable if it is done in a way that is ecologically friendly, community-driven, and integrated. More places throughout the world may use these concepts to move away from tourism models that take advantage of people and towards systems that are fairer, stronger, and more respectful.

Constraints

The Responsible Tourism model from Kerala gives us useful information about sustainable tourism, yet this study and the model itself have some limits that we need to be aware of:

Factors Unique to the Situation

Kerala's success is profoundly anchored in its unique socio-cultural, political, and ecological setting, including strong government support, high literacy rates, and well-established community organisations. These elements may not be easily replicated in regions with differing governance structures, social dynamics, or resource limits, which means that Kerala's model may not work everywhere.

Limitations and Scope of the Data

Most of the empirical data comes from government publications and program documents, which could show a positive bias. There aren't many independent, long-term impact evaluations or detailed quantitative data on environmental and social results. This makes it hard to completely evaluate sustainability over time.

Problems with Scalability and Consistency

Some places and groups have fully adopted RT, but others are still behind because of differences in infrastructure, awareness, and involvement. This uneven implementation makes people wonder if the concept would work the same way in all of Kerala's tourist attractions.

Market Pressures and Outside Factors Like many other places, Kerala's tourist industry has to deal with outside forces that can make it hard to follow sustainable practices. These include changes in the global economy, pandemics (like COVID-19), and the effects of climate change. We need to explore the model's ability to stay strong in the face of these problems more.



Finding a balance between growth and preservation

Kerala places a strong emphasis on sustainability, but the increasing number of tourists in certain popular areas could put stress on the environment and turn culture into a commodity. This makes it harder to find a balance between growth and preservation. To really comprehend Kerala's Responsible Tourism approach, you need to know about these limits. It also shows that lessons learnt in one area should be applied to other areas with care, and that they should be evaluated for their effects.

Recommendations

The following proposals are meant to improve sustainable tourism efforts in Kerala and other places that want to follow Kerala's example. They build on the accomplishments and recognise the flaws of Kerala's Responsible Tourism model.

Make Monitoring and Evaluation Stronger

Create and put into action stronger, separate mechanisms for monitoring that check the effects of tourism on the environment, society, and economy on a regular basis. Using quantitative data and longitudinal research will help us better understand sustainability outcomes and where we need to make changes.

Improve the ability of the community to grow

Add more training programs for local communities, especially those who are under-represented, that focus on entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and sustainable practices. Giving locals skills and knowledge will make participation better and make sure that the benefits last.

Encourage marketing strategies that include everyone

Make more of an effort to sell eco-friendly travel experiences around the world, focussing on responsible travellers and niche markets. Using digital platforms and storytelling can help Kerala and other places get tourists who care about sustainability.

Encourage partnerships between several stakeholders

Encourage government agencies, businesses, NGOs, and local communities to work together more closely to share resources, expertise, and plans. This can help with problems like gaps in infrastructure, dealing with trash, and changes in the weather.

Pay attention to how scalable and replicable it is.

Make rules for how to scale the RT model to different areas of Kerala and other places, taking into account how things are different in each place. Pilot initiatives and sharing of information can help people use effective practices in new situations.

Include Climate Change Adaptation

To make sure that sustainable tourism models are ready for environmental changes, include climate resilience techniques in tourism planning. These could include supporting energy-efficient infrastructure, being ready for disasters, and protecting biodiversity.



Control the number of tourists and the amount of space they can use

Use visitor caps, off-season advertising, and the creation of alternative destinations to avoid congestion, especially in popular locations. This will help fragile ecosystems and populations by reducing the stress they are under.

Kerala and other places may make sustainable tourism stronger and more effective by using these tactics. This will make sure that it continues to help communities, protect natural and cultural resources, and give travellers meaningful experiences.

III. Conclusion

Kerala's Responsible Tourism model is a great example of how sustainable tourism can be done well when everyone in the community is involved, the government is supportive, and people care about the environment. Kerala has established a tourism framework that helps local communities and gives visitors real, enriching experiences by combining economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental protection.

The state's focus on giving power to women and other marginalised people, encouraging local businesses, and using environmentally friendly practices shows that being green and making money can go hand in hand. Nonetheless, issues with scalability, consistent implementation, and environmental constraints still exist, which shows how important it is to keep adapting and doing thorough effect evaluations.

The lessons learnt from Kerala are really helpful for places all over the world that want to grow tourism that is fair, strong, and kind to people and the planet. Sustainable tourism may become a driver for positive change if we make smart policies, give communities more authority, and are willing to try new things.

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