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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# GROWTH OF TOURISM IN KERALA AS TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND ALLEVIATION OF POVERTY

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the few sectors where Kerala has clear competitive advantages given its diverse geography in a short space ranging from the Western Ghats covered with dense forests to the backwaters to the Arabian sea. Its ancient rich culture including traditional dance forms and the strong presence of alternative systems of medicine add to its allure. Unfortunately, Kerala is dominated by domestic tourism within the state although foreign tourists arrivals to the state has been growing at a faster rate than national average. The goal in the KPP 2030 is to develop Kerala as an up-market tourism destination with the state being the top destination in terms of number of tourists and revenue among all the Indian states. Sustainable tourism is the mission. This can be achieved by integrating tourism with other parts of the economy like medical and health hubs which will attract more stable tourists over a longer period of time and with higher spending capacity. There will be new elements added to leisure tourism and niche products in tourism will be developed. Infrastructure development is crucial to achieve this goal. The success of Kerala tourism will be based on the synergy between private and public sectors. The government has taken steps to encourage private investment in tourism, while adhering to the principles and practices of sustainability. Industry led sustainable tourism development relies upon the government- imposed and self- imposed regulations. Tourism in Kerala will be benchmarked against international indicators and monitored on a regular basis to achieve quality.

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## INTRODUCTION

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. Eventhough 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

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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." 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                              |

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". Other agencies including UN-ESCAP believe that the tourism industry will contribute to the fulfillment of all eight MDGs. Proponents have reasoned that poor communities,

for example, are likely to benefit from the infrastructure created and services provided to tourists, e.g. roads, communication facilities, health and sanitation services. This way, it is argued, governments would be able to achieve MDG2 that deals with primary education, MDG4, 5 and 6 that deal with the reduction of child mortality, improved maternal health care and combating HIV/ AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Linking tourism to poverty reduction and the MDG agenda has led to the emergence of the 'pro-poor tourism' concept. This concept has been particularly spearheaded by the UK-based Pro- Poor Tourism (PPT) Partnership, a collaborative research initiative between the ICRT, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (PPT Partnership, 2011). Meanwhile, there is a long list of organizations, including UN agencies such as the UNWTO, UNDP (UN Development Programme), UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development) and UNEP (UN Environment Programme), the European Union as well as a number of bilateral development agencies that actively support poverty-focused tourism projects. Even private sector organizations such as the WTTC have adjusted their strategic frameworks to fit into the 'new tourism' paradigm. A plethora of pro-poor programmes and projects have been designed and implemented by individual organizations or in partnerships. For instance, the UNWTO launched in 2003 a programme for 'Sustainable Tourism for Eliminating Poverty', or in short: ST-EP, to contribute to the fulfilment of the UN's MDGs. From 2006 to 2010, ST-EP supported 44 projects in 31 countries. Meanwhile, the UNDP initiated in 2004 the 'Endogenous Tourism Project for Rural Livelihoods', which includes poverty reduction as a major component and has been implemented in rural areas across India in cooperation with the Indian Ministry of Tourism and Culture and with the involvement of 30 NGOs.

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. Special attention has been paid to tourism's extensive links with other sectors. For instance, the tourism sector requires support to build and operate tourism facilities through backwards linkages with basic infrastructure services such as energy, telecommunications and environmental services, as well as agricultural, manufacturing and construction services. Moreover, it has a wide range of forward linkages with sectors supplying services to tourists, including financial, retail, recreational, cultural, hospitality and health services. "Strong linkages catalyze a multiplier effect that generates broad-based economic benefits at the national level as well as *in situ* employment opportunities and poverty reduction at the local level. Without strong tourism linkages, such benefits do not materialize." Therefore, one of the main objectives of poverty-focused projects is to enhance the linkages between tourism businesses and poor people at the community level. "Links with many different types of 'the poor' need to be considered: staff, neighbouring communities, land-holders, producers of food, fuel and other suppliers, operators of micro tourism businesses, craft-makers, other users of tourism infrastructure

(roads) and resources (water) etc. There are many types of pro-poor tourism strategies, ranging from increasing local employment to building mechanisms for consultation."

### 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 downside 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 world wide 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. Thattekad 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.

### **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 3. 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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