



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM IN KERALA : A CONCEPTUAL DEBATE

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ABSTRACT

Man always looks upon delight and entertainment. One of such ways of seeking pleasure is the travelling to various destinations, enjoy with nature and satisfy his mental happiness. Such type of travel with pleasure and entertainment can be termed as Tourism. When tourism is hosted with much care and responsibility by the host country so as to provide better facilities for the travellers, it came to be known as Responsible Tourism. It envisages a responsible travel towards destinations that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of the local community. The state is so suitable and conducive that it provides an ideal setting to practice responsible tourism due to the availability of plenty of natural resources, scenic beauty, rich composite culture, supportive local community, cooperative local self-governments, vibrant media and responsible management of tourism destinations. The practice of responsible tourism consists of various kinds of responsibilities like social, economic and environmental responsibilities. The aim of this Article is to help policy makers adopt a program to turn responsible tourism to the best of its kind in the country with a responsible approach.



KEY WORDS : Responsible Tourism, Ecological Sustainability, Unique attractions, Tourism Products, Sustainable Management, Social, Economic and Environmental Responsibility, Clean and Hygienic Environment...

INTRODUCTION

People have travelled in search of livelihood, employment, business and other purposes. They also travelled as traders, merchants, soldiers, priests, pilgrims, adventurers etc., this travel for various purposes gradually increased the need for bliss and enjoyment. Hence man began to hunt for leisure and entertainments, which ultimately resulted in the genesis of Tourism. It is an important factor of economic growth and income generation. Hence it must be implemented with much care and responsibility by providing better places and facilities to visit.

This tendency has resulted in the development of the concept of responsible tourism in the state of Kerala. The related activities are to be intended to enhance efficiency and sustainability and to maintain the best possible utilization of tourist capital and potentialities without causing any harm to our ecological system.

METHODOLOGY

Today, many States have developed sophisticated survey and other monitoring tools to identify the ways of implementing Responsible Tourism so as to enhance efficiency and sustainability. For the successful construction of this Article, various methods were employed. The methods used in this study include descriptive and analytical. Descriptive method is used to narrate the genesis and growth of Responsible Tourism. Analytical Method is dealt with conceptualising responsible tourism so as to understand the

characteristic features and its international perspectives. This method is also used to trace out the significance of responsible travel towards destinations for the sustainable development of the state of Kerala, which is stepping forward for the effective implementation of responsible tourism. This method helps to understand the integral implementation of responsible tourism along with the concepts of social, economic and environmental responsibilities for an overall sustainable development.

Tourism is an income generation industry to which many countries have an eagle eye with various activities in collaboration with the relationship of travellers with service providers including local community and the ruling authority. It encompasses travel for pleasure, leisure and entertainments. It also involves other purposes related to health, business, pilgrimage, education and religion etc. Since it provides leisure and recreational facilities to the visitors, it has acquired energy and strength by approaching it to disseminate to various parts of the world and invited global wide deliberation of this industry. This resulted in the insertion of science and information technologies, policy framework and Research and Development etc., and multiplied its activities so as to provide much concern towards ecological sustainability and service competence.

In India, the first endeavour of a systematic effort for promotion of tourism was taken during British rule in 1945 by appointing Sir John Sergento look into the potentials and wider scope of tourism in the country. His recommendations included the provisions for training tourist guides, liaison with the travel agencies, hotels and catering establishments and co-ordination with air and train services. This report vividly indicated that the country is well suitable for the promotion of tourism and the British government realized the fact that India has wider scope in this sector. Next initiative was taken after the Independence of India. In 1950, a Central tourist advisory committee was constituted with a view to attract tourists from America. This committee advised the Government of India about the possible problems and exertions of tourism sector and to co-ordinate the activities at the centre. This resulted in the creation of a separate department of tourism under the Ministry of Transport and Communication in the year 1958. Almost all the five year plans, except first five-year plan, have been provided separate outlay for the development of tourism industry in the country. This expenditure included for the development of infrastructure facilities, accommodation, transportation, recreational activities, leisure, adventure, human resource development, environmental protection and cultural preservation etc. Later in 1989, the Tourism Financial Corporation of India was setup for financing hotels, tourist centres and to meet other necessary requirements. Thus Government of India stepped into the promotion and development of tourism industry, which now became an important contributor for economic development and employment generation of the entire country.

Kerala, a green narrow fertile strip on the south-west coast of India, attracted by the most picturesque beaches, palm-fringed backwater, tropical forests, Refreshing hill stations, spectacular waterfalls, Rejuvenating Ayurveda, Exotic art forms, colourful festivals, Verdant National Parks and wild life sanctuaries etc. These diverse and unique attractions of the state have made the land as one of the ten paradises of the world and played host to travellers from time to time. Thus the state of Kerala is blessed by nature with matchless attractions and vibrant people to make tourism sector more responsible for both domestic and foreign travellers. The state presents the travellers a positive mind-bending array of experiences with a wealth of natural and historic attractions. The stakeholders of tourism activities in Kerala have recognized that the beneficiaries on either part will be benefitted only if tourism related activities are implemented with responsible approach. This novel initiative from the part of the government of Kerala led to the emergence of a new diversity of tourism titled "Responsible Tourism".

Responsible tourism is not a new notion, but it is as old as with the time of the emergence of tourism, even though it emerged recently with concept and significance. It seeks to provide better places and facilities for the people to visit and live without any environmental destructions and ecological damages. Simply speaking, Responsible tourism is treating the tourists and travellers the way they wish to be treated. It is considered to be an effective tool in pursuing comprehensive eco-friendly approaches and focuses on the availability and reliability of tourism products, which can be understood as composite product, as an

amalgam of attraction, facilities and accessibilities, transport, accommodation and entertainment. It also includes natural resources like waterfalls, hills and mountains, beaches and good climate etc.

The notion of responsible tourism has emerged with a special attention only in the year 1996 with framing of Tourism Policy by South Africa, which is well known to the world as Capetown Declaration. This Capetown Declaration is intended to provide better places to visit and live. It minimises negative social, economic and environmental impacts and generates greater economic benefit for local people. The Declaration also provides more enjoyable experiences with local people by understanding cultural, social and environmental issues of the locality. Hence many countries including India have proposed to assure the social, economic and environmental responsibility in tourism sector in an eco-friendly manner and ultimately lead to social, economic and environmental development, which altogether termed as sustainable development. Realizing the immense tourism potential in terms of tremendous economic growth and development, great endeavour was taken by the State of Kerala by organising a public debate in 2007 consisting of the elected representatives of the people, Non-governmental organizations, policy makers, industrial practitioners, community leaders, social activities, environmentalists, media persons, academicians etc., which decided to endorse Responsible tourism for the first time in Kerala by giving due emphasis on social, economic and environmental development.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Social responsibility is the most important factor in terms of responsible tourism, because most of the tourism-related activities are primarily confined to the concerned society or locality of a particular region. Each society has its own culture, traditions and heritage, which are to be respected and recognised. Tourists are highly gripped by cultural events, handicrafts, traditional dress, different religions, dance, music, folktales, folksongs, customs, ceremonies, behaviour, beliefs, languages and the way of life of the people. Each tourist should have a basic attentiveness regarding the local customs and practices of the concerned destination. For this purpose tourist Guides and operators should be well trained, and they in turn should provide awareness to the tourists with an intention to avoid cultural conflict between the tourists and host. Tourists who do not take off their shoes while visiting a temple or take photographs when they are requested not to do so are the examples of cultural inconsistency. Therefore, the tourists are to be briefed on how to behave before they interact with the locals and help them to be acquainted with and respect local practices. It will strengthen the reciprocal respect and relation between the tourists and the local community without impinging the responsibility.

In the state of Kerala, there are certain social issues, which are customary in various tourist destinations. Some of the acknowledged social issues consists of pollution of lakes or backwater and canals, degradation of paddy fields, displacement of local people, changes in the use of land, encroachments by indigenous people, pollution of public area, tourism related immoral and illegal activities like adulteration, child abuse, prostitution, human trafficking etc. Hence it is necessary to create an environment to address these issues effectively with the help of local population, who play a major role in the development of tourism at their locality. Social responsibility can be achieved only with the active involvement of the local community in planning and decision making and provide capacity building to ensure social responsibility.

ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITY

The economic development of a state is very essential for its existence and the phenomena of Tourism significantly contribute much towards this process. In order to have more earnings from the tourism industry, concerned governments and local bodies invest public funds in developing infrastructure facilities like construction of roads, airports, water supply, electricity etc. and encourage private investors to invest in hotels, resorts entertainments, food, beverage and transportation etc. Because the host community should have economic responsibility as it is a tool in creating new jobs and income generation opportunities, earning a substantial amount of foreign exchange and thereby developing backward regions of the state.

The economic responsibility is to be ensured as the tourists involve in the process of buying and selling the products and they should be completely free from financial exploitation.

Economic responsibility envisages that the tourism industry should become the one which contributes chief income to the local community, which shall be utilized for their developmental program. So that the host community can actively participate in tourism-related activities and services, different tourism packages related to village life experiences. Village life experience is an innovative package developed by Responsible Tourism initiative to show case the rural life and sustains the traditional occupations of the destination. Under this initiative, the tourists will be taken around the villages to understand a real experience of the village life where they can enjoy a visit to a fish farm, vegetables and fruits farm, paddy fields and can also learn a bit about coconut leaf weaving, brook stick making, screw pine weaving and the traditional fishing techniques like bow and arrow fishing, net fishing etc. These experiences of the travellers may inspire them to purchase certain rural products and thereby bringing some financial benefits to that particular rural community. Thus the local community will be equipped either to start small, medium and micro enterprises or to develop local level entrepreneurship with a view to ensure full participation in responsible tourism activities so as to benefit them in terms of local procurement or employment and income generation.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Environment denotes to human being and their surroundings, which are very significant in terms of tourism. The environment generally consists of two types, namely Natural Environment, which includes Flora and Fauna and Physical Environment, which comprises air, water and soil. The environmental responsibility is nothing but the protection and conservation of Flora, Fauna, Air, Water and Soil. The clean and hygienic environment attracting tourists to various destinations and is a powerful resource for tourism. The environmental responsibility seeks to raise the capacity of all stakeholders and ensure promoting awareness for sustainable development. Because tourism and environment are closely related to each other and tourism needs an attractive natural environment. The responsible conservation of environment is essential for the promotion of tourism and envisages rationale for promoting environmental protection by integrating the natural, cultural and human environment that characterizes many environmentally sensitive areas.

Environmental responsibility of tourism envisages the use of resources sustainably and reduces wastes and over consumption with the facilities of collection and safe disposal of non-degradable wastes or scientific management of wastes for the conservation of environment. The environmental responsibility should ensure that all the activities related with tourism including the utilization of resources may not affect environment in any way. Air pollution, water pollution, dumping solid wastes, activities affecting flora and fauna etc., are to be checked, controlled and prevented in each tourist destination of the state. In Kerala, the tourism environment factors comprises natural environment like beaches, caves, forests, hill stations, wildlife and water bodies such as lakes, rivers and oceans, theme parks and dams and reservoirs etc. These factors are closely associated with tourism-related environment and are to be protected from all kinds of environmental pollution. For this purpose, the initiatives of green tourism and eco-tourism are to be upheld and strengthened.

The notion of green tourism is significantly an environmental concern by providing opportunities for the tourists to live with nature and enjoy with nature. It is a nature-friendly tourism of environmental preservation without disturbing the wild life and habitats, with proper disposal of wastes and complying with the safety standards of the local authority. Green Tourism is very much similar to ecotourism, which attains much popularity in recent years and aims at the preservation and conservation of ecological sustainability. However, to be sustainable or to make green the ecological system, the optimum involvement and active participation of local people should be envisaged. They must be included in the process of planning, development and operation of various factors and products of Tourism, which are to be analyzed accordingly so as to comply with the ecological conservation along with the participation of local community.

CONCLUSION

Finally this manuscript gives the following suggestions and remarks.

- The present government of Kerala promotes responsible tourism by giving predominance for ensuring social, economic and environmental responsibilities with a view to achieve sustainable development and economic advancement.
- Recently, the state has modernised this sector by adopting a new initiative called “Green Carpet” with ten –point programme to implement responsible tourism effectively in the state.
- As a result the government of Kerala has bagged four awards at the 11th edition of Film AT at Polish Film festival held in Lublin. Kerala’s responsible tourism initiative also won three awards at the festival held recently, taking top honours in the ‘Best Promotional social campaign’, ‘Protection of Nature’ and ‘Eco-food categories’. The state also bagged nine honours of National Tourism Awards 2015-16 which were announced and presented in New Delhi on 27th September, Wednesday, 2017. Tourism Minister of the state Kadakampally Surendran received six awards secured by the state tourism department from the President of India Ram Nath Kovind, while the remaining three awards were received by private operators from Kerala.
- The State tourism also won award for the best Responsible tourism initiative for Kumarakom, which is aimed at protecting environment and conserving cultural heritage. Being the first tourism board in the country to run an official website, Kerala Tourism had initiated various innovative social media campaigns such as Kerala Blog Express, Visit Kerala and Go Kerala Bid Wards App. These awards and honours reveal the spirit and frequency of popularizing responsible tourism initiatives by the government of Kerala at the global level.
- Still there are miles to go ahead in improving tourism efficiency and managing the best use of its products so as to create better places for the people to visit.
- The state should make best use of a traditional ayurvedic medicinal system provide proper health and better treatment for the travellers. This medicinal practice will attract large number of foreigners for responsible travel.
- In order to bring responsible tourism into reality, an ‘A New Global Tourism Policy’ to be formulated by giving emphasis on social, economic and environmental responsibility.
- At the same time stringent steps to be taken either to prevent or to control unsustainable consequences of tourism like over consumption of natural resources and environmental degradation, exploitation of cultures and labour, displacement of people from their land, lack of consultation with local communities and high foreign exchange leakages which reduces local economic benefits etc. Hence by eradicating above mentioned hurdles, responsible tourism can chip in to the overall sustainable development with special reference to social, economic and environmental development of the host locality and society.

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