

Challenges Faced by Kerala Tourism Industry

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Introduction

Tourism being a smokeless industry is now a multi-billion, multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional activity in the world. Twenty first century tourism has reached up to space when a Russian rocket carried the space vehicle of Dennis Tito, an American businessman and the world's first space tourist, to the space station. Time is not too far to carry tourists to moon and other planets in specially launched vehicles.

Tourism is being considered as an agent of social change bridging gaps among nations, regions and people and helping them to open up. It is a promoter of development-material and spiritual both at macro and micro level. The General Assembly of the United Nations, in designating the year 1967 as 'International Tourism Year' recognized the importance of international travel as a means of fostering understanding among people, and giving them a knowledge of the rich heritage of the past civilizations, a better appreciation of the values of different cultures, thus contributing to the strengthening of world peace. It adopted the theme "Tourism-Passport to peace". Our veteran national leader and the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru had said "welcome a tourist and send back a friend" which indicates the need for extending friendly hospitality to the in bound tourists.

Modern transportation has removed the obstacles of distance enabling people to appreciate each other engage in the exchange of ideas and commerce. Tourism can help overcome real prejudices and foster bonds. Tourism can be a real force of world peace.

Considering the vast and varied potential of tourism in the state and its impact on the economic, social and cultural environment of the state, a detailed study is found to be relevant and imperative.

Importance of Tourism

Tourism industry provides a number of economic benefits some of which are listed below-

- 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.
- Tourism promotes related industries such as handicrafts, spices, coir, textiles, and gem, jewellery and furnishing goods.
- With the active involvement of private entrepreneurs new and new tourism related business projects will come up.
- Generates income for the government
- Enhances multiplier effect.
- Promotes social mobility.
- Promotes universal brotherhood, international understanding and world peace.
- Facilitates preservation of many vanishing arts.
- Promotes pilgrimage to holy places.
- Promotes urbanisation in the host region.
- 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.

Scope of the study

The State of Kerala in India is considered as a 'tourists' paradise'. As many as seventy five tourism products are found in the length and breadth of the State. Tourism in Kerala is really non-seasonal in nature. The flagship of tourism industry in Kerala is Department of Tourism (DoT), Government of

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Kerala. The budgetary allocation for the department for 2002-2003 is Rs. 50 Crore. Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC), Bakel Resorts Development Corporation (BRDC), Tourist Resorts (Kerala) Ltd. (TRKL), District Tourism Promotion Councils (DTPCs), Kerala Institute of Travel and Tourism Management Studies (KITTS), Kerala Institute of Hospitality Management Studies (KIHMS), Thenmala Eco-Tourism Development Agency, and a host of government departments such as Forests and Wildlife, Irrigation, Museum, Zoo and Archaeology are the other important state sponsored institutions which play key role in the tourism sector of Kerala. Considering the vast and varied potential of tourism in the state and its impact on the economic, social and cultural environment of the state, a detailed study is found to be relevant and imperative.

Besides, there are a number of agencies working in the semi-government and private sector for promotion of tourism in Kerala. So, in-depth studies are necessary to ascertain whether the optimum management potential is made use of by the above units. Moreover, based on the above study, the strategic management principles and methods to be adopted by the tourism industry in Kerala can also be worked out for implementation in the years to come. This study has been made to analyse the problems and prospects of tourism in Kerala and to manage Tourism effectively by employing new management strategies. Being, a green state with favourable climate, and natural surroundings, Kerala can make rapid strides in the tourism sector. The study covers the views expressed by various informants representing government, semi-government, private institutions and that of tourists.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the major challenges faced by Kerala tourism industry.
- To investigate the problems connected with the tourism industry and formulation of appropriate, apt and practical solutions to them.
- To ascertain the possibilities of application of modern management techniques and methods in the formulation of policies, plans and programmes for the development of tourism in Kerala.
- To suggest the ways and means of integrating the function of the department of tourism, other government agencies, local self-governments and private entrepreneurs for the promotion of tourism in Kerala.
- To conduct an in-depth study on the tourism industry in Kerala and evolve new and innovative strategies.
- To formulate strategic management model for the promotion of tourism in Kerala State.

Research Methodology

The study is mainly based on primary data. Four sets of questionnaires were prepared to collect primary data from the following categories of informants namely:

- The officials of the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala (DOT), Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC), India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), District Tourism Promotion Councils (DTPCs) and other related government departments;
- Private intermediaries such as tour operators, travel agents, hoteliers and resort owners;
- Domestic tourists and
- International tourists

Respondents were selected on a random basis. Data collected through survey were supplemented by data from published, unpublished sources and indirect oral investigation which are found relevant to make the study more significant and accurate.

Findings

Major Challenges faced by Kerala Tourism

Road journey

It is a fact that road journey in Kerala is horrible to any traveller. Roads in Kerala get damaged mainly on account of torrential rains during the monsoon season. The annual road maintenance and repairs cannot withstand the severity of rains.

Tourists information through Dept. of Tourism

Tourist information given by the Department of Tourism, Kerala is truly inadequate in the views of both classes of tourists. Publications of Tourism department need not open any fresh information centers, but existing information centers may be thoroughly revitalized to cater to the needs of both domestic and international travelers.

Basic amenities

In many tourism centers, basic amenities are woefully absent. Even if they are provided, there is no assurance regarding continued availability and quality in services.

Guides service

Accredited Guides service is a must in busy tourist centers. Guides must be qualified candidates having adequate training to lead adventure tourism, wildlife safari trekking and rock-climbing. A guide should be perfectly a guide ready to serve the tourist in his/her needs and not to exploit him/her.

Monuments, Museum and Zoo

Kerala lacks internationally famous monuments. Museum and Zoo in Kerala are not scientifically set up to suit the environment where they exist.

Cleanliness & Hygiene

It is high time we developed a culture of public hygiene and cleanliness. For everything there should be a proper place. Bio-waste should be treated scientifically to produce alternative products like manure or gobar gas. An intensive campaign should be started to reduce the consumption of plastic articles. Waste plastics being non-degradable are to be taken to recycling plants for producing alternative products. Incinerators which do not pollute the atmosphere may also be used in tourist centers.

Educating Taxi/Auto drivers

Foreign tourists have much complaint in this regard. Main complaint is overcharging of the time hire. Auto/taxi service is a hospitality service and the drivers have to be more humane and pleasing to the tourists. He should be a guide, a helper and also a motivator to the tourist.

Hill Stations

Kerala has a good number of magnificent hill stations viz, Munnar, Ponmudi, Peerumedu, Nelliampathy, Vythiri, Meppadi, Ranipuram etc., although our hill stations are cool, green and enchanting, they do not seem to be developed as tourist destination.

Conducted tours

Efficient, time-scheduled, pre-advertised and regular conducted tours are much appreciated by the tourists. Some backwater services handled by KTDC at Kochi and similar services run by DTPC, Kollam are specially not worthy.

Tax on hotel bill

Tourists are charged at various stages right from their entry in India. A tourist coming by a chartered flight is already charged for tax due to the Central Government. Then for his stay and food, luxury tax is charged.

Recommendations

- Take the tourists into confidence and present friendly hospitality to them.
- Provide special attention and care to tourists.
- Guests should be attached more with eco-tourism and towards nature.
- Special protection and arrangement for tourists to see festivals and cultural fairs.
- Get feedback from tourists.
- Distribute tourism publicity materials at airports.
- More and more domestic and international publicity
- Start more tourism information centers.

- Proper sign boards and road directions.
- Officers should be polite and hardworking
- Make available trained staff and guides.
- Conduct international fairs in Kerala.
- More tourism centers with hygienic facilities.
- Organise cultural programmes with the participation of foreign tourists.
- More power to DTPCs to project and develop district tourism resources.
- Provide high quality service by providing the required facilities.
- Provide necessary basic facilities.
- Link tourism centers with better transport facilities.
- Encourage charter flights from other countries.
- Maintain cleanliness at beaches and backwaters.
- Promote quality health tourism in ayurveda.
- Special flights on the eve of festivals and pilgrim season.
- Better roads with long-term perspective
- Neat and hygienic public toilets.
- Control sound pollution and smoke from passing vehicles.
- Direct international flights to America and Europe from Kerala.
- Subsidy on electricity charges.
- Give incentives to private entrepreneurs to start new tourism ventures.
- Develop hygienic drainage system.
- Proper garbage disposal from public places.
- Restrict plastics and other non-degradable materials at tourism centres.
- As in Singapore, prepare tourism master plan for tourism infrastructure with the service of experts and professionals.
- Systematic planning and its implementation.
- Co-ordination of various departments.
- Do not overcharge tourists.
- Frame new law and regulation so as to protect the industry and tourists.
- Teach tourism from school level and create public awareness.

Conclusion

The topic of this research study “Challenges faced by Kerala Tourism Industry” was undertaken by the researcher as a comprehensive study covering the whole Kerala State. It required extensive travelling in all the districts of Kerala in order to collect primary data from four types of involving participants such as officials, private intermediaries, domestic tourists and foreign tourists. In conducting this research, the researcher made a humble attempt to bring to light the problems, weaknesses, short-comings and plain realities associated with the management of tourism industry in Kerala. The scope for research on tourism is unending since the industry is greatly involving people, product and services. The impact of tourism is another area where there is need for regular study and research. Continuous research and time to time innovations alone will pave way for achieving sustainability in tourism. The greatest threat to tourism and travel, now-a-days, is terrorism in which the victims are mostly innocent people. World now requires another Mahatma Gandhi to preach the ideals of peace, universal love and non-violence.

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