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**TITLE OF PAPER:** Sustainable tourism in India: a study from a global perspective with focus on tourism prospects of Kerala

**ABSTRACT:** Currently, Kerala is one among the fastest growing tourism destinations in the entire world. While the prospects of tourism development appear to be quite promising in India in general and Kerala state in particular, there growing apprehensions regarding the sustainability of the same because of such varied reasons as adverse impacts on culture and environment, bottlenecks because of the paucity of adequate infrastructure and the like. In the above context, this paper seeks to (i) study the problems and prospects of Indian tourism sector, from a global perspective, (ii) analyze the case of tourism in Kerala state in better detail, and (ii) to suggest pragmatic and realistic strategies for meaningful tourism development in India, with due respect to the long-term sustainability of such initiatives.

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# **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN INDIA: A STUDY FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE WITH FOCUS ON TOURISM PROSPECTS OF KERALA**

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## **Abstract of the Paper**

*World over tourism has emerged as one of the priorities of governments as a sector with immense potential for economic development and employment generation. Various international agencies like World Tourism Organization (WTO) have pointed out the vast developmental potential of tourism, particularly with reference to the developing nations, like India. It is widely recognized that economies like India and China would emerge as the superpowers in world tourism in the next 20 years or so. In the year 2006, the foreign tourists arrivals in India (4.45 million) have been almost double that of 1996 (2.29 million), while the earnings have almost tripled during the period, from Rs. 10046 Crore to Rs. 29604 Crore. Further, in line with the above increasing trend, for the seven months' period January to July 2007 the provisional figures stand at 2.76 million as against 2.47 for the corresponding period of 2006. In respect of the state of Kerala in the Indian union, often cited as "Gods own country" with its vast and serene coastal areas and hillocks, prospects of tourism are really excellent. This is evidenced from the growth of the number of international tourists by nearly four times during the last decade. Currently, Kerala is one among the fastest growing tourism destinations in the entire world. While the prospects of tourism development appear to be quite promising in India in general and Kerala state in particular, there growing apprehensions regarding the sustainability of the same because of such varied reasons as adverse impacts on culture and environment, bottlenecks because of the paucity of adequate infrastructure and the like. In the above context, this paper seeks to (i) study the problems and prospects of Indian tourism sector, from a global perspective, (ii) analyze the case of tourism in Kerala state in more detail, and (iii) to suggest pragmatic and realistic strategies for meaningful tourism development in India, with due respect to the long-term sustainability of such initiatives. The paper takes into account, inter alia, relevant global experiences, ever-growing globalization pressures, and after all the peculiar socio-economic, geographic and such other features characteristic of the Indian union.*

**Key Terms:** *WTO, WTTC, Tourism Vision 2020, Ecotourism, Sustainable Development.*

# **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN INDIA: A STUDY FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE WITH FOCUS ON TOURISM PROSPECTS OF KERALA**

## **Genesis**

Tourism is fast emerging as an instrument for economic development and employment generation. This trend is more prominent among the developing nations. The case of tourism in the Asia-Pacific region in general and India in particular may be looked upon as a classic example in this regard. However, globally the long-term sustainability of tourism as a means of development is increasingly being questioned, mainly because of its adverse effects on the environment, fast depletion of natural resources etc. As such, the relevance of environment-friendly strategies for long-term sustainability of tourism initiatives need not be overemphasized. For the very same reason, it may be stated that meticulously planned, carefully designed and clearly articulated strategies are essential to maintain and further improve the performance of Indian tourism in the future, notwithstanding its appreciable performance since the fiscal 2002. The case of India with special reference to Kerala state in the Indian union is analyzed here.

## **Analytical Significance**

The prospects of tourism development appear to be quite promising in many of the developing countries of the world. India and a few other countries in the Asia-Pacific region is no exception in this regard. While the general pattern is that of fast growing tourism initiatives the world over, the adverse impacts of tourism are dangerously on the rise in many parts of the world, particularly the degradation of the environment, fast depletion of natural resources, adverse effect on bio-diversity and ecological balance, and the like. Accordingly, there is an enhanced significance for 'nature friendly' and sustainable tourism. For a nation like India which has been late in recognizing the developmental potential of tourism, this is more relevant. In this context an analysis of prospects and challenges of tourism in India – one of the most important tourism destinations of the world – assumes high level of significance. The state of Kerala in India, often cited as "God's own country", is more significant in view of its unmatched tourism potential.

## **Objectives of the Paper**

(i) To make an overall review of the current status of global tourism and its trends and patterns over the years; (ii) To make a detailed analysis of Indian tourism, its development over the years, and problems and prospects; with special reference to Kerala; (iii) strategies for sustainable tourism development in India, with special reference to the state of Kerala in the Indian union.

## **Organization of the Paper**

Broadly in line with the objectives set for the paper as mentioned above, the remainder of the paper is divided into three major parts. Part – I gives an overall review of the global scenario in respect of tourism and its broad trends and patterns, Part – II discusses the case of Indian tourism, its special features, problems and prospects; with special reference to Kerala state; and Part – III offers strategies for sustainable tourism development in India with special reference to the state of Kerala in the Indian union. Part – III is followed by the author's concluding remarks.

## **Part – I**

### **An Overview of the Global Tourism Scenario**

Tourism is inherently a highly social business that has carved a niche for itself internationally. This worldwide phenomenon is growingly recognized as an effective tool for economic development of nations, by way of employment earning revenue and foreign exchange, and is acting as a means for upward social mobility through interaction with cultures from elsewhere in the world. The social nature of tourism, on the one hand, is because of the presence of large number of diverse stakeholders in the host-guest relations forming part of tourism, and on the other hand, in the behaviour of tourists which often takes place publicly. The impact of tourism on the diverse facets of an individual's life, a society's customs and practices, and a government's policies and priorities has got far reaching implications. Because of the above characteristics of tourism, socio-economic, environmental and ecological interests of individuals, communities and governments are greatly influenced by the dynamics of tourism.

The conceptual framework propounded by Brundtland (1987) [1] viz. Ecologically Sustainable Development Framework is often used to study the implications of tourism on the society at large, from a social and ecological perspective. Globally, this framework has been used for managing the key issues related to the tourism development. World over ecologically sustainable tourism (or, 'eco-tourism' in short) is gaining momentum fast. According to Lane (1991) [8], ecologically sustainable tourism should strive for, "providing satisfying jobs without dominating the local community. It must not abuse the natural environment, and should be architecturally respectable. The benefits of tourism should be diffused through many communities, and not concentrated on a narrow coastal strip or scenic valley". It has widely been recognized that the heart of eco-tourism lies in the preservation of the nature and the environment, ie. a tourism that seeks to maintain a harmonious co-existence with the nature. Exhibit 1.1 depicts the global trends in tourism.

- **Distribution:** Tourism is a significant sector in almost half of the low income countries, and in virtually all the lower middle income countries.
- **Destinations:** The top 15 tourism destinations in the developing world (in terms of absolute numbers of arrivals or receipts) tend to be populous, low-middle income and upper-middle income countries. 5 out of these 15 destinations have a population of over 10 million living below a Dollar a day.

- **Employment:** World-wide forecasts predict a growth in tourism development of over 100 million jobs by 2007. Global tourism already accounts for over 250 million jobs.
- **Growth:** Tourism contributes to an aggregate economic growth of over 50 percent between 1990 and 1997.
- **Pro-Poor Tourism:** In most countries with high levels of poverty, tourism is a significant contributing factor, providing over 2 percent of GDP or 5 percent of exports). Some 12 countries account for 80 percent of the world's poor (living on less than a Dollar a day). In 11 of these countries, each with over 10 million poor people, tourism is significant addition to the economy and this contribution is growing.

### **Exhibit 1.1. Global trends in Tourism.**

[Source: UNEP 2002, WTTC 1998, Ashley et al. 2001, Roe et al. 1997, cited in Sinha 2006.]

In addition to the immense potential of tourism to contribute positively to socio-economic, political and cultural environment of a nation, tourism is increasingly being recognized as an effective means of economic development, particularly by the developing nations of the world. As depicted in Exhibit 1.2, there are excellent growth prospects for tourism in the Asia-Pacific region which has been lagging behind the world so far, but of late, growing at a fast pace. However, the growing challenges posed by tourism on the environment is as important as its ever-increasing growth prospects.

- **General Statistics:** Current growth rates in relative terms tend to be lower than world average. With a very large population, the scenario in absolute terms is different however. Domestic and regional tourism are significant and growing in importance. Both mass and alternative tourism have grown in past & despite economic downturns and currency fluctuations, continue to grow.

#### **South East Asia**

- **Economic contribution:** Some 21 million people are employed in tourism, its economic impact is expected to grow by 80 percent in the next decade.
- **Coasts and Seas:** In coastal and marine areas, tourism pressures (along with increasing urbanization, industrialization etc.) have contributed to degradation of coastal areas, reduced water quality and increased pressures on marine resources. Besides, tourism pressures, industrialization and urbanization – are resulting in critical depletion of coastal resources.
- **Coral Reefs:** More than half the world's coral reefs are located in the Pacific Island countries, and large areas are already degraded. Tourism and recreation activities are one factor that leads to this degradation. (eg. unsafe diving activities, tourism development.)
- **'Ethical Tourism':** is a growing sector. Tourists and tour companies are staying away from countries like Burma (Myanmar) where torture, human rights abuses, forced labour on tourism projects, and mass disruption for local communities from tourism development occur.

- **Waste:** Litter and discarded waste in popular sites like Himalayas (Mount Everest) has been a major problem for a number of years. Parts of the Himalayas recently underwent a clean-up campaign which has been a major success for the area.

### **Exhibit 1.2. Regional Trends in Tourism (Asia-Pacific Region)**

[Source: UNEP 2002, WTTC 1998, Ashley et al. 2001, Roe et al. 1997 cited in Sinha 2006.]

The magnitude of tourism industry the world over is evident from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) statistics. Accordingly,

- In the year 2002, travel, tourism and related activities contributed approximately 10 per cent of the world's GDP. This will reach 10.6% by the year 2012.
- The tourism industry is estimated to help generate 1 in every 12.8 jobs, 7.8 percent of total employment. This will rise to 8.6 percent by 2012.

In view of the foregoing discussions, it is worth noting that India is in an excellent position to exploit the opportunities in tourism for its development, as most of the leading tourism destinations in the world have their infrastructure (economic in general, or tourism in particular) that is much lower than that of India.

## **Part – II**

### **Tourism in India with Focus on Kerala State: Features, Problems and Prospects**

#### **2.1. Tourism in India: Location Advantages and other Favourable Features.**

As already noted, tourism is fast emerging as a sector having immense potential for ensuring rapid economic development of nations, particularly for developing nations like India. India has certain unique features that make it specially suited for taking maximum advantage out of tourism promotion. It is well-known that India is the seventh largest, second most populous, tenth industrialized and the sixth nation to have gone into outerspace in the world. However, India's uniqueness in respect of attracting the world as one of the most sought after tourism destinations, lies primarily in its very rich cultural heritage, presence of so many number of historical places including world wonders like the Taj Mahal, very vast coastal areas and hillocks that are exceedingly serene. Because of these reasons, from time immemorial India has been a land of bounty and prosperity, a nation with vibrant colours with people who are joyous and tolerant. Further, geographically also there are certain peculiarities that are favourable to India which make this country stand out distinctly from the rest of the world. India and its five neighbouring countries (viz. Pakistan, Bangladesh,

Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) together form a self-contained mass of land, fit to be called as a major sub-continent within the continent of Asia. In fact, physical unity to this sub-continent is provided by the numerous ranges and mountains in the North and mighty water bodies in the south. The mountain ranges comprising of Kirthar, Sulaiman, Hindukush, Karakoram and Himalayas cut-off the sub-continent from the remaining parts of Asia. Moreover, the peninsular region of this sub-continent is surrounded by water bodies like the Arabian sea in the west, Indian ocean in the south and the Bay of Bengal in the east. Here, it is worthwhile to point out that the third largest ocean in the world came to be known as Indian ocean because the sub-continent of India is located at the head of this ocean.

India's extensive mass of land covers an area of 32,80,483 sq. km and is the seventh largest country in the world after Russia, China, Canada, USA, Brazil and Australia. India is favourably situated in the world's highways of trade and commerce. The oceanic routes serving South East Asia and Australia pass through the Indian Ocean. India is connected with Europe, North America and South America through Suez Canal and the Cape of Good Hope. In short, India has got a geographical location, natural resources as well as historical and cultural background which are quite conducive for development of tourism.

## **2.2. Huge Potential, not Properly Tapped; however, Appreciable Growth since 2003.**

It may be stated that though India has got excellent potential for being developed as one of the best tourism destinations of the world, statistics relating to the previous years reveal that by and large this potential is underutilized. For instance, in respect of foreign tourist arrivals, the growth trend has been rather stagnant till 2002, as evidenced by the low single digit or even negative growth rates, in spite of a generally growing pattern of the absolute figures. But, since 2003 there has been reasonably consistent double digit growth rate over the years, till 2006. Table 2.1 is self-explanatory in this regard.

Year	Foreign Tourist Arrivals (in million)*	Percentage Change over the previous year
1996	02.29	08.00 %
1997	02.37	03.50 %
1998	02.36	(-00.40) %
1999	02.48	05.10 %
2000	02.65	06.90%
2001	02.54	(-04.20) %
2002	02.38	(-06.30) %
2003	02.73	14.70 %
2004	03.46	26.70 %
2005	03.92	13.30 %
2006*	04.45	13.50 %

**Table 2.1. Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India, 1996-2006**

[Source: Official statistics of Bureau of Immigration, Government of India.] [\* Provisional]

In respect of India's share in international tourism also, the trend over the years has been quite similar to the one relating to foreign tourist arrivals in India (as shown in Table 2.1). That is, till 2002, the share has been quite poor, so also the growth rates over the years. However, since 2003, there has been consistently high growth rates. In spite of this fact, it is worth noting that India's share in international tourist arrivals is just about 0.52% (2006). This suggests that India has to leap frog several times, given its vast potential for tourism. Table 2.2 clearly depicts the above pattern of India's tourism growth vis-à-vis the entire world.

Year	International Tourist Arrivals in World (in million)	Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India (in million)	Percentage share of India
1996	573.50	02.30	00.40 %
1997	597.50	02.40	00.40 %
1998	616.00	02.40	00.39 %
1999	639.50	02.50	00.39 %
2000	686.70	02.60	00.38%
2001	686.00	02.50	00.36 %
2002	706.40	02.40	00.34 %
2003	693.20	02.70	00.39 %
2004	761.00	03.50	00.46 %
2005	802.00	03.90	00.49 %
2006*	842.00	04.40	00.52 %

**Table 2.2. Share of India in International Tourist Arrivals in World, 1996–2006.**

[Source: *Tourism Market Trends*, 2005 Edition (WTO) for the years upto 2003, *WTO Barometer*, June 2007, for others.] [\* Provisional]

The share of India in respect of international tourism receipts shows a pattern similar to that of international tourist arrivals. But, it is worth noting that, here, the relative position (percentage share) of India is better than that of arrivals throughout the period. Accordingly, as of 2006, India's share of receipts is 0.89 % (as against 0.52%, for arrivals.) (Table 2.3)

Year	International Tourism Receipt	Tourist Receipt in India	Percentage share
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	in World (in USD Billion)	(in USD Billion)	of India
1996	450.50	02.80	00.63 %
1997	454.20	02.90	00.64 %
1998	451.70	03.00	00.65 %
1999	465.70	03.00	00.65 %
2000	483.80	03.20	00.66%
2001	472.30	03.00	00.64 %
2002	487.00	02.90	00.60 %
2003	533.10	03.50	00.66 %
2004	633.00	04.80	00.75 %
2005	678.00	05.70	00.85 %
2006*	735.00	06.60	00.89 %

**Table 2.3. Share of India in International Tourism Receipts in World, 1996–2006.**

[Source: *Tourism Market Trends*, 2005 Edition (WTO) for the years upto 2003, *WTO Barometer*, June 2007, for others.] [\* Provisional]

### **2.3. Tourist Arrivals: Comparison of India with Top Ten Countries of the World.**

Table 2.4 depicts top ten source countries for foreign tourist arrivals to India. It is worth noting that two advanced nations (viz. UK and USA) together account for more than 32 % of the total number of tourist arrivals to India in 2006. Besides, the top ten countries together account for 56.7% of the total foreign tourist arrivals during the above period.

Sl. No.	Source Country	Foreign Tourist Arrivals (Millions)*	Percentage Share
01.	UK	0.734	16.50 %
02.	USA	0.697	15.70 %
03.	Canada	0.177	04.00 %
04.	France	0.175	03.90 %
05.	Germany	0.157	03.50 %
06.	Sri Lanka	0.155	03.50 %
07.	Japan	0.119	02.70 %
08.	Australia	0.110	02.50 %
09.	Malaysia	0.107	02.40 %
10.	Nepal	0.092	02.10 %
	Total of Top 10 Countries	2.523	56.70 %
	Others	1.927	43.30 %

All countries	4.447	100.00 %
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**Table 2.4. Top Ten Source Countries for Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India in 2006.**

[Source: Official statistics of Bureau of Immigration, Government of India.] [\* Provisional]

India compares quite unfavourably with top ten countries of the world in respect of its relative share of international tourist arrivals. As of 2006, India has got international tourist arrivals of just 4.4 million representing a meager 0.52 % of the total for the whole world. This is quite low compared to 79.10 million (7.39%) for France and 20.20 million (2.4%) for Russian Federation; representing respectively the first and last among the top ten countries. (Table 2.5)

Rank	Country	International Tourist Arrivals* (in Million)	Percentage Share
01	France	79.10	09.39 %
02	Spain	58.50	06.95 %
03	USA	51.10	06.07 %
04	China	49.60	05.89 %
05	Italy	41.10	04.88 %
06	UK	31.10	03.57 %
07	Germany	23.60	02.80 %
08	Mexico	21.40	02.54 %
09	Austria	20.30	02.41 %
10	Russian Federation	20.20	02.40 %
Total of Top 10 Countries		395.00	46.91 %
India		04.40	00.52 %
Others		442.60	52.57 %
Total		842.00	100.00 %

**Table 2.5 International Tourist Arrivals: India Vs Top Ten Countries of the World (2006)**

[Source: *WTO Barometer*, June 2007.] [\* Provisional]

#### **2.4. Economic Benefits of Tourism, Appreciable Growth since 2003.**

Tourism has got tremendous potential for economic development of a nation. Firstly, it contributes towards the national GDP. Secondly it creates considerable level of employment opportunities.

Indicators	Year	India	World
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Contribution of Tourism to GDP*	2003	05.83 %	10.00 % (2002)
	2004	05.90 %	10.20 % (2003)
	2005	06.11 %	10.40 % (2004)
	2006	NA	10.60 % (2005)
Employment in Tourism Sector*	2003	38.6 million (8.27 %)	198.098 million (7.8 %) (2002)
	2004	41.8 million (8.78%)	194.562 million (7.6 %) (2003)
	2005	NA	214.697 million (8.1 %)
	2006	NA	221.568 million (8.3 %)

**Table 2.6. Economic Benefits of Tourism in India vis-à-vis the World.**

[Source: *Tourism Statistics 2006 at a Glance*, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, Sept. 2007.]

[\* Direct as well as indirect contribution of tourism.]

[ Figures in bracket for employment shows the percentage share in total employment].

[World figures shown above are drawn from World Tourism & Travel Council (WTTC)].

As is evident from Table 2.6, in India tourism has got somewhat high share in the overall GDP of the country, though the same is only about half of the international average. In respect of employment generation, the share of employment offered by Indian tourism is slightly higher than the world average. This fact points to the immense potential of Indian tourism to create more employment opportunities. Table 2.6 is self-explanatory in this regard. In fact, WTTC estimates that the top ten countries with the greatest expected relative growth in employment over the next ten years are all developing countries.

Foreign exchange earnings from tourism in India shows a trend that is quite similar to that of the foreign tourist arrivals in India. (See Table 2.1, discussed earlier) That is to say, till 2002, though there has been a generally increasing trend in foreign exchange earnings, the growth rates of the same over the years have been quite poor, either low single digit growth rate or even negative rates. But since 2003, there has been high, consistent two digit growth rates throughout till 2006. Table 2.7 depicts the above trend very clearly.

Year	Foreign Exchange Earnings		Percentage Change over the previous year	
	(US D million)	(Rupees Crores)	(US D million)	(Rupees Crores)
1996	2832	10046	09.60 %	19.20 %
1997	2889	10511	02.00 %	04.60 %
1998	2948	12150	02.00 %	15.60 %
1999	3009	12951	02.10 %	06.60 %
2000	3168	14238	05.30%	09.90%

2001	3042	14344	(-04.00) %	00.70 %
2002	2923	14195	(-03.90) %	(-01.00) %
2003	3533	16429	20.90 %	15.70 %
2004	4769	21603	35.00 %	31.50 %
2005	5731	25172	20.20 %	16.50 %
2006*	6569	29604	14.60 %	17.60 %

**Table 2.7. Foreign Exchange Earnings from Tourism in India, 1996-2006**

[Source: Official statistics of Reserve Bank of India ] [\* Provisional]

In view of the above, it is worth pointing out that for a developing nation like India, tourism promotion can help achieve fast economic development as well as high level of employment, apart from its potential for earning high level of foreign exchange.

### **2.5. Low Share of India in the Global Tourism: High Growth Prospects.**

India's share in the global tourism market (foreign tourist arrivals) has been quite low over the years. As of the latest (2006) statistics also, the same is just a meager 4.4 million tourists (ie. 0.52 % of the total) which is roughly one-fifth as that of the tenth largest country (Russian Federation) and just one-eighteenth as that of the largest country (France). In view of the abundant potential of India as one of the most preferred tourism destinations, there is tremendous scope for improvement. Equally important, however, is the fact that along with rapid growth in tourism, the adverse impact of the same on the environment is also on the rise. The case of Himalayas in India itself is a classic example. Therefore, while it is fact that tourism development is of utmost significance for economic development for developing nations like India, equally important is the need to check the adverse impact of the same on the environment that is dangerously on the rise over the years, thus underlining the need for eco-friendly tourism.

### **2.6. Tourism in Kerala: the “God’s own Country”**

Kerala is often referred to as ‘God’s own country’, because of its extraordinary natural beauty resembling the heaven. “Gods own country” has been recognized as an official slogan even by the State Government’s tourism ministry. Kerala, the pioneer tourism state in the country, has got a number of unique distinctions in the tourism front among the states in the Indian union. The state’s tourism has bagged many awards and recognitions, both at national and international levels. These include, inter alia, the following:

- Kerala has got one of the largest developed tourism destinations, among all states in the Indian union.
- The state is the only tourism destination selected for ‘Superbrand’ in India.

- The state has got the nomination as one of the three finalists at the WTTC (World Tourism & Travel Council).
- The state has won the ‘Tourism for Tomorrow’ award in the destination category in 2005
- Thenmala eco-tourism project in Kerala has been selected by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) as one of the best 64 eco-friendly tourist destinations, spread over 47 countries.
- Kerala’s tourism has won the ‘Gold Award for Best E-Newsletter’ in 2005, from Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA). Besides, it has won ‘Honourable Mention for Culture Award’ in 2005 from PATA.
- Kerala has won three Awards from Government of India in 2005, viz. (i) Best Performing Tourism state, (ii) Best Maintained Tourist-friendly Monument, and (iii) Best Publishing.
- Kerala has been pioneering in among the Indian states in health and medical tourism. Kerala and Ayurveda have become synonymous with each other. The state has been making concerted efforts to promote health and medical tourism in a big way, particularly Ayurveda-based health tourism. This has resulted in a substantial rise in the rate of tourist arrivals. Strong focus has been there on Ayurveda and its wide array of treatments and medications. Because of this brand equity clinics based on ‘Kerala Ayurveda’ are being profitably run even in other states of India, including metropolitan cities.

### 2.6. 1. Kerala’s Performance in the Indian Tourism: Impressive Performance.

The performance of Kerala’s tourism in the Indian union has been observed to be impressive both in absolute and relative terms. As shown in Table 2.8, it may be noted that there has been a generally increasing trend in respect of foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala over the years and also the share of Kerala’s share in the total for the Indian union.

As is evident from Table 2.9, it may be noted that as in the case of international tourist arrivals, there has generally been a commendable improvement in respect of Kerala state in respect of domestic tourists arrivals as well. There has been positive growth rate at about 5 percent throughout the period, except for one year viz. 2005 when there was a small negative growth rate. All these point to the prominent position of Kerala in India’s tourism map and hence its promising future as an important tourism destination in the whole India. Furthermore, as per the latest statistics reported in the State Assembly by the Governor R L Bhatia, for the year ended Dec.2007 4,43,594 foreign tourists visited the State showing an increase of 19.43 percent.

Year	India (Nos)	Percentage Change	Kerala (Nos)	Percentage Change	Kerala’s share in Indian tourism (%)
2001	2537282	(-03.31)	208830	(-0.53)	08.23
2002	2384364	(-06.03)	232564	11.37	09.75

2003	2726214	14.34	294621	26.68	10.81
2004	3457477	26.82	345546	17.28	09.99
2005	3915324	13.24	346499	0.28	08.85
2006	4447000	13.58	428534	23.68	09.63

**Table 2.8. Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India and Kerala (2001-2006).**

[Source: Department of Tourism, Govt. of Kerala ]

Year	Number of Tourists Arrivals (Kerala)	Percentage Change over the Previous Year
2001	5239692	04.52
2002	5568256	06.27
2003	5871228	05.44
2004	5972182	01.72
2005	5946423	(-0.43)
2006	6271724	05.47

**Table 2.9. Domestic Tourist Arrivals to Kerala (2001-2006).**

[Source: Department of Tourism, Govt. of Kerala ]

It may be observed that there has been considerable increase in the investment in tourism sector by the Central and State Governments over the years. Though the State's Plan allocation for tourism is showing an increasing trend, the growth rate is rather low compared with that of the Central Government. Table 2.10 is self-explanatory in this regard.

Financial Year	State Plan Allocation for Tourism (Rupees Crore)	Central Financial Assistance for Tourism (Rupees Crore)
2002-'03	64.30	09.11
2003-'04	61.35	12.39
2004-'05	69.29	21.99
2005-'06	88.02	48.09
2006-'07	81.57	NA

**Table 2.10. Allocations for Tourism in Kerala by the State and Central Governments.**

[Source: Department of Tourism, Govt. of Kerala ]

## 2. Kerala Tourism: the Strength Areas

It has been observed that there are a few areas wherein Kerala has got a comparative advantage over other countries in respect tourism development. As already noted, the unique socio-economic and geographic profile of the state has added significantly towards making it one of the sought after tourism destinations of the entire world. The lengthy coastal belt, peculiar geographical location, lush backwaters, a large number of beaches, serene hillocks, moderate climate throughout the year, highly literate populace etc. are some of the factors. Health tourism (Ayurveda fame) and Medical tourism (cost effectiveness) have got excellent prospects in Kerala. Whether it is based on Ayurveda or modern medicine, Kerala has got an excellent brand either because of reputation or cost effectiveness. Besides, Kerala has got immense potential for being developed as the best ecotourism destination in India. Thenmala in Kerala (near to the capital city, Thiruvananthapuram) is the first ecotourism project in the country.

### 3. Tourism Vision 2020

Kerala has drawn up a comprehensive policy document “Vision 2020” in the year 2000. This document gives due consideration to the sustainability aspects of tourism growth along with the economic and feasibility considerations. The new policy seeks to develop tourism as one of the core competencies of the State and also to regulate the tourism initiatives properly taking into account the broader and long-term interests of the State, like, environmental conservation, protection of heritage and culture, development of tourism infrastructure, quality standards etc. In short, it aims at using a sustainable and integrated approach to tourism promotion in Kerala. The Department of Tourism (DoT) of Kerala state has formulated a three-pronged strategy to maintain and further improve the superior position of Kerala in the global tourism map. Accordingly, the three broad strategies are as follows:

1. Product Innovation,
2. Innovative Marketing,
3. Strategic alliance with the Government of Rajasthan.

Besides, there are efforts in the direction of obtaining the benefits of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for tourism, so that SEZs for tourism could be established meaningfully.

### 4. Problems of Kerala’s Tourism Sector: Ecological Overkill, Growth Constraints.

**In spite of the appreciable growth rates and also tremendous potential of the State in the tourism front, the fact remains that Kerala tourism is at present fraught with its own share of sustainability and other problems. Referring to the problems faced by Kerala from a wider perspective (viz. Kerala model of development), Oommen (2008) [10] considers Kerala’s ecological problems also in detail, and calls the current scenario as ‘Ecological Overkill’. He points out that the emerging ecological scenario is affected by four major crises. (Box 2.1)**

- First, hydrological cycle is seriously damaged, probably irreversibly. Natural systems like forests and the river systems are irreparably destroyed. Kerala's abundant wetland's sometimes referred to as "kidney of the economic system" is fast disappearing. Despite the copious monsoon rainfall, Kerala has the lowest per capita availability of fresh water. Conservation of fresh water is done only at a very modest scale. No worthwhile efforts have been made to conserve the fast disappearing forests.
- Second, Kerala with its vast coastal system of 580 kms, mountains and undulating terrains has a peculiar geography which has been considerably distorted. Kerala's rich bio-diversity is being fatally interfered to the leveling of paddy lands, mountain regions and heavy quarrying.
- Third, few parts of the world have such a rich and diversified natural base of bio-resources which over the years have been culturally dependent on the people who protected them. Unfortunately, this beautiful matrix of agro-eco system is being badly destroyed. The traditional know-how is virtually vanishing.
- Four, a consumerist society throws out heavy solid, liquid and medical wastes. The hospitals alone generate around 1.5 lakh tones of solid waste per day. It is estimated that about one million cubic metres of sewage is generated per day in the coastal areas alone.

Needless to mention, the fast deteriorating trend of the emerging ecological scenario, declining environmental sanitation and poor hygiene, would definitely have an adverse impact on development of tourism in the state. As suggested by Oommen (2008) [10], 'a comprehensive vision and purposive actions' seems to be imminent for the state. Prakash and Nair (2008) [11] have observed 'widespread environmental damage' as ones of the 'serious issue staring the state in the face', the other issues being 'high incidence of unemployment, fiscal crisis of the state government, informal nature of agriculture, industrial backwardness etc. They have observed 'Technological change, urbanization and migration have created new opportunities for the state, but these have also brought new challenges for the state, like, environmental degradation'. Premchand (2008) [12] has pointed out that the demolition of illegal resorts in Munnar, the reputed tourism destination in Kerala, in the recent past has adversely affected the prospects of tourism and has put the Department of Tourism in an 'embarrassing situation'.

### **Part – III**

#### **Strategies for Sustainable Tourism Development in India with Focus on Kerala State**

As already pointed out in Part – I of the paper, ecologically sustainable tourism (ecotourism) is fast gaining momentum the world over. This in turn is because of a number of adverse impacts of tourism on the environment, which need urgent attention

## 1. Adverse Impacts of Tourism on the Environment:

The adverse impacts of tourism on the environment include the following:

- **Pressure on Natural Resources:** Tourism adversely affects land and landscape, marine resources, atmosphere, fresh water, etc. and also pressure on other local resources (like, energy, food, other raw materials etc.).
- **Harm to wildlife and habitats, with associated loss of biodiversity:** This mainly arises on (i) biological resources – in the form of disruption of wildlife habitats, clearance of vegetation for tourism development, increased pressure on endangered species etc., (ii) ecologically fragile areas, like, rain forests, wetlands, mangroves, coral reefs etc.
- **Pollution and wastes:** These cause contamination of land, freshwater, marine waters and coastal areas, air etc. and also causes noise pollution.
- **Social and cultural pressures related to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity:** These include, (i) social and cultural impacts – that is, disturbance to the local way of life and of social structures, and (ii) adverse impacts on livelihoods – lack of benefit sharing with those who bear the tourism related costs.
- **Environmental Threats to Tourism:** These include, inter alia, (i) global warming, (ii) loss of bio-diversity, water pollution, and local air pollution.

### 2. Ecotourism: Concept and Main Features:

Because of the adverse effects of tourism on the environment as discussed above, the concept of environment-friendly tourism (ecotourism) is gaining significance all over the world. The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as “responsible travel that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of the local people.” A tourism programme that is nature based, ecologically sustainable, environmentally educative, locally beneficial and generates tourist satisfaction can be called ecotourism.

Eco-tourism seeks to achieve the following broad goals: (i) To improve the material and non-material well being of communities, (ii) To protect biological diversity and maintain ecological systems, and (iii) To ensure the cultural integrity and social cohesion of communities. The key characteristics of ecologically viable tourism are as follows: (i) It has social equity and community involvement, (ii) Tourism, which maintains the full range of recreational, educational and cultural opportunities within and across generations, (iii) It is based on activities or designs that reflect the character of a region, (iv) It is integrated into local, regional and national plans. The main features of ecotourism are as follows:

1. Ecotourism seeks to make the visitor aware of the protective, productive and regulatory functions of the forests.
2. Its principal aim is benefiting from nature, landscape or specific species (eg. watching lions, elephants, whales etc.)

3. It involves low visitor impact and should contribute to the well-being of local population.
4. It involves a purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing the economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people.
5. It is a very powerful means to preserve and develop the biodiversity.
6. Ecotourism involves sharing of the responsibility by both travelers and service providers.
7. It underlines the sustainability of tourism, ie. The needs of today's visitors should not be met at the expense of future generations.
8. It may involve travel to any area of nature for admiring and enjoying the biodiversity, natural landscapes and cultural and social heritage of the area.

### 3. Ecotourism: the Indian Scenario

The religious tradition of India is often quite conducive for preserving the nature, particularly in many rural and tribal settlements. As per Hindu religious scriptures, one is expected to follow certain rules ('Dharma', in religious language) regarding the sanctity to be maintained in temples and other places of worship, hills, sanctuaries, holy rivers and other water bodies, historical monuments etc. This is a feature that favours promotion of ecotourism India. Certain tourist locations in India have already attracted world attention because of their extreme uniqueness. Floating accommodation in Dal Lake (Kashmir) and the serene back waters (and also the boat race held therein) are just two classic examples. The above type of tourist locations bring people close to the nature.

#### 3.3.1. Facets of Indian Ecotourism: Quite Diverse

Ecotourism in India has got a number of facets. These include, inter alia, the following:

- **Rural Tourism:** Indian society is characterized by enormous diversity and distinction between urban lifestyle and rural lifestyle. There is tremendous demand for the above kind of tourism settings – both domestic and foreign. Typically, such a setting could be a recreated village environment on the outskirts of an urban area. Some variants of the above model are already existing naturally, like, Chokhi Dhani on the outskirts of Jaipur.
- **Religious Tourism:** As India is home to many religions of the world, its importance as a prominent destination for religious tourism need not be overemphasized. The most important religious tourism destinations include, Bodh Gaya (Buddhists), Hardwar / Rishikesh, Varanasi, Ujjain etc. (Hindus), Amrithsar (Sikhs), Ajmer (Muslims) etc.
- **Nature Tourism:** Large number of virgin territories available in India provides the country with good scope for nature tourism, particularly if adequate investment is made in special infrastructure, so that it appeals to the

- relevant special interest groups. The presence of the great Himalayas, deserts, extensive green plains, sea, lakes etc. is the advantage to India in this regard.
- **Ethnic Tourism:** This is another advantage of India to showcase the local culture, customs and heritage. For instance, Surajkund Crafts Mela held at Surajkund (Haryana).
  - **Health Tourism:** This type of tourism involves a wide range of services ranging from the 'The Art of Living' to the most authentic and original forms of yoga, meditation and Ayurveda. This should ideally be conducted in the ambience of the ocean or river and the backdrop of lush forests. Of late, many affluent and health conscious foreigners, mostly from the western countries, are growingly being attracted towards this type of tourism.
  - **Wild Tourism:** This involves, as the name suggests travel to destinations wherein wild animals, interiors of forests etc. is involved. For instance, Thekkadi (Kerala) offers opportunities to closely observe elephants and other wild animals in their natural surroundings by traveling through boats along the river flowing across such forests.
  - **Adventure Tourism:** Adventure tourism is often targeted at special interest groups and it involves travel to remotely inhabited places that are far removed from urban settings. Accordingly, it is often clubbed with nature tourism. Because of the very nature of adventure tourism, it is essential to develop adequate travel and transportation infrastructure to develop this kind of tourism.
  - **Medical Tourism:** This kind of tourism is fast picking up in India and its growth potential is huge, primarily because of the relatively low cost of medical facilities in India compared with other nations. India has got a potential to attract 1 million tourists per annum which in turn would translate into USD 5 Billion to the economy.

### 3.3.2. Ecotourism in India: Emerging Concerns, Impediments and Hurdles.

From the forgoing analysis it may be noted that ecotourism is an environment-friendly, sustainable and nature-based form of tourism that is also meant to benefit indigenous people and local communities. For a country like India with abundant natural resources to support tourism, the scope of ecotourism is tremendous. In spite of the favourable features as above, there are a number of disturbing facts as well. These adverse aspects ecotourism have been pointed out by many writers, like for instance, Deiffee, J (1981) [4]. As consideration of such negative factors are necessary for formulation of meaningful eco-friendly strategies for sustainable tourism development, the most important of such negative effects are given below.

- The influx of tourists will increase the need for additional facilities, like, roads, accommodation, power, water, waste disposal facilities etc. This in turn will adversely affect the natural systems and their eco-system. Besides, such evil effects as development of rural slums, noise and air pollution, disturbance of wild life may also follow. Often unhygienic environments arise due to such slums, stagnated water bodies, encroachments, stray cattle etc. which in turn may alienate the tourists.
- Ecotourism may be severely constrained by the physical and social carrying capacities of many areas. Havoc and destructions caused to the hill stations, vandalism of historical monuments, degradation of beeches etc. are just a few examples.
- Reaction of community to tourism in general and eco-tourism in particular may not be that encouraging. Often, ecotourism is associated with unfavourable changes in local prices and employment generation.
- Lack of sufficient information and tourist guides relating to various tourism destinations, accommodation facilities, modes of transport, sanitary, toilet and drainage facilities are some other factors that adversely affect tourism industry.
- The benefits to the local people are often not at all as expected. This is the case particularly in respect of developing countries. As such, local people have either resentment or hostility towards ecotourism and their participation is quite poor. In some cases they resist such initiatives as well.
- As against the expectations, very little of the tourism money directly benefits the local people. It has been observed that outsiders dominate ecotourism, resulting in outside flow of money. World Bank observes that 55% of the dollar spent on tourism in developing countries leaks back to the developed countries.
- Rather difficult and procedural immigration and entry / exit formalities that are existing in India vis-à-vis other nations, is another impediment. Going by international best practices, such formalities have to be fine-tuned made easier.
- Though, of late, there are some improvements, generally the governmental support towards tourism development has been quite poor. Similarly, the governmental resources for tourism development are limited. This, in turn, underlines the need for ensuring active private sector participation. Besides, the high rate of taxation existing in India on tourism activities is another impediment which needs to be standardized.

#### **4. Strategies for Eco-Tourism Development in India: an International Perspective**

##### **1. Private Sector Participation through PPP (Public-Private Partnership) Model:**

Participation of private sector appears to be essential in the Indian scenario looking into the resource constraints of the Government. The Government may play the roles of both an enabler and regulator. Firstly, as an enabler / facilitator – who provides the licenses to private agencies who fulfill the norms laid by the government and also agrees to comply with pre-fixed norms of service quality, use of natural resources, pollution control norms etc. Secondly, as a regulator the government ensures strict adherence to the pollution control, use of resources, service quality etc. by the private agencies and takes remedial / corrective action in case of defaults.

### **2. Better Infrastructure and Capacity Building amongst the Local Community.**

Better infrastructure facilities, like, road lines, air ports, accommodation facilities, drainage and sanitation facilities etc. need to be created with immediately for faster tourism development. India has to go a long way in this regard. Apart from infrastructure creation as above, a holistic and integrated approach would call for considerable amount of capacity building amongst the local community to manage and operate the tourism sector.

### **3. Easier Entry/Immigration Facilities are Vital.**

The norms prevailing in India being rather procedural, the same need to be overhauled based on international best practices. That is to say, either a (i) Visa-Free situation, or (ii) Visa-on-Arrival situation need to be ensured, in order to attract more foreign tourism.

### **4. Enhanced Level of Services and Utilities to the Tourists.**

Better services need to be provided to the international tourists, which include inter alia, readily accessible information kiosks, information guides / bulletins, clean public utilities (sanitation, drainage etc.), hassle-free arrivals, improved hygienic conditions in tourism sites and surroundings, clean air ports and railway stations and so on.

### **5. Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Status and Tax Benefits for Tourism Projects.**

In view of the immense potential of tourism for economic development of an emerging economy like India, conferment of SEZ status to tourism industry will prompt many investors to invest in tourism projects. Here, it must be ensured that only ecotourism projects should be encouraged. Or, in other words, strict conditions for ensuring the protection of environment should be inbuilt. Likewise, it appears meaningful that income tax benefits like tax holidays be extended to tourism projects

in notified areas which conform with stipulated conditions. This in turn would ensure faster and balanced economic development as per the Governmental priorities and that too with less strain on the natural resources.

#### **6. ICT Initiatives in Tourism for Enhanced Productivity and Service Quality.**

As in any other field, in tourism also ICT implementation can dramatically improve operational efficiency as well as improve the quality of service. Reliable information regarding prominent tourism locations, connectivity through rail, road and airlines be provided at various prime tourist locations for the benefit of the tourists. This in turn would reduce the hardships of the tourists and hence improve the service quality. Many research studies have revealed that the expectation of service quality by foreign tourists are often higher than whatever the providers can offer, particularly in respect of developing nations which are lacking adequate infrastructure.

#### **7. Facilities for Training Manpower and Capacity Building for Providers**

Capacity building for service providers (CBSP) is of utmost importance for long-term sustainability and enhanced competitiveness of tourism services. Similarly, there should be permanent mechanism for training and developing manpower of international quality. This in turn necessitates establishment of specialized training institutes in tourism, on the pattern of IIMs, IITs, etc.

#### **8. Complete Co-operation and Support from Local Populace.**

Last, but the not the least, full co-operation and support from the local population need to be ensured for any ecotourism initiative. For this their representation in all policy making forums is absolutely essential. Needless to mention tourism policies sans local support would not be sustainable in the long run. Moreover resentment or hostility of the localities may alienate the tourists also.

#### **5. Tourism in Kerala: Need for Focusing on Health Tourism and Medical Tourism.**

As already pointed out, in the special situation of Kerala apart from following all the ecotourism strategies as noted above, there is the special significance for health tourism and medical tourism. The excellent brand equity for Ayurveda treatment that Kerala possess ensures excellent prospects for Ayurvedic health tourism. Similarly, the state has got globally competitive medical facilities in respect of modern medicine also. For cardiac surgery, dental surgery, heart transplantation etc. the charges in Kerala have been observed to be quite low, often in the range of one-fifth to one-tenth

of the international tariffs, while the services available are internationally competitive.

### **Concluding Observations**

Of late, there has been increased thrust on tourism development in India. While tourism has got excellent prospects for promotion of rapid economic development particularly in respect of the developing nations, as is evident from the experiences of many a developing nation, it may be stated that the sustainability aspect of tourism has not often been given adequate consideration in designing tourism policies of government. This in turn results in excessive burden the nature beyond its carrying capacity adversely affecting its ecological balance. Besides, often there are instances wherein the interests of tourists alone are protected in a bid to garner maximum tourism earnings, unmindful of the consequences of the same on the local people. All these point to the growing relevance of the need for adoption of ecotourism in its true letter and spirit, rather than simply from the point of view of compliance with regulatory stipulations or norms. This in turn necessitates a concerted action from the part of all concerned, for the cause of sustainable tourism development. Above all, in view of the resource constraints of the government in respect of developing countries like in India private sector participation seems imminent, thus underlining the need for a PPP approach towards a holistic, integrated and sustainable tourism development.

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