

Economic Development through Responsible Tourism Initiatives at Kumarakom Backwater Destination

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ABSTRACT

Responsible Tourism has been emerged as one of the main form of tourism which focuses on the responsibility aspects of tourism. It highlights the importance of being responsible towards the people and place at each tourism destinations by all stakeholders of tourism. It's a mission to frame a practicing model which guarantees better places for people to visit and to live in. While focusing on this mission of Responsible tourism it makes out three kinds of responsibilities like social, economical and environmental responsibilities. Responsible tourism is thus tourism that can be consumed in a more responsible way. Tourism that which minimizes negative social, economic and environmental impacts generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities can be called as Responsible Tourism. Pointing out the benefits the study highlights the role of Responsible tourism in generating economic development to the local community, business organizations and tourists. Being declared Kumarakom as a model of responsible tourism by the RT Mission, the study has been conducted in Kumarakom. The study was carried out in Kumarakom panchayath collecting data from 150 respondents, 50 each from business organizations, tourists and local people. using a structured questionnaire who were selected using convenience sampling method. Review of available literature has highlighted a 12% growth in income generation after the implementation of Responsible Tourism in the destination under study. The constituents of economic development like income generation, employment generation, standard of living, and repaying capacity were analysed. It is find out that the responsible tourism initiatives in Kumarakom contributed positively to the economic development of all these three categories under study. The support gained from samrudhi groups and kudumbasree units ensured better local community participation and reduced leakages of benefits from the initiative and contributed to the overall economic development to various stake holders.

Key Words: Business organizations, Economic Development, local people, Responsible Tourism, tourists

1. INTRODUCTION

Responsible tourism can be explained as a “form of tourism which respects the host's natural built, cultural environments and the interest of all parties concerned”. Responsible tourism highlights the need for being responsible by all stakeholders of tourism for achieving sustainability in all grounds. It deals with three line approach of responsibility: social economical and environmental responsibility. It is to be pointed out that any of

these could not be achieved by holding other two. Three of these responsibilities interrelates each other. It's clear from available literature that for all sorts of development and sustainability the advancement in economic ground is a must. The definition for responsible tourism used by the South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) considers responsible tourism as 'tourism that promotes responsibility to the environment through its sustainable use, responsibility to involve local communities in the tourism industry; responsibility for the safety and security of visitors and responsible government, employees, employers, unions and local communities. There is lots of responsible tourism initiatives have been implemented by Responsible Tourism Mission in the RT Destinations. With the support of local people and community participation through kudumbashree units and collaboration with business units and community groups responsible tourism initiatives are flowering in destinations. Kumarakom has declared as a model for Responsible tourism for its successful implementation of these initiatives. This study examines the impact of Responsible Tourism Initiatives in Economic development of backwater tourism in Kerala. However, the study itself is interesting for the practice of Responsible Tourism, and presents an opportunity to critically evaluate the conceptual and practical contribution of the concept of 'Responsible Tourism'.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The concept of Responsible tourism show successful developments in Social, Environmental and Economical sphere of tourism in Kerala. The four spots, Kumarakom, Wayanad, Kovalam and Thekkady were emerged as strong destinations of Responsible Tourism. Kumarakom becomes a model for economic responsibility activities with support from Kudumbasree groups, Local Self Government, Farmers and Industry partners. There are lot of Responsible Tourism initiatives put forward by the local as well as the state and central authorities. All these are initiated for the purpose of overall development of the nation. Socio cultural and environmental sustainability can be achieved through the prime economic development. The impact of responsible tourism initiatives on the economic side is assessed here in this study. Hence the study is entitled as "Economic Development through responsible tourism initiatives in Kumarakom Backwater destination."

3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study shows the role of Responsible Tourism initiatives in contributing to the economic Development of backwater destinations in Kerala. It covers the Economic development assessment from three angles: Business people, Local People and Tourists. Kumarakom is being chosen as it is declared as a model for responsible tourism in Kerala

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the role of Responsible Tourism initiatives in the economic development of business organizations, local people and tourists in Kumarakom backwater destination.
- To assess the awareness of Local people, Business organizations and Tourists at Kumarakom about the concept of Responsible tourism.

5. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study is an empirical research based on the assessment of the role of Responsible tourism initiatives in the economic development of Kumarakom Backwater destination. The convenience sampling method was used for the selection of sample units based on the relative ease of access. The sample size was 150 respondents. The sample of 150 was collected by dividing the total respondents into three groups namely business organisations, local public and the tourists. From each group a sample of 50 were collected. Interview schedules were administered to collect data from the respondents. After collection of data; an analysis of the data and interpretation of the result were made with reference to the objectives of the study. Statistical tools like Mean, Standard deviation, Percentages, Combined Mean Score were used for analyzing the collected data and the analysis is done with the help of SPSS software.

6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The study is intended to assess the impact of Responsible Tourism initiatives in the Economic, Environmental and Socio-Cultural development of Kumarakom Backwater destination. Here firstly the environmental aspect of responsible tourism is considered. For making a realistic output regarding the role of responsible tourism in sustainable tourism development in Kumarakom backwater destination, the study is conducted from three view perspectives. The respondents are divided into categories namely Business Organisations, Local Public and the tourists. Samples are collected from each group of respondents and careful analysis is made to access the role of responsible tourism in the environmental development of Kumarakom backwater destination.

6.1 Economical Aspect of Responsible Tourism

Economical development through responsible tourism were analysed under three perspective” business organizations, local people and tourists.

6.1.1 Business Organisation’s perspective

Table shows how the business organizations respond to the various economical factors that contribute to the sustainable tourism development in Kumarakom. For the purpose of the study, the several economic factors are identified and the respondents are asked to comment of each factor. Certain statements regarding the economic aspect of responsible tourism are stated in the interview schedule and the respondents are asked to scale their response. The scale used is, Strongly Agree (2), Agree (1), No opinion (0), Disagree (-1), and Strongly Disagree (-2)

Table1
Economic Development: Organisation’s Perspective

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Shortage	0.64	0.749
Price	-1.44	0.501
Infrastructure	1.86	0.351

Subsidies	1.04	0.198
Economic Status	1.38	0.490
Income Level	1.52	0.505
Employment	1.48	0.505
Local Products	1.68	0.471
Investment	1.18	0.629
Contribution	1.48	0.505
Valid N (list wise) 50		

Source: Primary Data

6.1.2 Local Public Perspective

In the second phase of analysis, the opinion of local public are carefully analysed As the result of responsible tourism implementation, the most benefited group is the local residents. Their response about the various aspects of responsible tourism is depicted in the following pages.

As per the response obtained from the local respondents, it is seen that only a minimum number of economic factors are negatively affecting them. The most important problem faced by them is the increase in the prices of goods and services. Every day the prices of goods and services are increasing as in other parts of our economy. Especially the price of food materials are increasing day by day.

Table 2

Economic Development: local people's Perspective

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Employment	1.46	0.503
Village Development	1.46	0.503
Economic Disparities	1.34	0.479
Savings Investments	1.36	0.485
Quality Life	1.34	0.479
Standardisation	1.52	0.505
Infrastructure	1.54	0.503
New Business	1.38	0.490
Better Standard	1.50	0.505
Living Standard	1.44	0.501
Land Value	1.78	0.418
Price	-1.52	0.505
Living Cost	-1.40	0.495

Unemployment	-0.06	1.391
Natural Resources	1.56	0.501
Shortage	1.44	0.501
Local Products	1.76	0.431
Working Conditions	1.54	0.503
Image	1.56	0.501
Local Employment	1.64	0.485
Local Recognition	1.50	0.505
Valid N (list wise) 50		

Source: Primary Data

6.1.3 Tourists Perspective

In the third phase of analysis, the opinions of both local and foreign tourists are carefully depicted with the help of various tables and figures. Since the responsible tourism initiatives and projects are also benefited to the tourists that are arriving at the kumarakom backwater destination, their opinion is also sought with regards to the role of responsible tourism in sustainable tourism development of Kumarakom.

According to table the respondents feel that the price of goods and services are increasing day by day. It is reducing the purchasing power of the tourists who are visiting Kumarakom backwater destination. There is no shortage of goods and services and better quality products are locally available. The respondents feel that better standard of services are provided by shops, restaurants and other commercial centers as the result of responsible tourism implementation. The infrastructure developments like roads, bridges, communication facilities etc are resulted from the development of tourism in Kumarakom.

Table3
Economic Development: Tourist's Perspective

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Shortage	1.06	1.018
Price	-1.16	0.766
Standard	1.48	0.505
Infrastructure	1.62	0.490
Supply	0.40	1.309
Quality	1.46	0.503
Employment	1.52	0.505
Local Products	1.56	0.501
Hospitality	1.46	0.503

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Local Products	1.56	0.501
Hospitality	1.46	0.503
Valid N (list wise) 50		

Source: Primary Data

They feel that there is consistency in supply of local products and it will increase the demand for local products in the market. Responsible Tourism creates lot of new employment opportunities for the local people. High quality hospitality management are maintained by the resorts, hotels and other residential centers in Kumarakom because of responsible tourism development.

6.1.4 Summary of responses

Table shows a summary of response given by the three groups of respondents. One of the most important objectives of the study was to find out the awareness level of different classes of people in kumarakom about responsible tourism. From the samples collected from 150 respondents from three different groups namely Business Organisations, Local Public and The tourists, it is clear that the entire respondents are aware about the concept of responsible tourism and its implementation. None of the respondents are unaware about responsible tourism and its implementation in kumarakom backwater destination. This is a great indication of the success of responsible tourism practices in kumarakom. As the people are very much aware about the concept of responsible tourism and its implementation, it is very easy for the tourism authorities to initiate new programs and projects.

Table 4
Summary of Response

Sl. No.	Attributes	Business Organisations		Local Public		Tourists	
		N	Percentage (%)	N	Percentage (%)	N	Percentage (%)
1	Awareness						
	Yes	50	100.00	50	100.00	50	100.00
	No	0	00.00	0	00.00	0	00.00

	Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	50	100.00
2	Benefit						
	Yes	50	100.00	50	100.00	50	100.00
	No	0	00.00	0	00.00	0	00.00
	Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	50	100.00
3	Success						
	Yes	34	68.00	38	76.00	43	86.00
	No	16	32.00	12	24.00	7	14.00
	Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	50	100.00
4	Participation						
	Yes	42	84.00	40	80.00	33	66.00
	No	8	16.00	10	20.00	17	34.00
	Total	50	100.00	50	100.00	50	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Table 5
Combined Mean Score

Attributes	Business Organisations (C.M.S)	Local Public (C.M.S)	Tourists (C.M.S)
Economic Development	1.0820	1.1495	1.0444

Source: Primary Data

Table 5 shows the nutshell of this study. The C.M.S value, which is the Combined Mean Score value, is calculated as follows: Firstly the total of mean score of all individual factors listed under the above three heads are calculated. Secondly, the number of individual factors in each head divides the total mean score. Economic aspect of responsible tourism is in the right track and the only thing we have to do is to move within the track and make the maximum advantage. One important factor, which shows a negative response from the respondents, is the rise in the prices of goods and services. So it is necessary to take necessary steps to control the price level changes and make it more uniform and standardized.

7. MAJOR FINDINGS

As per the data collected and analysed the findings of the study are as follows:

- ❖ The business organisations, Local public and the Tourists in Kumarakom back water destination are highly aware about the concept of responsible tourism.
- ❖ The respondents are of the opinion that there are a number of responsible tourism initiatives in Kumarakom backwater destination.
- ❖ As per the data collected from 150 respondents from different groups, all of them are of the opinion that they are getting some advantage or benefit from the practice of responsible tourism in Kumarakom.

- ❖ All the respondents are having the opinion that the implementation of responsible tourism has changed their life style.
- ❖ About 70 – 90 percentage of the respondents are of the opinion that the tourism authorities are successful in implementing responsible tourism practices in Kumarakom.
- ❖ More than 80 percent of the Business Organisations and Local Public are participating in various responsible tourism initiatives. However, the participation of tourists is less and it comes only to 66 percent.
- ❖ More than 60 percent of the tourists are satisfied with the various responsible tourism initiatives implemented in Kumarakom.
- ❖ Responsible Tourism in Kumarakom is providing more employment opportunities to local people.
- ❖ Local laborers are given proper recognition and opportunities for employment as the result of responsible tourism.
- ❖ The business organizations are getting large amount of subsidies and incentives from government or other associations as you are operating in the tourism industry.

8. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that responsible tourism in Kumarakom backwater destination leads to a balanced development of the locality. The various responsible tourism initiatives implemented by the authorities helps to make a positive impact in the various dimensions of Kumarakom. It leads to economic advancements like infrastructure developments, increased standard of living, lot of new employment opportunities, new business investments, market for local produce, recognition for local laborers etc. The only one thing, which needs some urgent consideration, is the environmental aspect as the environmental advancement is not up to the mark. Hence, we can say that if some simple measures are taken for the environmental protection and the waste management and continue the other present situations; we can make Kumarakom as a dreamland of tourism. We can make Kerala as the paradise in the world

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