

AN EVALUATION OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM INITIATIVES IN KUMARAKOM

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Abstract

Responsible Tourism conceived with three kinds of responsibilities which are termed as the 'triple bottom-line' - economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility. Responsible Tourism encompasses all forms of tourism and seeks to minimize negative economic, environment and social impacts. It generates greater economic benefits to local people and enhances the well-being of local communities. The concept of responsible tourism show successful developments in social, economic and environmental sphere of tourism in Kerala. Kumarakom was honored by Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India for the best Responsible Tourism initiative in Kerala and it also bagged the national award for rural tourism. Kumarakom became a model for other destinations with their initiatives with strong support from local self-government, kudumbasree groups, farmers and industry partners. The study attempts to evaluate the various initiatives that stimulated the growth of responsible tourism in Kumarakom and the level of satisfaction among the local people as regards various responsible tourism initiatives.

Key Words: Responsible Tourism, Socio Economic Factors.

Introduction

Responsible Tourism conceived with three kinds of responsibilities which are termed as the 'triple bottom-line' - economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility. Responsible Tourism encompasses all forms of tourism and seeks to minimize negative economic, environment and social impacts. It generates greater economic benefits to local people and enhances the well-being of local communities. The concept of responsible tourism show successful developments in social, economic and environmental sphere of tourism in Kerala. Kumarakom was honored by Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India for the best Responsible Tourism initiative in Kerala and it also bagged the national award for rural tourism. Kumarakom became a model for other destinations with their initiatives with strong support from local self-government, kudumbasree groups, farmers and industry partners. The study attempts to evaluate the various initiatives that stimulated the growth of responsible tourism in Kumarakom and the level of satisfaction among the local people as regards various responsible tourism initiatives.

Research Gap and Objectives

Increasing numbers of consumers are looking at the reputation and responsibility of the companies they buy from; they want to have “guilt free” holidays and introducing check lists which rate the sustainability of their practice (Vijayakumar & Rupesh, 2011). Within the notion of betterment resides the acknowledgement that conflicting interests need to be balanced. However, the objective is to create better places for people to live in and to visit. Responsible Tourism is an aspiration that can be realized in different ways in different originating markets and in the diverse destinations of the world (Goodwin, 2002). The responsible tourism initiative was first implemented at four destinations, including Kovalam, Kumarakom, Thekkady and Wayanad. Among these destinations Kumarakom was honored by Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India for the best Responsible Tourism initiative in Kerala and it also bagged the national award for rural tourism. There are lot of responsible tourism activities put forwarded by local as well as state and central government for its development. Though there are many studies in the tourism sector studies conducted in the responsible tourism are rarely found in the literature. The present study is an attempt to bridge the void in the literature.

The study was conducted with following objectives:

1. To evaluate various responsible tourism initiatives in Kumarakom.
2. To measure the level of satisfaction among respondents on various responsible tourism initiatives in kumarakom.
3. To identify dominant factors that stimulated the growth of responsible tourism in Kumarakom.

Hypotheses used in the study

1. The opinion of the respondents about various responsible tourism initiatives is equal to average.
2. The respondent possesses moderate level of satisfaction about various responsible tourism initiatives in kumarakom.
3. There is no significant difference between mean ranks towards the factors that stimulate growth of responsible tourism in kumarakom.

Materials and Methodology

The study was based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected from 60 respondents of Kumarakom panchayat by applying convenience sampling method. The data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Responses on the various measures used in the study were obtained on a five point scale as very good (5), good (4), average (3), poor (2) and very poor (1). The collected data was analysed using statistical tools like arithmetic mean, one sample t-test one way analysis of variance, independent samples t-test and Friedmans test are used for analyzing the data.

In order to ensure the content validity, the variables identified were anchored from previous studies in this area Eg: (Vijayakumar & Rupesh, 2011), the initiatives are grouped under twelve different heads. Each of these heads comprises around one to seven sub variables totalling thirty eight sub- variables under consideration.

To identify the dominant factors stimulating the growth of responsible tourism in Kumarakom ten variables were identified. They are:

Initiatives	Item Acronym
1. Fallow land cultivation and enhanced production	In 1
2. Fish farm and lotus cultivation	In 2
3. Establishing linkages with hotel industry and Demand for local resources	In 3
4. Development of souvenir industry	In 4
5. Community based tourism products	In 5
6. Promotion of art forms and culture	In 6
7. Promotion of cultural tourism and ethnic cuisine	In 7
8. Social awareness and tourism management	In 8
9. Protection of environment	In 9
10. Energy saving measures	In 10
11. Comprehensive resource mapping	In 11
12. Destination labour directory	In 12
Stimulating Factors	
1. Capacity building and skill development	SF 1
2. Alleviation of poverty and employment opportunities	SF 2
3. Marketing of local resources and cost reduction benefits	SF 3
4. Access to disadvantaged societies	SF 4
5. Improvements in health and education	SF 5
6. Reducing tourism carbon foot print and climatic changes	SF 6
7. Support to tourism business	SF 7
8. Reduction of all forms of pollution and waste management	SF 8
9. Involvement of local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances	SF 9
10. Conservation of social diversity, cultural diversity and natural resources	SF 10

Result and Discussions

The study found that the respondent's opinion about establishing linkages with hotel industry and demand for local produce, comprehensive resource mapping and destination labour directory is good. But their opinion is poor as regards to fallow land cultivation and enhanced production, fish farms and lotus cultivation, development of souvenir industry, promotion of art forms and culture, promotion of culture and ethnic cuisine, social awareness and tourism management, protection of environment and energy saving measure. The study also found that respondents are satisfied with the responsible tourism initiatives of government. . Based on the mean rank, alleviation of poverty and employment opportunities is the most dominant factor stimulating growth of responsible tourism in Kumarakom followed by capacity building and skill development and support to tourism business.

Based on the mean score it can be concluded that the respondent's opinion about three variables is good since its mean value is above the second quartile. These three variables are (i) establishing linkages with hotel industry and demand for local produce, (ii) comprehensive resource mapping and (iii) destination labour directory. But their opinion is poor as regards seven variables as these variables have a mean value less than the second quartile. These seven variables are fallow land cultivation and enhanced production, fish farms and lotus cultivation, development of souvenir industry, promotion of art forms and culture, promotion of culture and

ethnic cuisine, social awareness and tourism management, protection of environment and energy saving measure.

Based on the mean rank, alleviation of poverty and employment opportunities is the most dominant factor stimulating growth of responsible tourism in Kumarakom followed by capacity building and skill development and support to tourism business.

Major Findings

- General evaluation of responsible tourism initiative in Kumarakom shows that initiatives relating to establishing linkages with hotel industry and demand for local produce, comprehensive resource mapping and destination labour directory are good.
- Based on the age wise analysis it is found that respondents do not differ significantly as regards their opinion about various responsible tourism initiatives in Kumarakom except in case of fallow land cultivation and enhanced production and establishing linkages with hotel industry.
- The respondents do not differ significantly on gender wise regarding their opinion about various responsible tourism initiatives in Kumarakom except in case of fallow land cultivation.
- It is clear from the analysis that respondents differ occupation wise regarding their opinion about various responsible tourism initiatives in Kumarakom; It can be interpreted that opinion of respondents in government sector significantly differ with opinion on responsible tourism initiatives.
- The opinion of respondents differ significantly income wise regarding their opinion about various responsible tourism initiatives in Kumarakom; But in the case of fallow land cultivation and enhanced production, Fish farms and lotus cultivation, Community based tourism products and Establishing linkages with hotel industry and demand for local procedure directly have opposite results.

Theoretical Contribution of the Study

This study is one of the first studies in Kerala which attempts to evaluate various responsible tourism initiatives in Kumarakom. The Kumarakom Panchayath has efficiently mobilized local community and ensured local ownership through continuous programs that guarantee positive and meaningful involvement of the local community, through which it has brought about local economic empowerment especially to the women community. Responsible tourism initiatives measures were identified and tested in the study which contributes to the literature.

Practical Contribution of the Study

- The respondents differ significantly age wise as regards their opinion about fallow land cultivation and enhanced production and establishing linkages with hotel industry. The reasons for the same are to be identified and concrete measures are to be taken to overcome the defects if any regarding these initiatives
- The respondents differ significantly gender-wise as regards their opinion about fallow land cultivation. The reasons for the same are to be also identified and some concrete measures to be taken in this regard to improve the effect of such initiative.
- The respondents in government employment have got better opinion about the responsible tourism initiatives. Adequate measures are to be also taken to drag the attention of the other local people in this regard and the local panchayat and other government agencies should take appropriate measures to improve the quality of each measure so that we can sustain the development of the economic, social and environmental aspect of this tourist destination.

Conclusion

Five years of experience of implementing Responsible Tourism in Kerala proves the capability of Local Self Government to build industry-community trust and the leadership to coordinate activities in triple bottom line areas. The Kumarakom Panchayath has efficiently mobilized local community and ensured local ownership through continuous programs that guarantee positive and meaningful involvement of the local community, through which it has brought about local economic empowerment especially to the women community. Despite the first ever coordinated initiative in India to implement Responsible Tourism; it has produced significant outputs at Kumarakom in terms of enhanced cultivation and community participation. It is vital to remember that, these achievements are noteworthy when leading tourism destinations fail to balance tourism development and retain their unique tradition livelihoods, culture and heritage. But the long term commitment of Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala, and its strenuous efforts to coordinate different stake holders invariably proves that Responsible Tourism model at Kumarakom could be replicated in all growing tourism destinations to ensure sustainable of tourism development.