



ECO TOURISM INITIATIVES IN KERALA- A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THEKKADY

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Abstract

Eco tourism is a travel experience, first and foremost that helps travellers come to better understanding of unique natural and cultural environments around the world. It was first introduced in the 1980's and was developed as a creative strategy for conservation. Planners and developers are quickly finding that ecotourism can provide an economic rationale for natural resource conservation and wildlife protection policies. But if it is not properly planned it can result in the destruction of the natural environment. So this study makes an attempt to understand the importance of ecotourism development for the sustainable tourism development and also tries to understand the steps taken by Kerala government at Thekkady for the development of Ecotourism. The study used random sampling methodology and primary data was collected from 100 respondents from Thekkady. The study found that many nature friendly activities are practiced in Thekkady with the active participation of the resident community at the destination. The study detail explains the various activities promoted in Thekkady. The study found that the residents at the destination provides high level of support for the tourism activities.

Key words: *Tourism development, sustainable tourism development, Eco tourism*

Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the global economy and developing countries are attempting to cash in on this expanding industry in an attempt to boost foreign investment and financial reserves. But the uncontrolled growth of this industry can result in serious environmental and social problems. A growth in tourism exerts a lot of pressure on the environment and the local population. These include the destruction of the traditional landscape, congestion of the transport system, various forms of pollution, impacts on natural resources, impacts on consumption patterns, impacts on social systems etc. Thus the need for sustainable planning and management is imperative for the industry to survive as a whole. The sustainable development approach to tourism is acutely important because most tourism development depends on attractions and activities related to the natural environment, historic heritage and cultural patterns of areas. Ecotourism is a new concept in the sustainable tourism development. Ecotourism is 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 economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people. This study makes an attempt to understand the importance of ecotourism development for the sustainable tourism development and the study also tries to understand the steps taken by Kerala government at Thekkady for the development of Ecotourism.

Research questions

1. What is the importance of Ecotourism for the sustainable tourism development?
2. What are the initiatives taken by Government for the development of ecotourism in Kerala?

Objectives of the study

1. To understand the importance of ecotourism for the sustainable tourism development.
2. To understand the steps taken by Kerala government for the development of ecotourism in Kerala.
3. To understand the various activities promoted at Thekkady for the development of Ecotourism.
4. To understand the resident community support for the ecotourism at Thekkady.

Methodology

The study location was Thekkady in Idukki district. Primary data for the study was collected using random sampling method and a total of 100 samples were drawn from the resident community of Thekkady. The secondary data for the study was collected from major tourism journals and important tourism websites. The questionnaire contained two sections. Section one included questions regarding the demographic details of the residents and section two included questions to assess the community support. All the items in the questionnaire (section two) were measured on a five point Likert scale. The scale used contained five points where 1 represented 'strongly disagree' and 5 'strongly agree'. The analysis was done using SPSS (ver21).