

A Study on Factors Influencing the Selection of Tourist Destination by Tourists in Kerala

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Abstract: *One of the earliest human activities is travel and tourism. Man used to roam in prehistoric times in quest of food and shelter. Travel, however, had evolved into a leisure activity that was mostly done to escape a monotonous routine as time went on. God's Own Country of Kerala is a much sought-after tourist destination of India. Kerala is not only known for its hill stations, backwaters and the scenic beauty but also for its beaches. After Goa, Kerala is said to have most of the beaches in India hence making it a beach destination. From the south of Kerala, at Thiruvananthapuram to the north at Kannur, Kerala has got umpteen numbers of beaches gracing its landscape.*

Keywords: Kerala Tourist.

I. INTRODUCTION

Travel and tourism are one of the oldest activities known to human kind. During the pre-historic times, man used to travel in search of food and shelter. However, with the passage of time, travel had become a leisure activity largely undertaken to break away from mundane routine. The concept of paid holidays during the time of industrial revolution played a crucial role in popularising leisure tourism and weekend getaways leading to development of mass tourism destinations. However, with time, the concept of mass tourism has had a damaging effect to the destination owing to factors like pollution, over-crowding etc. which paved way for emergence of alternate forms of tourism like sustainable tourism, green tourism, heritage tourism, eco-tourism, which not only offer tourism opportunities but also cause less (or almost negligible) damage to the destination. This provides for a win-win situation for all tourism stakeholders viz. tourists, government, local community, businesses, etc. Nevertheless, development of any industry or activity requires a streamlined and systematic approach. Thus, the above factors led to development of theory of tourism system, to go into the depth of this phenomenon, specifically, considering factors like drawing power or pull force offered by a destination, push factors or what motivates people to undertake travel and finally what tourists do in the intermediate time frame. Tourism activity starts with the attractions. At a place or destination there has to be some attraction only then people or tourists will visit that area. Attractions are believed to be the greatest influencers of all the components. They can make or break a destination. Attractions are of two types: Natural Attractions like lakes, rivers, mountains, etc. and Man-made attractions like monuments, museums, shopping areas, etc. The ultimate motive of any tourist is to experience the attraction, though accessibility and accommodation also partake in this phenomenon. But it can be said that without attraction there shall be no tourism, however transport, hotels, activities and amenities can also act as attraction. Attractions are at the first step of tourism supply chain. Attractions are one of the most important component and element that attract people to travel from one place to another. Attractions consist of archaeological sites, cultural sites, historical buildings and monuments or scenery like beach, flora and fauna, mountains, resorts, wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and zoological parks.

1.1 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

It is a boom time for Kerala tourism. Kerala today is considered as the top ten tourist destination in the world. Its unique culture and traditions, coupled with its varied demography, have made Kerala one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Several international agencies ranging from UNESCO to National Geographic have recognized the state's tourism potential. Backwaters, Hill stations, Wildlife, Historical Monuments, Events, Festivals,

Medical Tourism, Beaches, Culture these are the major attractions of tourist destination of tourists in Kerala. Foreign Tourist arrival to Kerala during the year 2021 is 60,487. It shows a decrease of 82.25 % over the previous year's figure of 3,40,755. Domestic Tourist arrival to Kerala during the year 2021 is 75,37,617. It shows an increase of 51.09 % over the previous year's figure 49,88,972. Tourists like to choose destinations that are easily accessible and which don't require days of travelling. The common characteristics of tourist destinations are attraction, comfort, local events and business, accessibility, a specific area with certain tourism resources, facilities, and transportation conditions, which can attract a certain number of tourists to carry out tourism activities in Kerala. Destination choices are usually represented with some level of aggregation of the alternatives. The capability of incorporating a wide variety of attributes of the traveler like age, income, gender, occupation etc. into the utility function. These attributes generally do not enter the utility function directly, as the traveler attributes do not vary based upon the choice of any particular destination in Kerala.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

- To study the awareness of tour destinations in Kerala
- To study the factors influencing to choose tour destination in Kerala
- To study the level of satisfaction of tourists towards services provided by tour operators in Kerala

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology is used to understand the factors that influencing the selection of tourist destination by tourists in Kerala. Different types of tourists have been included in the sample of primary and secondary data collection, which is stated in the sample profile, to make the sample representative.

A. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design used in this study was descriptive in nature. Probabilistic sampling design has been used to conduct the research. Sampling unit is the basic unit containing the elements of a target population of tourists in Kerala.

B. SAMPLE SIZE

In this research by using questionnaire, receive 120 responds from the tourists of different tourist destinations in Kerala.

C. COLLECTION OF DATA

The data was collected from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary Data:

The primary data of the research is collected through convenience sampling method of well-structured questionnaire. Simple random sampling was adopted to get the questionnaires filled. The primary data are collected from the tourist destinations in Kerala like Kochi, Munnar, Athirappilly, Wayanad, Varkala, Vagamon, Palakkad, Alappuzha, Kozhikode etc.

Secondary Data:

Secondary data was gathered from the literature previously written through Internet, Journals, Research Papers, Government Reports, News Articles etc.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Tourism is one of the few industries where Kerala has clear competitive advantages. The present study aims to explore tourism in Kerala. More specifically, it aims to assess the factors that influencing the selection of tourist destination by tourists in Kerala. Kerala has natural advantages in this industry, in terms of beautiful hills and valleys, lakes, waterfalls, backwaters, lagoons, and beaches. The state is also well-known for its manmade natural advantages, such as national parks and wild life sanctuaries, Kerala's traditional dance forms, cultural festivals, temples, and traditional medicine are major tourist attractions. This is the research that helps to the clear understanding about unique factors that influence the destination choice of both Indian and Foreign tourists in different tourist destinations in Kerala.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Syamala, 2002) believes that ecotourism has become a need for everyone who wants to refresh from the routine fast city life. Ecotourism provides many interesting tours to the heart of Mother Nature. Ecotourism in India is about taking a break from the busy life and leading a slow-paced life in the midst of greenery. In her words, instead of waking up with the alarm we can wake up with the chirping of birds, we can have healthy and timely food rather than having fast food-fried stuffs. India offers many ecotourism spots, which are safe.

(Joseph, 2020) assessed the pilgrim satisfaction with special reference to Sabarimala destination in Kerala state. The study identified 526 devotees and identified the factors for pilgrim satisfaction such as food and accommodation, safety and security, health and sanitation, ecology and environment, and communication and transportation with the help of factor analysis and two-step cluster analysis. The study concluded that devotees are mostly influenced by spiritual aspects.

(kakkar & Sapna, 2012) this study generally focus on impact of tourism on Indian economy and they mainly focus on how India is emerging as a global tourist centre because of innovation and creating value for tourist. The contribution of travel and tourism to country's GDP will grow after passing of time as expected to grow from 4.5% in 2011 to 4.9% in 2021. Simultaneously the contribution of travel and tourism towards employment will grow from 7.5% in 2011 to 8.17% by 2021

(Anique & Hafiz Hanafiah, 2021) examined the tour guide performance, tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions of tourist with special reference to Kuala Lumpur City Centre. The study revealed that tour guide and tourist satisfaction have a positive impact on their behavioural intention of the tourist.

(Jiyaing & Sanjay, 2011) study specially focus on the sustainable tourism research papers published in journal of Sustainable tourism from 1993 to 2007. Their research area was volume/ number/ year, study area, forms of tourism, subject themes, future researchers, concept testing, methodology and trends. They derive sustainable tourism journal has made major contribution towards articulation, improvement and synthesis of sustainable tourism concept and its various fields. Due to global change this journal will help creating a good future.

(Dhanasekaran, 2005) protection, development and improvement of the various constituents of the environment are among the basic conditions for the harmonious development of tourism". Similarly, intelligent tourism management can contribute in large measure to the protection and development of the physical environment and cultural heritage of mankind as well as the improvement of the quality of human life. It is therefore advisable that 39 tourism development and sound environmental management should be integral concerns of national development policies.

(Suvidha & Nidhi, 2014) focus on the influence of tourists' demographics on their travel motivation and travel choices and also tried to find out the relationship between travel motivation and their destinations choice. After analysis they found out there is not much difference in the motivation of the pilgrims on the basis of gender. There is a positive correlation between the travel motivation and travel pilgrimage destination choices of the tourists visiting.

(Anil, 2000)in his paper holds the view that ecotourism is entirely a new approach in tourism. It is reserving travel to natural areas to appreciate the cultural and natural history of the environment. He reviews various issues and information about ecotourism.

(Ganesh & Madhavi, 2007)) the objective behind the study is to evaluate the impact of tourism industry in India with regards to various fronts such as economic, social, cultural, historical, environmental and political effects. They clearly state certain things needed to be done for the positive result of tourism towards our economy like sustainable tourism development, responsible consumption of tourism, need of good management and planning to stop environmental degradation.

(Ramseookh, 2015) analyzing and comparing the tourist satisfaction among the tourism industry based on the tourist satisfaction index model and expectation-assuming framework.

(Lian, 2004) since the late 1970s, foreign scholars have started the research about tourists satisfaction connotation, influence factors, measurement and so on. For instance, tourists satisfaction showed the "positive" feeling or perception on the basis of the "positive" effects through comparing the expectation of tourists with actual perception to tourist destination.

(Batabyal, 2012) empirically investigated the foreign tourist arrivals to India. This paper analyses the tourism demand generally interpreted through arrivals to various destinations in India. The study covers two periods: a period of

significant development from 1980-1981 to 1990-1991 and 1991-92 onwards. First period is considered for significant improvement of Indian tourism and the second period for its subsequent changes in the perspective of significant of economic and political crises. The study was conducted through hypothetical trend equations contributing to estimation of growth in tourist's arrivals over the year.

III. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Seasonal dependency: The factors that attract tourists to Kerala, such as natural beauty and cultural festivals, can be highly dependent on specific seasons. For example, the monsoon season may limit outdoor activities and reduce the attractiveness of some destinations. This seasonal dependency can lead to fluctuations in tourist arrivals and revenue, making it challenging to maintain a consistent flow of visitors throughout the year.
- Limited carrying capacity: Kerala's natural attractions, such as backwaters and hill stations, have a limited carrying capacity. The influx of tourists, especially during peak seasons, can put strain on the environment and local infrastructure. Overcrowding and congestion can diminish the quality of the visitor experience and impact the sustainability of the destinations.
- Infrastructure constraints: While Kerala has made significant progress in developing its infrastructure, there are still limitations in certain areas. Remote destinations may have limited accessibility and inadequate transportation networks. Insufficient accommodation options, particularly in popular tourist areas, can lead to a lack of availability and higher prices during peak seasons.
- Cultural preservation challenges: Kerala's cultural heritage and traditions are major attractions for tourists. However, the preservation and promotion of these cultural aspects can be challenging. Ensuring the authenticity and integrity of cultural experiences while meeting the demands of tourism can be a delicate balance. Over-commercialization or dilution of cultural practices can impact the overall visitor experience and compromise the sustainability of cultural tourism.
- Environmental sustainability: The factors that attract tourists to Kerala, such as natural beauty and wildlife, need to be carefully managed to ensure long-term sustainability. The increase in tourism activities can put pressure on fragile ecosystems and natural resources. Uncontrolled development and inadequate waste management practices can lead to environmental degradation, negatively impacting the very attractions that draw tourists.
- Changing traveler preferences: Tourist preferences and trends are dynamic and constantly evolving. Factors that currently attract tourists may change over time, requiring continuous adaptation and innovation in tourism offerings. Failure to anticipate and respond to changing preferences can result in a decline in visitor numbers and competitiveness.
- Competitive landscape: Kerala faces competition from other domestic and international tourist destinations. Other destinations may offer similar natural beauty, cultural experiences, or wellness offerings. To remain competitive, Kerala needs to differentiate itself and continuously invest in destination branding, marketing, and quality improvement to attract and retain tourists.

Addressing these limitations requires a strategic and sustainable approach to tourism development. It involves careful planning, collaboration among stakeholders, and a focus on preserving the natural and cultural assets that make Kerala unique. Implementing carrying capacity management strategies, investing in infrastructure development, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and continuously monitoring and adapting to changing traveler preferences are crucial for overcoming these limitations.

IV. FINDINGS

- 52.1% of respondents are Female.
- Majority (61.2%) of respondents belong to the age group of 21-40.
- 62% of respondents coming from India.
- 47% of respondents occupation is Private Employee.
- The largest proportion of (33.3%) respondents falls within the income range of 50000-100000.

- 37.5% of respondents visited Kerala between 2 and 5 times.
- The most commonly visited places among the respondents were Kochin 10.8%.
- The most preferred mode among the respondents is Back Water Tourism 27.5%
- Majority of respondents 46.7% stayed in Kerala as tourists for 2-4 days.
- Majority of respondents fell into the 10000-40000 spending range is 36.7.
- 34.2% of respondents are influenced by the autumn season when choosing a Kerala tour.
- 50.0% of respondents rated the attractiveness and natural beauty of Kerala with a score of 4.
- 83.3%) of respondents reported occasionally facing problems while exploring Kerala.
- 37.5% of respondents are selecting tour destination through Social media.
- 12.5% of respondents are choose the Happy Tours and Travels travel service partner or travel agent for their trip in Kerala.
- 50.0%of respondents were highly satisfied with the ticket booking services provided by their tour operators.
- Majority of the customers 62.5%expressed satisfaction with the provided information.
- 55.8% of respondents are satisfied with the money exchange service provided by tour operators n Kerala.
- Majority of customers (46.7%) expressed either satisfaction or a neutral sentiment towards the transportation provided.
- 26.7% of respondents being satisfied with the food facility provided by tour operators.
- Majority of the respondents 26.7% are highly dissatisfied with the travel insurance provided by tour operators.
- 29.2 % of respondents highly dissatisfied with the travel itineraries given by the tour operators.
- 27.5% of respondents reported being highly satisfied with the attractiveness of Kerala.
- Majority of respondents 98.3% would recommend Kerala as a tourist destination to others.

V. SUGGESTIONS

Kerala has a rich cultural heritage that should be preserved and showcased. Encourage the promotion of traditional art forms, festivals, and historical sites through cultural events, exhibitions, and guided tours. This will create a deeper appreciation for Kerala's cultural legacy among tourists.

Enhance transportation networks, including roads, airports, and railways, to improve accessibility to different parts of Kerala. Develop and maintain tourist-friendly infrastructure such as well-connected roads, signage, public amenities, and facilities that cater to the needs of travelers.

Continue to prioritize the safety and security of tourists by implementing effective measures. Strengthen law enforcement, establish tourist police units, and provide information and assistance centers to address any concerns and create a safe environment for visitors.

Leverage the power of digital platforms and social media to promote Kerala as a tourist destination. Develop engaging websites, create visually appealing content, and actively engage with tourists through social media channels. Encourage positive online reviews and testimonials to enhance the online reputation of Kerala as a preferred destination.

Establish strong partnerships with travel agencies and tour operators, both domestically and internationally, to promote Kerala as a top tourist destination. Provide them with accurate and up-to-date information, organize familiarization trips, and offer incentives to encourage them to include Kerala in their tour packages.

Emphasize sustainable tourism practices to preserve the natural beauty and cultural heritage of Kerala. Promote eco-friendly accommodations, encourage responsible tourism activities, and educate tourists about the importance of conserving the environment and respecting local customs and traditions.

VI. CONCLUSION

Tourism industry in Kerala to continue promoting and developing the state's natural beauty, cultural heritage, wellness offerings, and ensuring safety and infrastructure improvements. Additionally, fostering positive experiences and encouraging positive word-of-mouth recommendations can help attract more tourists to Kerala. The natural beauty of Kerala, including its lush green landscapes, backwaters, beaches, and hill stations, was found to be a major factor influencing tourists' destination choices. The state's diverse and picturesque environment appeals to tourists seeking a

serene and visually appealing experience. Recommendations from friends, family, or travel agents significantly influenced tourists' destination choices. Positive word-of-mouth experiences, online reviews, and social media posts played a vital role in shaping tourists' perceptions and preferences.

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