

## **Introduction**

Tourism has an important role in the development of economies. Tourism relates to the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places and residences and to the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations. WTO claims that Tourism is the world's largest industry with annual revenues of over 3 trillion dollars. Today, tourism is a major source of income for many countries and affects the economy of both the source and host countries.

Kerala is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country. Ecotourism, Health tourism, Pilgrimage tourism are the factors that attract tourists to Kerala. Bordered by the lofty Western Ghats in the east, Vembanad lake and paddy fields of Kuttanad in the west, Kottayam is a land of rolling plains and gentle green hills. Kottayam is very unique in its geographical splendour, with panoramic backwaters stretches, lush paddy fields, highlands, extensive rubber plantation and has 100% literacy, which together earned the district the enviable title- the land of Letters, Latex and Lakes. The main ecotourist attractions of Kottayam include its backwaters, Kumarakom bird sanctuary, Vembanad Lake, Illaveezhapoonchira hill station etc.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The government of Kerala views ecotourism as one of the alternatives to develop the economy especially in the context of limited prospects of the manufacturing sector, problems in the agricultural and traditional sectors and uncertainties in the expatriate employment in the Middle East. According to the 10th Five Year Plan document, ecotourism has emerged as the vital sector for generating employment and income. It is no longer possible to ignore the vital role that ecotourism is destined to play in the economy of Kerala.

We need a careful management to get the maximum benefits and minimum negative impacts. In this developmental stage of ecotourism a study on this field is pertinent. This study focuses on the importance, performance and problems of ecotourism development in Kerala and aims to explain and understand the ecotourism projects in Kottayam. The study of ecotourism destinations in Kottayam district also provides a picture about the economic impact and trends of ecotourism and hence is titled "Impact of Ecotourism in Economic Development".

## **Significance of the Study**

In Kerala, tourism has become one of the major sectors of the economy contributing to a large proportion of income and generating huge employment opportunities. Ecotourism is a growing area in the tourist friendly state of Kerala.

seek tourism dollars with no obvious damage to eco systems, since wild resources are not being harvested and there is no apparent associated development. As a concept, ecotourism has gained momentum recently in India, but as a way of life, Indians have practiced ecotourism since times immemorial by their traditional approach to nature and rich cultural heritage.

Ecotourism can be distinguished from nature tourism by its emphasis on conservation, education, traveller responsibility and active community participation. Nature tourism, low impact tourism, green tourism, bio-tourism, ecologically responsible tourism and others have been used in literature and marketing, although they are not necessary synonymous with ecotourism. In some foreign countries, ecotourism is also termed as green tourism. Another name of ecotourism is ecological tourism.

Ecotourism is a new concept in tourism industry. Within the ambit of international tourism, ecotourism is a fast growing segment. Ecotourism emerged on the basis of demand which grew as a revolt against ill effects of urbanisation. Ecotourism projects the concept of sustainability in tourism. It can become an important factor in expansion of the level of tourism. Although returns from ecotourism are higher than in agriculture in many cases, tourism should not be used as an excuse for further encroaching on protected areas.

#### **Definition of Eco- Tourism**

The term Ecotourism and nature tourism were synonymously applied by Boo in her study of Latin America. She defined Ecotourism as nature tourism and "traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of study, admiring and enjoying the scenery and wild animals and plants as well as only existing cultural manifestations". For Lucas Ecotourism is one "based on the enjoyment of natural areas and the observations of nature". He further stated that Ecotourism has low environmental impact, higher labour intensity and contributes socially and economically to the nation. The Canadian Advisory Council in its National Workshop on Ecotourism reported that "Ecotourism is an enlightening nature travel experience that contributes to conservation of the ecosystem while respecting the environment." Godwin made an attempt to distinguish between nature tourism and eco-tourism. Nature tourism encompasses all form of tourism-mass tourism, low impact tourism, ecotourism-which uses natural resource in wild or under developed form including species, habitat, landscape scenery and fresh water features.

World Tourism Organization defines Ecotourism as "any Tourism Programme which is nature based, ecologically sustainable where education and interpretation are major components and where local people are benefited". The International Ecotourism Society defines Ecotourism as, "responsible travel that conserves the

Tourism also depends on the earning members and the size of earning. From the data presented, it can be observed that a total of 38 percent of the tourists covered in the survey were teachers and workers in public sector undertakings. Of the 27 tourists covered in the survey, 7% were social workers, 7% were medical field workers, 7% self employed and 15% were students. 15% tourists were unemployed. From the survey it can be inferred that most of the ecotourists are generally employed.

Income is the base of human development and is one of the major factors that promote tourism. Hence the family income of the sample respondents is analyzed here. The sample data shows that 30% of the tourists covered in the survey have annual income between Rs.1 lakh and Rs.5 lakh. 22 % of the sample respondents have income between Rs. 5 lakh and Rs. 15 lakh. 37% of tourists did not reveal the annual income.

The purpose of visit in an ecotourism place is an important factor. Some tourists intend to visit the place as a pleasure trip. Some others visit the tourist destinations for study purpose. Certain people have some other objectives while visiting ecotourism places. The sample survey shows that majority of the tourists (89%) visit for pleasure. Only 11% of the tourists' intention is as an extension tour. Study purpose is negligible.

The budget of the tourists for conducting this trip covered under the survey. The data shows that majority of the tourists (48%) spend less than Rs.10000/- for their visit. 19% percentage of tourist spent between Rs.10,000/- and Rs.50,000/- for their visit. 11% spent between Rs.50,000/- and Rs.1,00,000/-. 22% of them spent more than Rs.1,00,000/- for their trip. Most of them who belonged belong to this category were foreigners. This shows that majority of the domestic tourists visiting the ecotourism spots in the area are spending small amount of money for this trip. The authorities must try to promote class tourism rather than mass tourism. Mass tourism will endanger the environmental quality of the tourist spots.

Eco-tourists are interested in number of factors. The major factors that attract eco-tourists are natural factors (37%), awareness about environmental preservation (26%), traditional sightseeing (29%), physically active factors (4%) and other factors (4%).

## Distribution of tourists visited Kottayam district in 2014

2014 (<http://www.keralatourism.org>)

Month	Earnings from tourism in Kerala	Number of Foreign tourists visited	Number of Domestic tourists visited										
January		4520	39456										
February		4656	25460										
March	Year	3825	27512										
April		3970	26672										
May		1415	35245										
June		1214	32320										
July		3546	27546										
August		3750	33586										
September		3841	40425										
October		4264	38988										
November		4598	40156										
December		4862	45816										
Total		44066	413182										
	Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
		3797.37	4221.99	4571.69	5560.77	6398.93	3797.37	4221.99	4571.69	5560.77	6398.93	3797.37	4221.99
		39.35	11.18	8.28	21.63	15.07	33.09	11.18	8.28	21.63	15.07	33.09	
		5938.00	6829.00	7738.00	9126.00	11433.00	13231.00	17348.00	19037.00	20430.00	22926.55	24885.44	
		12.83	15.01	13.31	17.94	25.28	0.77	31.12	9.74	7.32	12.22	12.11	

Source: Tourism statistics

Source: Tourism statistics ([www.keralatourism.org](http://www.keralatourism.org))

- Most of the tourists preferred KTDC hotels for their accommodation.
- Boating occupies the top position among the tourist attractions.
- 90% of the tourists opined that local people behave in a good manner
- Climate of Kottayam is another factor which attracts tourist to this location
- Above 75% of the tourists hold the opinion that the officials were helpful to them.
- Majority of the tourists were happy with the price charged for the service
- There is much improvement in infrastructural facilities in ecotourism area.
- Majority of tourists experience pollution problems in ecotourism places.
- The study revealed that 90 % of the tourists preferred ecotourism to general tourism.
- Most of the regular visitors experienced some changes in the location compared with their previous visit. The major change noted is the increase in ecotourism activities.
- Majority of the tourists suggested measures for improvement in infrastructure conservation of forest and wildlife, environmental preservation and security measures for ecotourism development
- One strange thing noticed is that there is no clear relationship between tourists' income and type of accommodations preferred.
- 86% of local people get economic benefits from tourists' destination.
- The man days of employment in ecotourism area has increased compared to pre tourism period.

## **SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Infrastructural Development**

The government should plan to build world class infrastructural facilities to attract foreign visitors.

### **Accommodation**

Tourism can be promoted in a big way by establishing tourist resorts at strategic locations; proper accommodation centers with modern amenities suitable for stay of the international tourists must be constructed. Construction of day shelter is another step for ecotourism development

### **Marketing**

There should be some improvement in marketing facilities for ecotourism promotion; steps should be taken to market tourism potentials of Kottayam district in india and abroad.

6. Economic Survey 2013-2014, Ministry of Finance, Dept. of Economics Affairs, Govt. of India.

**Website**

1. [on.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecotourism](http://on.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecotourism).
2. [www.ecoindia.com/eco-tourism-in-India.html](http://www.ecoindia.com/eco-tourism-in-India.html)
3. [www.ecotourism.org](http://www.ecotourism.org)
4. [www.ecotourismkeralam.org](http://www.ecotourismkeralam.org)
5. [www.keralatourism.org](http://www.keralatourism.org)