SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN KERALA – POLICIES AND INIATIVES

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ABSTRACT: *Tourism is the second large Industry in India .It provide large employment opportunities . It also influence the Indian economy on a great scale . It contribute foreign exchange on a large scale .Tourism in India can be developed through sustainable Tourism . Sustainable tourism refers to the Sustainable tourism is a way of traveling and exploring a destination while respecting its culture, environment, and people . Kerala also plays a leader role   in bringing sustainable tourism policy . In kerala sustainable tourism applied through three strategies .They are economic social and environmental responsibility .*

Key Words:

Tourism

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The word Tourism defined by UNWTO as, "Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure , business and other purposes"

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism refers to the Sustainable tourism is a way of traveling and exploring a destination while respecting its culture, environment, and people .Expressed simply, **sustainable tourism** can be defined as:***"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"***

Conceptual definition

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

Thus, sustainable tourism should:

1) Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

2) Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

OBJECTIVES

- To appreciate the benefits and problems arising from various forms of tourism, especially in terms of social equity and the environment;

- • To develop a critical awareness of the ways in which tourism can enhance the welfare of people and protect our natural and cultural heritage;
- • To promote a personal commitment to forms of tourism that maximise rather than detract from sustainable human development and environmental quality; and
- • To plan ways of teaching about sustainable tourism.

Major aims of sustainable tourism
The following are the 12 Aims of Sustainable Tourism propounded by UNWTO
The 12 Aims:
1) Economic Viability: To ensure the viability and competitiveness of tourism destinations and enterprises, so that they are able to continue to prosper and deliver benefits in the long term.
2) Local Prosperity: To maximize the contribution of tourism to the economic prosperity of the host destination, including the proportion of visitor spending that is retained locally.
3) Employment Quality: To strengthen the number and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including the level of pay, conditions of service and availability to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.
4) Social Equity: To seek a widespread and fair distribution of economic and social benefits from tourism throughout the recipient community, including improving opportunities, income and services available to the poor.
5) Visitor Fulfilment: To provide a safe, satisfying and fulfilling experience for visitors, available to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.
6) Local Control: To engage and empower local communities in planning and decision making about the management and future development of tourism in their area, in consultation with other stakeholders.
7) Community Wellbeing: To maintain and strengthen the quality of life in local communities, including social structures and access to resources, amenities and life support systems, avoiding any form of social degradation or exploitation.
8) Cultural Richness: To respect and enhance the historic heritage, authentic culture, traditions and distinctiveness of host communities.
9) Physical Integrity: To maintain and enhance the quality of landscapes, both urban and rural, and avoid the physical and visual degradation of the environment.
10) Biological Diversity: To support the conservation of natural areas, habitats and wildlife, and minimize damage to them.
11) Resource Efficiency: To minimize the use of scarce and non-renewable resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services.
12) Environmental Purity: To minimize the pollution of air, water and land and the generation of waste by tourism enterprises and visitors.

Major initiatives of sustainable tourism in kerala
Kerala - aptly called 'God's own country' and the first state in India that has been conferred upon the top United Nations Award, UNWTO Ulysses Award for Innovation in Public Policy and Governance, the highest honor given to government bodies for shaping global leadership and creating innovative initiatives for sustainable tourism. Located in the southwestern coast of the country, bordered by the Arabian Sea on the west and Western Ghats on the east, Kerala is famous for its beautiful backwaters, pristine beaches, lush tea gardens, cultural extravaganza and traditional healing practices.
The path-breaking 'Responsible Tourism' (RT) project in Kumarakom has successfully linked the local community with the hospitality industry and government departments, thereby creating a model for empowerment and development of the people in the area while sustaining eco-friendly tourism. This was achieved through a three-pronged strategy encompassing:
Economic responsibility: Activities undertaken were designed in such a way that all stakeholders get an equitable share in the economic benefits of tourism. In order to revive agriculture in the region, the Kumarakom Panchayat (local self-government) established a link between local farmers and hotels for the uninterrupted supply of vegetables. Despite the agreement, hotels and resorts refused to buy local produce expressing concerns in price, quality and regularity of supply. This necessitated the establishment of an RT Cell to enable continuous dialogue between concerned parties. Eventually, after prolonged efforts the stakeholders were convinced about the importance of the RT initiative and supply-chain mechanisms were strengthened to alleviate their looming concerns.

Tourists engaging in Village Life Experiences at Kumarakom, Kerala (Pic courtesy: Kerala Tourism)

Social responsibility: A detailed study was conducted to identify the local art and culture of the area; women and children were involved to form cultural groups and perform in hotels and resorts with the support of the RT Cell. An innovative package was developed under the RT initiative called the Village Life Experiences (VLI) Packages - a day with farmers, a day with fishermen and beyond the backwaters - to showcase rural life and sustain traditional occupations.

Environmental responsibility: The RT Cell collaborated with the local Gram Panchayat in organizing and training for the program called 'Zero Waste Kumarakom' and a subsequent one on vermicomposting for proper waste disposal and treatment in the area. Additionally, mangrove regeneration programs were organized in which seeds were distributed to resort owners to plant in backwaters and local clubs, students, activists were roped in to create awareness.

The Kumarakom Initiative won the National Award for Best Rural Tourism Project and also the PATA Grand Award for Environment.

In order to ensure the sustainable growth of tourism in the state, Kerala adopted a "high value, low volume" perspective (Banerjee, 2013); a tourism management strategy that aids in controlling the overall impacts of tourism while ensuring that the industry remains one of the top economic performers for the region. Through this policy, Kerala limited the quantity of tourists entering the state while monitoring the quality of tourists to ensure that they are culturally sensitive, environmentally friendly and economically viable.

Taking lessons from the success of other destinations around the World that have minimized the negative impacts of tourism while maximizing the profits, Kerala required all potential tourists to go through registered tour agencies that follow the sustainability requirements and have an annual set quota barring independent travelers from visiting the state without prior approval. While limiting the number of tourists might not be a viable or even advisable option for all destinations, this approach strives for a balance and can serve as a good starting point for certain places.

Conclusion

Tourism   provide large employment opportunities to the community directly and indirectly. Thus tourism is the inevitable part in a developing country like India . The role of Kerala state in tourism development achieves much progress . Sustainable tourism enables adomestic and foreign tourist to protect tourism environment .Itenables at one hand at the destinations and on the other hand with the whole world .

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