

The Routes of Wellness in Tourism in Kerala and its Impacts

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Abstract

Kerala is located in the south of India and together with Goa it is seen as the best international tourist destination of India. Kerala is also identified by the National Geographic Traveler as one of the two 'must see' spots in India, with the Taj Mahal being the other. According to the Economic Review (Kerala Planning Board, 2008) "Kerala is today the most acclaimed tourist destination in India with its Super brand 'God's Own Country' and is continuing as one of the prime tourist destinations of South Asia. The tourism industry in Kerala not only facilitates infrastructure development but also helps in balanced and sustainable regional growth by generating income and creating employment opportunities" (Kerala planning board, 2008). The state is ranked 9th in foreign tourist arrivals and 14th in domestic tourist arrivals in India. Keeping in mind India has 24 states, it can be said Kerala has a high ranking within India on tourist arrivals.

Keywords: Helth tourism, wellness, employment opportunities

Introduction

Tourism is not only a growth engine but also an employment generator. According to the Economic Survey 2011-12, the sector has the capacity to create large scale employment both direct and indirect, for diverse sections in society, from the most specialized to unskilled workforce. It provides 6-7 per cent of the world's total jobs directly and millions more indirectly through the multiplier effect as per the UN's World Tourism Organization(UNWTO)1. In 2001, the total population of Kerala was about 32 million, of which 91% was literate. The key crops of Kerala are coconut, tea, coffee, rubber, cashew, cardamom, pepper and cinnamon. Although these are still most important for the region's income, the service sector in Kerala is booming with financial companies, real estate agencies, mortgage companies, consultancy services, insurance companies and the tourism industry.

Economic crisis that is underway has been affected by the negative growth effects. Practically, all sectors of the national economies have been experiencing the effects, and tourism is no exception. By nature, humans are resilient and in face of odds and always try to find *via media* solutions. In the tourism sector against all the economic odds, dissatisfaction and depression among people has found refuge in ways of relaxation of soul, body and mind. People, during the last five years, have increasingly turned towards the ways of health and wellness activities. Tourism providers have, accordingly, made good on the opportunity and offered attractive wellness packages in specialized destination.

While in the late 1980s and 1990s most of such destinations were primarily located in SE Asia, however, in the current decade, more and more European destinations are becoming popular. With Switzerland and France being the cherished destinations of the rich, highly competitive European destinations like Austria, Greece, Italy, Spain, Croatia, Turkey and others, have been successfully offering wellness facilities and having some comparative advantages. Naturally, the already established destinations in the SE Asia remains strong competitors in the market. However, at least in Europe, increased number of people is looking for nearest locations. Although, leading luxury hotels are among the top providers of such services, modest wellness service providers have successfully entered this emerging market. Not only more and more new destinations and service providers are emerging but also new wellness services are being developed offering the tourists attractive choices.

THE CONCEPTS OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The term '*health tourism*' has not been well defined. Since the 1970s it has implied 'the provision of health facilities utilizing the natural resources of the country, in particular mineral water ad climate'. Goodrich and Goodrich (1987, 217) define it as: The neo-classical economic theory subjectively defines happiness and has long been the standard of measurement used interchangeably with utility as well as the general welfare. Modern classical economics no longer attempts to quantify happiness or satisfaction through measurements in consumption and profits. Instead, argues that individual's preference is revealed through choice. The idea that modern neoclassical economics define happiness on the basis of consumption is widely disputed.

The Happy Planet Index (HPI) is an index of human well-being and environmental impact that was introduced by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in July 2006. The index is designed to challenge well-established indices of countries' development, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the Human

Development Index (HDI), which are seen as not taking sustainability into account. In particular, GDP is seen as inappropriate, as the usual ultimate aim of most people is not to be rich, but to be happy and healthy. Furthermore, it is believed that the notion of sustainable development requires a measure of the environmental costs of pursuing those goals.

Table. 2 Tourism Products

Tourism product category	Domestic tourists	Foreign tourists
1. Heritage, culture & religion	65	40
2. Backwaters	15	20
3. Beaches	8	25
4. Hills & hill stations	7	5
5. Forests & wildlife	5	10

Types of tourism in Kerala

Kerala is far ahead of many other states in India in terms of planning & project implementation in tourism. The state is also a veritable treasure trove of tourism assets of diverse nature. There are at least 175 distinct tourist/pilgrim centers of varying degrees of importance and development potentials across the state.

Heritage and cultural tourism

Heritage and cultural tourism constitutes a dominant component among both domestic and foreign tourists visiting the state. Among the available assets, it is imperative to identify and focus upon those that are outstanding enough to attract and satisfy varied interests. Possible models for tourism development that would draw strength from the local culture, arts and lifestyle of Kerala include Rural tourism, development of a heritage village and business tourism packages incorporating cultural performances, local cuisine etc.

Eco tourism

It is type of tourism that provides the responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of the local people". Ecotourism, also known as ecological tourism, is responsible travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and small scale. It helps educate the traveler; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights. It is a nature-oriented travel that promotes conservation and resource protection and also adds to the local economy.

Medical tourism

Medical tourism in Kerala grew without much willful collective efforts. It was recognized as an opportunity by some sectors, particularly the Ayurveda sector who took some collective effort to convert Kerala as a source for Ayurveda treatment. Dentistry and modern medicine also took the role. A combination of many factors has led to the increase in popularity of medical tourism in Kerala.

- Traditional systems of medicine like Ayurveda and siddha are widely popular in the state, and draws increasing number of tourists.
- High costs of healthcare in industrialized nations
- Ease and affordability of international travel
- Improving technology and standards of care.

Hill station tourism

Kerala is famous for its Hill station tourism. There are many hill station destinations in Kerala such as Munnar, Ponnudi, Wagamon, Ranipuram, Nelliampathy, Pythalmala, places in Wayanad District etc. Tourism development is having a negative impact on the local plantation based economy. One of the important suggestions put forward is that tourism development may be encouraged in places where the plantation or other form of local economy is on the downslide due to extraneous reasons.

Rural tourism focuses on participating in a rural lifestyle. It can be a variant of ecotourism. Any village can be a tourist attraction, and many villagers are very hospitable. Agriculture is becoming highly mechanized and therefore requires less manual labor. This is causing economic pressure on some villages, leading to an exodus of young people to urban areas. There is however, a segment of urban population that is interested to visit the rural areas and understand their perspective. This segment has been rapidly growing in the past decade and has led to Rural tourism becoming a good business prospect.

Culture tourism is the subset of tourism concerned with a country or region's culture, specifically the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, the history of those people, their art, architecture, religion(s), and other elements that helped shape their way of life. Cultural tourism includes tourism in urban areas, particularly historic or large cities and their cultural facilities such as museums and theatres. It can also include tourism in rural areas showcasing the traditions of indigenous cultural communities (i.e. festivals, rituals), and their values and life style. It is generally agreed that cultural tourists spend substantially more than standard tourists do.

Dental tourism is a subset of the sector known as medical tourism. It involves individuals seeking dental care outside of their local healthcare systems and may be accompanied by a vacation. Dental tourism is growing worldwide. As the world becomes ever more interdependent and competitive, technique, material, and technological advances spread rapidly, enabling providers in "developing countries" to provide dental care at significant cost savings when compared with their peers in the developed world.

Water tourism is traveling by boat while on holiday, with the express purpose of seeing things meant for the water tourist. This can be traveling from luxury port to luxury port in a cruise ship, but also joining boat-centered events such as regattas or landing a small boat for lunch or other day recreation at specially prepared day boat-landings. Also known as a boating holiday, it is a form of tourism that is generally more popular in the summertime.

Wildlife tourism can be an eco and animal friendly tourism, usually showing animals in their natural habitat. Wildlife tourism, in its simplest sense, is watching wild animals in their natural habitat. Wildlife tourism is an important part of the tourism industries in many countries including many African and South American countries, Australia, India, Canada, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Maldives among many. It has experienced a dramatic and rapid growth in recent years world wide and is closely aligned to eco-tourism and sustainable-tourism.

Religious tourism, also commonly referred to as faith tourism, is a type of tourism, where people travel individually or in groups for pilgrimage, missionary, or leisure (fellowship) purposes. The world's largest form of mass religious tourism takes place at the annual Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia

Yoga tourism is a new concept for "celebrating your destination with yoga". a generally accepted idea by the foreigners is, that India is a land of billions of people, of millions of gods, of great variety of religions, of enormous number of temples, of philosophers and sadhus or saints, of festivals and fares, of deserts and hills, of cows and snakes etc.etc.

Forest tourism

Development of tourism in forest areas has often been a subject of considerable debate. The Tiger Trail (guided trekking programme for tourists) in the Periyar Tiger Reserve is projected as a model success story in Wildlife tourism. Thattekad Bird Sancturay, Parambikkulam, Wayanad (Muthanga) and Aralam Wildlife sanctuaries; Silent valley National park etc is famous for forest Tourism.

Ayurveda Tourism

There has been a spontaneous growth in Kerala for Ayurveda which has no competition in the Whole world. By unorganized but collective effort the name Ayurveda got branded all over the world. With Ayurveda rejuvenation treatments becoming available widely in different parts of India and abroad, Kerala would have to strengthen its positioning as the real destination for Ayurveda. Traditional Ayurveda treatments in Kerala are famous among the tourists.

Outdoor tourism

The Indian subcontinent is a geographically varied land form that contains dense jungle, pristine coasts and the highest mountain range in the world, the Himalayas. These mountains are among the most popular destinations on Earth for hikers, mountaineers and climbers, and they offer nearly endless possibilities for trekking adventures. In the lowlands, the forests of India are home to exotic wildlife, including the rare white tigers of Bandhavgarh National Park, and they are popular destinations for safaris and ecological tourism. The varied beaches of India are popular with surfers, divers, sailors and sun worshippers.

Spiritual tourism

Globally people are increasingly mentally disturbed and looking for solace in spiritual reading, meditation and moments of divine ecstasy. Our country has been known as the seat of spiritualism and India's cosmopolitan nature is best reflected in its pilgrim with varied attractions but also for many places of worship; present itself as embodiments of compassion where one get peace of mind. Kerala is the best place for spiritual tourism. The tradition of Kerala itself implies a long historical perspective. Temples, mosques and churches in Kerala are highly inviting the attention of the tourists in to Kerala.

Sightseeing tourism

Kerala is a popular for historical sightseeing, and it's thousands of year's worth of monuments and architecture are some of the world's most spectacular

Leisure tourism

Kerala is also a global hot spot for those who just want to party or relax. Luxury resorts that offer all-inclusive holiday's line for the tourists to enjoy the scenic beauty of Kerala.

Hall (1992, 151) provides an analysis of health tourism within the context of adventure and sport tourism. Health tourism is compared to tourism based on its activities particularly

- Sun and fun activities

- Engaging healthy activities

- Motivation for travel is primarily health

Travel for sauna, massage, and other health activities
Medical treatment

Muller and Kaufmann (2000) make a distinction between health and wellness. They regard wellness tourism as a subset of health tourism. According to Dunn (1959) wellness is a “state of health, which comprises an overall sense of well being and sees a person as consisting body, mind and spirit. Lifestyle and self-responsibility for health see paramount in the quest for a better quality of the life. In some countries like Germany, Austria and Switzerland, there is a considerable emphasis on ‘medical well-ness’.

Wellness should not be confused by health. It is supposed to create harmony in mental, physical, spiritual or biological health in general and has stronger ties with changing lifestyle or doing something healthy than with curing a specific disease. As stated above, the concept of wellness is the co-product of the awareness of sound health, well being and happiness. The three elements differ in understanding.

As stated above, the concept of wellness was developed as a special state of health comprising an overall sense of well being which sees human being as consisting of body, spirit and mind and being dependent on their environment. In the western world people have attempted to define wellness by understanding as the harmony of body, mind and spirit, self-responsibility, physical fitness, beauty care, healthy nutrition, relaxation, meditation, mental activity, education, environmental sensitivity, and social contacts as fundamental elements. Wellness is an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices towards, a more successful existence. It advocates positive and optimistic outlook, and a holistic and balanced approach to life. The concept embraces physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social and occupational aspects of life.

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia (2007) well being can be defined as ‘what is non-instrumentally or ultimately good for a person’. It is more than just happiness. As well as ‘feeling satisfied and happy, well being means developing as a person, being fulfilled, and making a contribution to the community’ (NEF). Diener and Saligman (2004) consider following constitutes of high well being:

1. living in a democratic and stable society that meets material needs;
2. have supportive friends and family;
3. have rewarding and engaging employment with adequate income;
4. be reasonably healthy and able to treat physical and mental health problems;
5. have one’s own value goals; and
6. have a philosophy/religion providing guidance and purpose to one’s life.

Though the term ‘quality of life’ (QOL) is difficult to define, it has come to understand ‘peoples’ satisfaction with their lives, their physical, mental, social and emotional health, and the nature of the environment in which they are living. It can be measured with quantitative indicators which are subjective and objective in nature. Objective indicators include: life expectancy, employment status, marital status, education, working hours per week, housing conditions, crime rates, poverty level, healthcare provisions and legal rights. The subjective indicators relate to happiness, job satisfaction, sense of community, family relationships, stress level, use of leisure time, degree of spirituality, sense of safety and number of enjoyed holidays. QOL is considered to have a balance of most of these mentioned elements. Researches in the field have shown that travel and tourism and travel have a positive correlation with QOL.

Happiness is a complex and almost an indefinable term. However, researchers believe that happiest people are those surrounded by family and friends; engage themselves in relaxing activities; are not focused on materialism; not obsessed with image, social status, and fame; are grateful for and satisfied with what they have; are altruistic; trust others and cooperate; and live in politically stable nations. Travel without doubt creates happiness on many levels. By visiting friends and relatives, participating in voluntary activities creates a feeling of belonging and love that forms an important part of happiness.

A wide spectrum of health and wellness tourism has developed in recent years (see table 2). These range from those which focus on physical or medical healing to those which have psychological or spiritual dimension. The holidays which take place within these environments would in some cases be radically different from one another. Depending upon motivation, life-stage, and interests tourists will select the form of wellness required and this could be purely physical with a focus on sports and fitness; medical with focus on disease treatment or surgery; mental or psychological with a focus on mind control; relaxing and pampering; entertaining and recreational or meditation and spiritual.

SCOPE OF WELLNESS ASSESSMENT TECHNOLOGIES

Wellness assessment technologies include a wide range of methods designed to obtain information and then analyze and interpret it in order to form an understanding of a person’s health and then use this information along with existing knowledge to inform the design and implementation of the most effective therapies. There is a very wide range of wellness assessment technologies that can be summarized as under:

1. Data recording
Body measurement

Electrophysiological measures

Sleep studies

Pedometry

Bioenergetic testing

2. Direct questioning

Through formal and informal medical history on current and past illnesses, family, occupational, travel, dietary, lifestyle, and sex details.

3. Tissue sampling

Blood and urine analysis; hair, sweat, semen, breast milk, ear wax, finger nails and tissue biopsies.

4. Functional testing

Lung function, cognitive performance, auditory and visual function as well as fitness assessment, cardiovascular stress testing, nutritional challenge tests etc.

5. Data analysis and knowledge management

Information and communications technology

Electronic health information systems

Knowledge management and bibliographical databases

Clinical decision support and tele-medicine

Over the last decade, the world is undergoing far-reaching changes in attitudes, behavior and economic life of the people. Frequent natural disasters and global economic crisis have resulted in economic miseries of the people. Long existing widespread hunger and under nourishment, poverty and unemployment have not only resulted in economic decline (fall in consumption, savings and investments, deterioration of standards of living etc.) but also in social discontent and fall in the happiness index².

Economic crisis that is underway has been affected by the negative growth effects. Practically, all sectors of the national economies have been experiencing the effects, and tourism is no exception.

By nature, humans are resilient and in face of odds and always try to find *via media* solutions. In the tourism sector against all the economic odds, dissatisfaction and depression among people has found refuge in ways of relaxation of soul, body and mind. People, during the last five years, have increasingly turned towards the ways of health and wellness activities. Tourism providers have, accordingly, made good on the opportunity and offered attractive wellness packages in specialized destination.

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CONCLUSION

Like all other sectors of the world economy, tourism is also feeling the pinch of the crisis that has resulted from the global economic turmoil. World economic situation since 2007/2008 has put an extra pressure on people's psycho-physical state of health. People are increasingly looking forward to new ways of relaxation and re-energizing themselves. Some modes of tourism, globally, due to the economic downturn, have slowed down, but the tourism sector itself has done remarkably well during the last two-three years by offering the new model i.e. facility generally called *Wellness*. Within tourism, wellness is relatively a new trend that has registered an impressive growth rate. World-wide more and more people are traveling to destinations that provide wellness facilities. The rise of 'wellness' concept can be attributed to two factors. First, the WHO has now long been pushing forward an integrated concept of «well-being» and «fitness» into its global health policy. Second, the overall education of people has increased the human awareness of personal health. Tourism service providers, especially the luxury hotels were quick to cash upon these facts and created a palette of wellness services such as spa and health treatments, occupational health therapy, beauty treatments, sports' facilities, spiritual activities, massages, and rehabilitation programs, etc. Since sufficient data on the subject have not yet emerged, the paper basically discusses some conceptual aspects of wellness tourism only.

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