

The Criteria of Green Tourism in Kerala-A Journey through the Imperatives of Green Growth

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Abstract

Green tourism is defined as environmentally friendly tourism activities with various focuses and meanings. In a broad term, green tourism is about being an environmentally friendly tourist or providing environmentally friendly tourist services. The green tourism concept would be highly appealing to tourism enterprises and operators owing to increasing governmental pressure to improve environmental performance by adopting effective and tangible environmental management techniques. Furthermore, achievement and promotion of internationally recognized environmental awards would be instrumental to the tourism enterprises in marketing their services. As a result, many concerned and responsible parties put forward recommendations for green tourism products to regulate tourism's negative impacts. This conceptual paper attempts to discuss green tourism concept, green tourism certification and its processes as well explain the comparative approaches of green tourism in a few countries.

Keywords: green, tourism, certification, sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of tourism as a major industry is one of the most remarkable changes that have taken place in the global economic activity (Sinclair, 1998). Tourism is the third largest economic activity in the world (after oil and automobiles), and it is one of the fastest-growing activities (Batta, 2009). The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2008) projects that by the year 2010, international tourist arrivals will have increased to 1.018 billion and a direct receipt is expected to US\$1.55 trillion.

Receipts from tourism make an important contribution to the economies of the developing countries. Among the three major impacts of tourism—economic, socio-cultural and environmental—the economic impact played a dominant role in policy-making. With the focus on the economic benefits that accompanied the development of tourism, the adverse socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism were relatively ignored. Based on the economic benefits, tourism development was prescribed as a panacea for many social and economic problems. This led to the indiscriminate and unplanned growth of tourism infrastructure in many countries, and soon the negative effects in the form of social and environmental degradation began to emerge. Due to enhanced awareness of the negative impact of tourism on the environment, efforts have been made to develop approaches for making tourism sustainable. The last two decades have witnessed a growing interest in the relationship between tourism development and environmental quality (Erdogan and Tosun, 2009), with the emergence of special interest tourism including green tourism.

Tourism in Kerala

Tourism is one of the few sectors where Kerala has clear competitive advantages given its diverse geography in a short space ranging from the Western Ghats covered with dense forests to the backwaters to the Arabian sea. Its ancient rich culture including traditional dance forms and the strong presence of alternative systems of medicine add to its allure. Unfortunately, Kerala is dominated by domestic tourism within the state although foreign tourists arrivals to the state has been growing at a faster rate than national average. The goal in the KPP 2030 is to develop Kerala as an up-market tourism destination with the state being the top destination in terms of number of tourists and revenue among all the Indian states. Sustainable tourism is the mission. This can be achieved by integrating tourism with other parts of the economy like medical and health hubs which will attract more stable tourists over a longer period of time and with higher spending capacity. There will be new elements added to leisure tourism and niche products in tourism will be developed. Infrastructure development is crucial to achieve this goal. The success of Kerala tourism will be based on the synergy between private and public sectors. The government has taken steps to encourage private investment in tourism, while adhering to the principles and practices of sustainability. Industry led sustainable tourism development relies upon the government- imposed and self- imposed regulations. Tourism in Kerala will be benchmarked against international indicators and monitored on a regular basis to achieve quality. Kerala lies on the southwest coast of the Indian Peninsula, stretching 360 miles along Malabar Coast and has been noted as the paradise of tourism. Kerala is a prime high-end tourism in the Indian subcontinent and has been rated as “one of the fifty destinations to be visited in one's lifetime

Table No.1
Trends in domestic & Foreign tourist arrivals into Kerala

year	Domestic Tourists	% var.	Foreign Tourists	% var.
2003	58,71,228	5.4	2,94,621	26.7
2004	59,72,182	1.7	3,45,546	17.3
2005	59,46,423	-4.3	3,46,499	0.27
2006	62,71,724	5.47	4,28,534	23.7
2007	66,42,941	5.92	5,15,808	20.37
2008	75,91,250	14.28	5,98,929	16.11
2009	79,13,537	4.25	5,57,258	-6.96
2010	85,95,075	8.61	6,59,265	18.31
2011	93,81,455	9.15	7,32,985	11.18
2012	100,76,854	7.41	7,93,696	8.28
2013	108,57,811	7.75	8,58,143	8.12

Source: Tourism statistics-2013, Department of Tourism Development

Table 2
Earnings from Tourism

<i>Year</i>	<i>Foreign Exchange Earnings (Rs. In Crores)</i>	<i>Percentage of Increase</i>	<i>Total revenue generated from Tourism (Direct & Indirect) Rs. In Crores</i>	<i>Percentage of Increase</i>
2001	535.00	1.85	4500.00	9.58
2002	705.67	31.90	4931.00	20.42
2003	983.37	39.35	5938.00	12.83
2004	1266.77	28.82	6829.00	15.01
2005	1552.31	22.54	7738.00	13.31
2006	1988.40	28.09	9126.00	17.94
2007	2640.94	32.82	11433.00	25.28
2008	3066.52	16.11	13130.00	14.84
2009	2853.16	-6.96	13231.00	0.77
2010	3797.37	33.09	17348.00	31.12
2011	4221.99	11.18	19037.00	9.74
2012	4571.69	8.28	20430.00	7.32
2013	5560.77	21.63	22926.55	12.22

Source: Tourism statistics-2013, Department of Tourism Development

Tourism aggravates Sustainable development or environmental impoverishment?

‘Sustainable tourism’ is offered as an answer to both poverty and environmental concerns. But as with ‘ecotourism’, sustainable tourism means different things to different people, with the industry often misusing the term to cultivate a positive and ‘green’ image for themselves. The concept of “sustainability has emerged in a hegemonic discourse. In many areas of the developing world there is “a grassroots groundswell to take control of, and exploit, tourist opportunities at the community level. Currently, this tendency seems to assume automatically that ‘sustainability’ is their prerogative, and use of the term is as loose as it is in other tendencies. Ecotourism and new programmes linking tourism and poverty are actually promoting industrial tourism models oriented to economic growth. These forms of so-called ‘sustainable’ tourism are known to be exploitative of both people and land. They dangerously distort the relationship between tourism and biological diversity.” The lack of safeguards for environmental and cultural sustainability in tourism policies and programmes poses threats particularly to areas inhabited by Indigenous Peoples, whose cultural landscapes and even their traditional knowledge, ceremonies and sacred sites are being exploited for tourism purposes, often without their consent. Most sustainable tourism advocates are aware of the fact that tourism competes with local activities for the use of limited natural resources. But to make tourism ventures successful, they suggest that ‘tradeoffs’ are inevitable. Tourism as ‘sustainable development’ proves to be a myth when ‘trade-offs’ are made in the narrow interests of the industry, while local residents draw the short straw and end up making sacrifices in quality of life.

Green tourism concept

The blessings of the nature have to be protected. The concept of a green product is one that is easier to use than to define. Green tourism is used to indicate environmentally friendly tourism but have different focuses and meanings. Often such claims use terms which lack of accepted or standard definitions, or utilize extravagant language to wash the emptiness of the claim being made (NCC, 1996). These terms are used for two purposes:

first, to tell customers that the holiday destination they are going to is beautiful and unspoilt. Green tourism or another term related to environmental concern is mostly used to label nature holidays to exotic destinations (Wight, 1994). Second, green tourism claims can be used to signal that tourism operations taking place in that area do not harm the environment (Font and Tribe, 2001).

There is another version of Green tourism. The tourism has to be beneficial when it is both beneficial to producers and consumers. The difficulty starts when a stakeholder attempts to measure the negative effects of their activities on the environment. Even in cases where measurement seems possible, the next difficulty arises at agreeing the criteria to be considered and the threshold levels of unacceptable effects. Tourism traditionally has been considered a relatively green industry, with the exception of its transport and land development implications, and for this reason it has only recently become an area of concern (Font and Tribe, 2001).

According to Dodds and Joppe (2001), the green tourism concept can be broken down into four components.

Environmental responsibility—protecting, conserving, and enhancing nature and the physical environment to ensure the long-term health of the life-sustaining eco-system.

Local economic vitality—supporting local economies, businesses and communities to ensure economic vitality and sustainability.

Cultural diversity—respecting and appreciating cultures and cultural diversity so as to ensure the continued well-being of local or host cultures.

Experiential richness—providing enriching and satisfying experiences through active, personal and meaningful participation in, and involvement with, nature, people, places and cultures.

Like innovation itself, tourism products and services can be technological or non-technological in nature, the intangible components (*i.e.* processes, methods, practices) will be considered as part of this review. The objectives of which are to:

1. Analyse the role of green innovation in the transition of tourism enterprises to a green economy (*e.g.* hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, tour operators);
2. Better understanding of how green innovation in tourism is supported at the national and local levels.
3. Identify ways to accelerate the diffusion of green innovation in the sector, including effective communication; and 4.
4. Develop a range of conclusions and policy orientations to enable policy makers and industry to derive maximum benefit from the findings and recommendations of the study.

The importance of Green growth strategies

The need to reframe growth is becoming increasingly important due to imbalances being created by the impacts of economic activity on environmental systems. Greening the growth path of an economy depends on policy and institutional settings, level of development, resource endowments and particular environmental pressure points. There is no “one-size-fits-all” prescription for implementing a green growth strategy. There are, however, common considerations that need to be applied in all settings. And in every case, good economic policy lies at the heart of any strategy for green growth and policy action requires looking across a very wide range of policies, not just explicitly “green”, or environmental, policies.

The central feature of a green growth framework is recognition of natural capital as a factor of production and its role in enhancing well-being. Green growth should be conceived as a strategic complement to existing priorities and areas for environmental and economic policy reform, and strategies should target areas where there is clear beneficial overlap between environmental and economic policy. They should focus on finding cost-effective ways of reducing environmental pressures, to begin the transition towards new patterns of growth that will avoid crossing critical environmental thresholds.

Policy frameworks for Green growth

The pursuit of green growth will require a mix of measures that can collectively bolster growth, while guiding economic activity into modes of production and consumption with lower environmental impact. The key to this will be finding ways of integrating efficient natural resource use and other environmental considerations into every day economic decisions. The experience of many economies suggests that while there is no single recipe for success, there are some important ingredients. These include improving the quality of human capital through education and labour market policy, capital deepening assisted by sound macroeconomic policy, and more effective institutions that allow competition, innovation and entrepreneurship to flourish while protecting the social fabric and the rule of law.

Pricing the use of environmental resources has proven to be a powerful tool for influencing consumer and household decisions. However, behavioural studies indicate that consumers often focus on short-term costs, without fully considering longer-term factors. This suggests that efforts to highlight the cost implications of consumer choices over the product lifecycle may be needed to influence choices for consumer durables. Similarly, the construction and operation of hotels, cars, airports, and other tourism related infrastructure all

consume considerable amounts of energy during their lifecycles. As such, similar efforts may also be required to influence consumer choice in the traditionally service orientated tourism sector.

While economic instruments are powerful tools, access to comprehensible and trustworthy information is central to strengthening markets for environmentally friendly products, particularly for goods and services where environmental attributes are less “visible”. The manner in which information is presented and the way that choices are framed can influence consumer decisions.

Third party certification can also improve consumer confidence in the environmental attributes of products. Governments can further address information issues by providing consumers with comparative information themselves, or by encouraging firms to do so, mandatorily or on a voluntary basis. This can help consumers reduce their search costs by making it easier for them to compare products.

Innovation has an important role to play and needs to be marshalled to help provide ways around old patterns of production and consumption and generate new sources of growth that better reflect the full value of economic activity to society. While better pricing of resource use and pollution, and smarter regulations, can help provide incentives for these shifts, more will be needed to overcome inertia. Innovation and the resulting creative destruction mean new ideas, new entrepreneurs and new business models. It contributes to the establishment of new markets, leads to the creation of new jobs and is a key ingredient of any effort to improve people’s quality of life.

Human capital has particular significance for innovation because skilled people create and use knowledge. It spurs innovation through channels such as the generation of new knowledge, the adoption and adaptation of existing technologies and ideas, and the ability to adapt to change and to learn new things. Without innovation, it will be very difficult and very costly to address major environmental issues and, as such, innovation plays a crucial role in enabling green and growth to go hand. The beauty of innovation is that, in general, the gains of one country do not come at the cost of another, making the diffusion of new ideas or technologies generally as important as the inventions behind them. Shifting to a greener growth trajectory requires special attention to network infrastructure such as energy, transport, water and communications networks. There is considerable potential for infrastructure investment to contribute to economic growth and prosperity because it enables trade specialisation, competition, access to new resources, the diffusion of technology and new organisational practices. Well planned infrastructure development can reduce water and air pollution and curb unsustainable land use change, further enhancing development.

Institutional and governance capacity to implement wide-ranging policy reform is an essential condition for greening growth. Governments need to be able to integrate green growth objectives into broader economic policymaking and development planning. Capacity development for green growth policies should take a whole of government approach. While the policy motivation for greener growth may lie in environmental concerns, green growth policies are not exclusively environmental policies. They should be core economic policies that have engaged central planning, finance and sectoral ministries as well as environment agencies in their formulation. The role and capacity of non-governmental actors in the private sector and civil society will also be important.

The case for investing in the greening of tourism

Tourism in general drives significant investment. However, even small increases in investments designed to achieve a greener sector, result in very significant increases in investment flows. Examples of positive outcomes linked to investing in the move towards more sustainable tourism include, job creation, where additional employment in energy, water, and waste services, and expanded local hiring and sourcing are expected from the greening of mainstream tourism segments.

In addition, tourism’s role as an effective driver of local economic development is widely recognised. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that sustainable tourism can increase both the local contribution and multiplier effect, in line with local community involvement in the tourism value chain, through the supply of products, labour, tourism services and, increasingly, “Green services”. When tourism-related income grows with a substantial reorientation in favour of the poor, poverty can be reduced. Local industry, for example, can help by engaging in and encouraging the use of local companies for the provision of transport, services and food in order to generate local income and employment multipliers and contribute to alleviate local poverty. However, as with income effects, there is increasing evidence that more sustainable tourism, particularly in rural areas, can lead to more positive poverty-reducing effects. With growing awareness of the need and value of conserving unique natural, social and cultural assets of destinations, there is increasing motivation from both the private and public sectors to invest in making tourism more sustainable. Investment in sustainable tourism offers both environmental benefits and opportunities to generate significant returns, notably in the areas of

Energy – In hotels and other accommodation there is considerable scope for investment in energy-efficient features and services. These include improvements to refrigeration, television and video systems, air conditioning and heating, and laundry. Such investments are often driven by rising energy costs; likely carbon

surcharges; increasing expectations of customers; technological advances with low-carbon technology; and in some cases, government incentives.

Water – Internal water efficiency and management programmes, and investments in water-saving technology in rooms, facilities and attractions reduce costs. Greater efficiency and improved management allows for the increase of number of rooms/visitors in water-constrained destinations. Investments in water-saving systems, grey water reuse and rainwater collection and management systems can help reduce the volume of water consumption by approximately one quarter per guest per night (Fortuny, et al. 2008).

Waste – Lower levels of waste generation improves financial return for private sector actors, while better management of that same waste creates opportunities for jobs, and enhances the attractiveness of destinations.

Biodiversity – Guest expectations that tour operators should respect and protect the natural resource base from which they benefit, are increasingly driving changes in the tourist industry. Policies of mainstream tourism are likely to change towards more effective conservation of sensitive ecosystems, driven by growing market demand and large operator programmes. Conservation and restoration provides a highly profitable, low-cost investment for maintaining ecosystem services.

Cultural heritage includes living cultures, mainstream and minority, as well as historical, religious, and archaeological sites. Investment to maintain cultural authenticity, can offer opportunities for continuation, rejuvenation or enhancement of traditions and way of life, resulting in a more sustainable tourism offer. In addition, most commentators believe that investment in cultural heritage is among the most significant, and usually profitable, investments a society, or tourism sector, can make.

The need to reframe growth is becoming increasingly important due to imbalances created by the unsustainable impacts of economic activity on environmental systems. Green growth is about fostering economic growth and development while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our well-being relies and is an essential component of sustainable development.

Promoting a successful transition towards green growth means: *i*) developing strategies for reform; *ii*) facilitating adjustment in the labour market; *iii*) accounting for concerns about distributional impacts on firms and households, especially those on low incomes; and *iv*) promoting international co-operation.

Conclusion

The dream for a Green Economy would be an asset to the total well being. A green economy can be thought of as one which is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive. In a green economy, growth in income and employment should be driven by investments that reduce carbon emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Tourism is one of the most promising drivers of growth for the world economy and key to driving the defining trends of the transition to a green economy. With tourism's close connections to numerous sectors at destination and international levels, even small improvements toward greater sustainability will have important impacts. Like many other sectors, tourism faces a range of significant sustainability-related challenges. In the modern era of growth and development the strategy adopted by us is to ruin the nature not protect it. The nature without green is like a desert and nobody will be happy there even if can see a lot of concrete topmost buildings.

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